

How to Meditate



Lama Samten

Centre Paramita

How to Meditate

Essential Instructions on Calm-Abiding and Special Insight

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Translation from French to English

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We render homage to the Master,
the Victor Shakyamuni!

Foreword

It is well known that the primary purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to attain enlightenment by practicing two forms of meditation: concentration meditation and analytical meditation. The first aims at achieving calm-abiding (*samatha*), while the second aspires to gaining special insight (*vipassana*).

A mind that is pacified while abiding in single-pointed concentration is referred to as the state of calm-abiding. When such a state is attained, special insight becomes possible. This particular form of wisdom, when coupled with the bliss of meditative suppleness induced by the power of analysis, is capable of discerning every phenomenon.

In other words, calm-abiding is the temporary cessation of mental disruptions in the mind. By calming the mind, it becomes clearer. This allows the profound analysis of special insight to completely eliminate the very root of these mental disruptions.

This text is a brief presentation of the essence of calm-abiding and special insight, as well as the manner in which to develop them. The instructions provided are in keeping with the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni and of the great Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters who have commented on them.

I. The Noble Origin of the Teaching on Calm-Abiding and Special Insight

Our current world witnessed the birth of Buddhism approximately two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago. It was at this time, in fact, that the incomparable and compassionate Teacher¹ taught at the centre of our planet², in the sacred land of India. In his great kindness and with perfect equanimity, he turned the wheel of Dharma³ in an extraordinary manner for all beings, knowing precisely how to adapt the teachings to the different personalities and interests of his students. Hence, he transmitted the teachings of the three “baskets” (the Vinaya, Sutra, and Abhidharma) which contain respectively the instructions for the practice of the three higher trainings in ethics, concentration, and wisdom.

These teachings were transmitted to Maitreya and Manjushri, and respectively to Asanga and Nagarjuna, who then transmitted them to the two learned Lamas, Serlingpa (Suvarnavipi-Dharmakirti of the Golden Isles) and Rikpekouyouk (Vidyakokila the Elder). These two teaching lineages were later united in the glorious and incomparable Indian master, Atisha Dipamkara, who for seventeen years devoted himself to the Dharma and the people of Tibet. He in turn transmitted the teachings to his principal spiritual son, the Tibetan master Dromtonpa. These instructions outlined the basic fundamentals of every path, namely calm-abiding

¹ Another name for Buddha Shakyamuni.

² Referred to as Jambudvipa in Sanskrit.

³ Expression used referring to the transmission of the teachings.

and special insight. These were then carefully preserved and passed on in an uninterrupted lineage of masters to the great pioneer Lama Tsongkhapa, founder of an excellent tradition that remains very much alive today.

| Bouddha Shakyamuni | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Vast practice lineage | Profound view lineage |
| Maitreya | Manjushri |
| Asanga | Nagarjuna |
| Serlingpa | Rikpekouyouk |
| Atisha | |
| Dromtonpa | |
| ↓ | |
| Lama Tsongkhapa | |

II. The advantages of calm-abiding and special insight presented in order to generate enthusiasm for their development

Calm-abiding and special insight are discussed in the three baskets whose contents consist in the three higher trainings. The volume on discipline (Vinaya), the volume on the Sutras and the volume on metaphysics (Abhidharma) serve as an introduction to the higher training in ethics, concentration and wisdom, respectively.

Higher training in *ethics* aims at putting an end to external distractions. It is the basis of all the qualities, and fosters moral and behavioural discipline. It encourages the development of tolerance, dignity, consideration for others, contentment, respect, and love.

Higher training in *concentration* aims at stabilizing the mind in one-pointed concentration within. It allows to attain calm-abiding, which rests in the two felicities that result from physical and mental suppleness, as well as the development of states of consciousness in the higher realms of form and no-form.

Higher training in *wisdom*, through the realization of the true nature of phenomena, enables the development of special insight.

Thus higher training in ethics results in attaining the happiness of elevated conditions⁴, and the trainings in

⁴ The upper realms, namely, a rebirth as a human, god or demigod.

Preliminaries

concentration and wisdom result in the ultimate happiness of liberation.

III. Instructions for listening and teaching

1. How to listen

Those fortunate persons who aspire to liberation should listen to these teachings motivated with the keen desire to obtain *authentic calm-abiding*, that is to say, single-pointed concentration endowed with the felicity derived from both physical and mental suppleness. The listener should also have:

- an impartial mind
- wisdom that discriminates between what is good and bad
- aspiration that directs the mind to the desired object
- joyful perseverance to practice virtue
- determination that stabilizes the mind on the object of observation⁵
- application that fixes the mind on the object to which it is directed
- attention that prevents forgetting the object of meditation
- vigilance that prevents distraction
- humility that frees the mind of ignorance

In the sutras, the Buddha explained that one must listen with a mind that is free of the three faults of a recipient. It should not be stained, punctured, or turned upside down. The person who receives the teaching should have a pure motivation, remember what has been said, and not be distracted. In other words, as stated in the sutras:

Listen correctly, listen perfectly, and remember.

⁵ Throughout the text, the terms *object* and *object of observation* do not refer exclusively to the simple objects of daily life, but rather to any phenomenon that can be perceived or known by the mind. For example, an object can be a thought or a mental image.

To listen correctly means to have a mind that is free of mental disruption. To listen perfectly means to be focused. To remember means not to forget. Developing calm-abiding and special insight will not be possible if we listen to the teaching with the sole purpose of acquiring new intellectual knowledge, or of simply listening to a story.

In his *Four Hundred Stanzas*, Aryadeva, spiritual son of Nagarjuna, describes the qualities required to receive instructions on calm-abiding and special insight:

They say that a person who is nonpartisan, intelligent and applied is a good recipient for receiving the teachings. Without this, neither the qualities of the instructor nor those of the student will appear.

This subject is explained in detail in *L'essence de la voie vers l'éveil*⁶. Thus we can see that the quality of a student does not depend on race, sex, social standing, physical appearance, country of origin, caste, etc. Moreover, the Buddha has clearly indicated that the practice of calm-abiding and special insight is not mandatory. It is our own personal decision. The Buddha said:

Oh Bhikshus and great sages! Just as the quality of gold is verified by heating, cutting and rubbing it, accept my words only after examining them carefully, and not simply out of respect for me.

⁶ *L'essence de la voie vers l'éveil*, Lama Samten, Centre Paramita, 2nd ed. 2014.

2. How to teach

Having never practiced or received any instructions or explanations on calm-abiding and special insight, it would be difficult to speak effectively about them to others. Similarly, if an illness is unknown to a doctor, treating those who suffer from it would be impossible.

Therefore, what are the characteristics of a good teacher? A teacher should first have received several teachings in Buddhist philosophy and taken the time to ponder them at length. Then he/she should seek excellent instructions and empowerments concerning the qualities of calm-abiding and special insight. Only after obtaining these will it be possible to explain them to others. If after having received the empowerments, instructions and explanations directly from a master, and taken the time for proper reflexion, calm-abiding and special insight are not yet fully developed, we must at least have an absolute confidence in them.

Moreover, if we develop the ten qualities of an authentic spiritual master of the common Mahayana as enumerated by the venerable protector Maitreya, nothing could be better or more extraordinary. These ten qualities are:

- 1) To be disciplined by training in ethics
- 2) To be pacified by training in concentration
- 3) To be totally pacified by training in wisdom
- 4) To be well versed in the teachings
- 5) To have realized emptiness
- 6) To be more knowledgeable than the students
- 7) To be an able speaker
- 8) To be loving
- 9) To be enthusiastic
- 10) To have abandoned discouragement regarding the performance of students

The first six of these qualities are developed for one's own benefit, while the last four are for the benefit of others. In his *Ornament to the Mahayana Sutras*, Maitreya refers to them as follows:

You must place your confidence in a spiritual master who is disciplined, pacified, very pacified, who has more qualities than yourself, who is perseverant, versed in the Scriptures, who has realized emptiness, is an able speaker, is loving, and has abandoned discouragement regarding the performance of his students.

Thus a teacher may possess all these qualities without necessarily being famous, the abbot of a monastery or a tulku. Furthermore, this has nothing to do with race, origin, or wealth. Briefly, as the venerable protector Maitreya states:

Let us examine ourselves to see whether or not we possess all ten qualities required of an authentic master of the common Mahayana.

While these qualities are especially necessary for obtaining authentic calm-abiding, they are not mandatory for attaining simple calm-abiding.

IV. Instructions on guiding students

1. The meditation session

1.1 Preliminaries

1) Clean the place where you meditate

The importance of cleaning the place of meditation is mentioned in the biography of the famous and excellent Lama Serlingpa. This practice is widespread in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and is not of my own invention. The Muni himself has said:

The Bodhisattvas sit crossed-legged in clean surroundings.

This is done not only to keep the place clean and sanitary, but also to eliminate illness, and mental and physical problems. In fact, as we clean, we can also imagine that we are eliminating all adverse conditions of body and mind. Thus with a purified state of mind, the subtle wind upon which the mind rides becomes purified as well, and attaining calm-abiding is greatly facilitated.⁷

For example, if we invite a guest to our home, we would clean the house and make all necessary preparations. Similarly, if we “invite” calm-abiding and special insight to come in, or in other words, develop them in our mindstream, purifying the inner winds and mind by cleaning the space where we meditate is very important.

⁷ The various physical and mental levels are described in the teachings of the Vajrayana. At the subtle level, consciousness always accompanies the energy winds of the body and is said to ‘ride’ them.

2) Display the supports for meditation

Buddha Shakyamuni was the first to give teachings on calm-abiding and special insight. To remember him and to recall his immense kindness, it is suggested to place his image on an altar that is approximately waist-high. The way to visualize the Buddha will be explained later in this text. However, this visualization is not necessary for the person seeking simple calm-abiding, since this state can be attained by visualizing a stone, letter, light, a drop, or even a flower, etc.

3) Sit in a suitable posture

The bliss associated with calm-abiding is that which arises from mental suppleness. It must be preceded by the bliss that follows from having attained physical suppleness. The seven-point posture of Buddha Vairochana allows this to happen because it purifies the contaminated states of the gross body (aggregates, elements, and sources of perception) as well as the blockages in the subtle body (channels and winds). Buddha Vairochana is the deity that represents the purified aspect of the aggregate of form. This aspect is referred to as the seven-point posture of Vairochana and is described as follows:

a) *The legs are in the lotus or half-lotus position*, the back of the body being slightly more elevated than the front. For meditations preceding the completion stage, and for those experiencing certain physical discomfort, it is possible to simply sit with legs crossed or on a chair. However, when meditating on the stage of completion, such as when practicing the technique of the six yogas of Naropa or when meditating on the subtle winds, the complete lotus posture is necessary.

b) *Both hands are resting in the mudra of meditative equanimity, palms facing up with the right hand resting on the left. The tips of the thumbs are touching and point upwards, representing the union of bliss and emptiness. The tetrahedron thus formed symbolizes that this union is the source of emergence of all phenomena. Both hands should be placed about four centimetres below the navel, at the level of the chakra of emanation. It is here that the inner fire (tummo) is generated.*

c) *The back should be as straight as an arrow.* If the gross elements and aggregates of the body are straight, the subtle energy channels and chakras will be as well. In this way, the winds and the consciousnesses riding on them will become pliable and supple.

d) *The teeth and lips are closed, the tip of the tongue touching the palate.* This prevents a dry mouth, and saliva from running out of the mouth while in deep meditative absorption.

e) *The head is tilted slightly forward.*

f) *The eyes are looking down, following the sides of the nose.* This technique helps to prevent mental agitation and laxity. It is sometimes suggested to meditate with eyes completely closed or open. This however, is not in keeping with our tradition.

In fact, when meditating with eyes closed, we risk becoming lethargic and susceptible to mental laxity, sleep, physical and mental fatigue, etc. At the other extreme, if the eyes are completely open, we might succumb to agitation, mental dispersion and distraction. This is why Dje Tsongkhapa explains in his *Lamrim* that

meditating with eyes half-closed prevents such difficulties.

Some people however, find it easier to meditate with eyes completely closed or open, and are not affected by such difficulties. Since the goal of meditation is to achieve concentration, if a certain technique is more efficient, it can be adopted. Having eyes closed or opened is merely an external condition. On the other hand, concentration is an inner quality that is attained only through mental consciousness, not visual consciousness.

g) *The shoulders are straight, neither too tense nor too loose, and slightly raised like a bird preparing for flight. This posture is of crucial importance for practitioners in the completion stage.*

There is also the “nine-cycles” breathing technique, which can be used to clear blockages of the subtle body (composed of channels and winds). Before explaining this technique, the following is a brief description of the five energy centres (chakras) where the winds circulate. The centres are: 1) the chakra of highest bliss at the crown of the head, 2) the chakra of enjoyment at the level of the throat, 3) the chakra of the Dharma at the level of the heart, 4) the chakra of emanation at the navel, and 5) the chakra that maintains bliss situated in the secret place i.e. the sexual organs).

Associated with these five chakras are five circulating winds: 1) the pervading pale blue wind, 2) the ascending red wind, 3) the vitalizing white wind, 4) the regular sliding green wind, and 5) the yellow wind of elimination.

This technique allows for purifying the five afflictive emotions: 1) aversion, 2) attachment, 3) confusion, 4) jealousy, and 5) pride.⁸

This technique allows to clear the blockages of the subtle body (channels and winds), facilitating the attainment of the common path (calm-abiding and special insight) and of the uncommon path (the stages of generation and completion). This achievement can actually be realized in this very lifetime.

The nine-cycle breathing technique is practiced as follows: Take three breaths by first exhaling from the right nostril and inhaling through the left. Then inverse the order by exhaling three times from the left nostril and inhaling through the right. To complete the cycle, take three breaths using both nostrils simultaneously.

Ordinarily, the channels and winds are not mentioned when teaching the sutras⁹. However, it is very useful to discuss them here so as to know how to purify the subtle winds.

⁸ Only a brief introduction on the subject is presented here. For more details, the reader is invited to refer to the classic texts.

⁹ The Buddha's teaching is divided into two levels: Sutras and Tantras. The Sutras are the foundation with emphasis placed on study, reflection, and analysis. Relying on a solid understanding of the Sutras, the teaching of the Tantras emphasizes visualization and the power of imagination to realize the state of enlightenment.

| The Subtle Body | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Chakra | Location | Subtle Wind | Colour of the wind | Afflictive Emotion |
| Chakra of Great Bliss | Crown of the head | Pervading wind | Pale blue | Aversion |
| Chakra of Enjoyment | Throat | Ascending wind | Red | Desire-attachment |
| Chakra of Dharma | Heart | Vitalizing wind | White | Confusion |
| Chakra of Emanation | Navel | Sliding wind | Green | Jealousy |
| Chakra that maintains Bliss | Secret place (sex) | Downward clearing wind | Yellow | Pride |

h) *Motivation*

When seeking the path to the happiness of liberation and omniscience, our motivation must include the two factors that are the gateways to the path. What are these factors?

- a pure renunciation that aspires to liberation from the suffering of Samsara, and
- the precious mind of enlightenment, Bodhichitta, which aspires to practicing the deeds of the Bodhisattvas who are rooted in universal love and the Great Compassion.

It is not enough that our motivation be oriented only to achieving *simple*¹⁰ *calm-abiding* and the bliss of mental and physical suppleness. In fact, it is even doubtful that such motivation could actually contribute to obtaining a higher rebirth. When imbued with pure renunciation and Bodhichitta, however, our calm-abiding is of the highest quality and is then referred to as *authentic* or *supramundane calm-abiding*.

Although not explicitly mentioned here that taking refuge is the doorway to the teachings, it is nevertheless implied, since there exists no greater refuge than supramundane calm-abiding and special insight.

If the mind is troubled and distracted by disruptive thoughts, it is always possible to simply take a breath and exhale while visualizing these thoughts immediately leaving the body in the form of grey or black smoke.

¹⁰ Simple calm-abiding may be developed by non-Buddhist practitioners. It does not involve taking refuge, renunciation, and Bodhichitta.

With the next breath, imagine a white light penetrating the body and purifying the mind.

Or again, if the mind is agitated because attached to problems about work, friends, etc., we may use this technique: count 'one' with the in-breath and 'two' with the out-breath, etc. until breath 'seven'. We keep our mind focused inwardly for as long as possible. If this does not work, start again by counting to nine. In the same way, we may repeat the process by counting to eleven, fifteen, or twenty-one. This is said to be the best method to end distractions and keep the mind focused.

During meditation, when afflictive emotions such as desire-attachment, jealousy or anger interfere with our concentration, redirect the mind by focusing the visual consciousness - or any other sensory consciousness - to an exterior object. Thus by being distracted outwardly, the mind will no longer be disturbed inwardly. Once our mind has become clear again, immediately make an effort to refocus on the meditation. This is another way to develop concentration.

Lastly, the most effective technique to attain concentration is to begin by visualizing and meditating on Buddha Shakyamuni or any other deity. While visualizing the Buddha or deity before us, we should recite the ritual chant and associated mantra. In this way, we put an end to any distraction, conceptual thought or emotion. We should then refocus the mind in single-pointed meditative equilibrium. With this technique, calm-abiding and special insight will be achieved very quickly - even in this lifetime.

Counting the breath is unnecessary if the mind is not afflicted with disruptive thoughts. In this case, it would

be quite natural and easy to generate a positive state of mind, regardless of the type of virtuous practice being carried out. However, the most important element by far is having an excellent motivation. It is stated in a sutra:

Aspiration is the perfect condition wherein resides the root of all Dharma.

The incomparable Atisha has said:

If the root is poisoned, the branches and the leaves will be likewise; if the root is medicinal, the branches and leaves will be also.

The incomparable Lama Tsongkhapa has said:

If the thought is positive, thus will be the grounds and paths. If the thought is inferior, so will be the grounds and paths. Everything is dependent on thought.

4) Establishing visualization

When the mind is agitated because distracted by external contaminated objects, it can be pacified by using a visualization as an external support. By being focused in single-pointed concentration, the mind will thus be able to generate a particularly virtuous state.

4a) Authentic calm-abiding

There are as many ways of visualizing an object of meditation as there are traditions. However, I believe an

object can be clearly visualized¹¹ at a distance of approximately two meters in front of us, and fifty centimetres above the point between the eyebrows. The object should be perceived as luminous and heavy, and approximately the size of a thumb. Imagining it as luminous prevents mental laxity; and visualizing it as heavy prevents agitation. Our concentration should have two main qualities: great clarity and excellent stability.

What can we choose as an object of visualization? Since the instructions on calm-abiding and special insight originate with Buddha Shakyamuni, Lama Tsongkhapa's tradition recommends visualizing the body of the Buddha. This visualization not only contributes to accumulate merits and purify our mindstream, it also facilitates calm-abiding and special insight. Furthermore, it familiarizes our mind with the deity yoga practiced in the secret Tantras. The *Sutra of Royal Single-pointed Concentration* states:

The Bodhisattva whose mind takes the gold-coloured body of the excellent protector of the world as its object, is said to abide in meditative equanimity.

In other words, this mode of visualization is said to facilitate meditative equanimity on calm-abiding and special insight, which constitute the foundation of all the paths.

¹¹ As previously explained, this does not mean simply looking at an image in front of us, but actually visualizing this image before us through our mental consciousness. It is our mental consciousness, not our visual consciousness, that attains calm-abiding.

4b) Simple calm-abiding

Those seeking *simple calm-abiding* however, need not use this particular object for meditation. In fact, *simple calm-abiding* can be obtained by concentrating on the visualization of a drop, letter, dot, light, flower, etc.

In meditation, it is not so much an external object as the *mental image* that is used. This is because it is the inner mental consciousness that meditates, and it is this same consciousness that will eventually obtain calm-abiding. Focusing an external sensory consciousness on a physical object has never been advised in any of the classical texts.

From the very beginning, a wholehearted effort should be made to put all these preliminaries into practice because they constitute the foundation of every Sutra and Tantric path (calm-abiding, special insight, etc.) – whether in their complete or abridged versions.

The topics discussed so far only concern those who seek authentic calm-abiding; they are not required for the attainment of simple calm-abiding.

1.2 The conditions necessary for attaining calm-abiding

Once the common preparations are completed, six specific conditions can assist us to rapidly develop concentration if not yet obtained. If concentration is already attained, these conditions will allow it to increase rather than diminish.

In *The Land of Listeners*, Asanga mentions thirty-four prerequisites. In other texts, the master Bodhidhadra enumerates nine, and the mayasiddha Nagpopa, thirty-three, etc. Kamalashila, however, in the second volume of *The Stages of Meditation*, explains how they can be condensed in the following six points:

1) Reside in a place with these five characteristics

In *An Ornament to the Mahayana Sutras*, it is said:

The wise practice in a place that is blessed and wholesome, where excellent provisions and good friends are nearby, and where everything needed by the yogi is available.

a. A place with excellent provisions

This means that we must make sure that all available material conditions (food, shelter, etc.) needed to facilitate the practice of calm-abiding are not only pure¹², but can also be obtained honestly without having to make concessions.

Furthermore, we should reside in a place that is private and peaceful, where our presence does not interfere with others, and where we can easily procure the basic goods (food, clothing, etc.) necessary for maintaining health. If we have specific needs with regard to medication, diet or time, we must ensure these will be met.

¹² For a monk or a nun, this would mean avoiding alcohol or drugs because they have taken a vow to abstain from consuming these substances, and doing so would hinder their practice.

If, in order to gather these conditions, we must kill, steal, lie, borrow money, or perform similar negative actions, such behaviour will obviously not be conducive to calm-abiding.

b. A holy place

Living in a holy place does not mean that we must absolutely leave for Tibet or Bodhgaya in India, or live in a monastery, hermitage, cave or desert. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to reside in a sacred place or area visited by the great masters of the past. Doing so makes purifying the elements and constituents of the body that much easier, and also favours the development of qualities and realizations.

If such a place is not available, it is important not to meditate in inhospitable places where acts of violence and war have occurred, or where wild animals or thieves are a danger. If we have no other choice however, we must then make an effort to avoid feeling hatred toward such potentially harmful beings, and do our best to gently win their confidence. A place not blessed by past masters should be consecrated by performing traditional rituals of purification and blessings. Or at the very least, we should recite the Heart Sutra, the practice of Tara, or other similar text.

c. A wholesome place

We should reside in an area that is free of epidemics, sickness and extreme climate, and where the soil and water are not contaminated.

Indeed, external elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and internal psychosomatic elements (aggregates, elements,

and means of perception) must be balanced. This is an important condition for the attainment of calm-abiding and special insight.

When external elements are in a state of imbalance, causing earthquakes, floods, and extreme climatic conditions, our practice of calm-abiding and special insight can only be affected. Likewise, when sickness, epidemics, or other similar factors create an imbalance at the psychosomatic level, this causes mental and physical discomfort, and disrupts the proper circulation of energy.

d. Good friends

Ideally, it is preferable to be surrounded with several positive people who share our vision and attitude. As beginners, it is ill-advised to remain alone and without friends. It is suggested to have a minimum of three friends with whom to practice.

If our friends have not yet realized emptiness or developed universal love, the Great Compassion, or the spirit of enlightenment, but have the understanding, confidence, and aspiration to develop them, they can be considered spiritual friends. Also, those people with whom we can regularly discuss calm-abiding, the happiness of liberation, the advantages of enlightenment, the law of cause and effect, reincarnation, etc., can be considered friends who contribute to our practice of calm-abiding and special insight. On the contrary, those whose interests are mainly related to mundane activities cannot qualify as spiritual friends able to support us in attaining these two objectives.

e. Having received the necessary instructions for practice

We must have received all necessary empowerments and explanations and, above all, have become an expert in our practice. Without having sufficiently integrated the instructions on calm-abiding and special insight, we may think we have completed a wonderful meditation, when in fact we were like a pigeon dozing off in the sunlight after having stuffed itself. We are actually fooling ourselves and confusing calm-abiding with mental laxity.

Nowadays, there are people who have no interest whatsoever in receiving instructions on calm-abiding and special insight, but who nevertheless wish to practice and teach these subjects. Needless to say, the path to attaining any realization is hindered when the necessary conditions for calm-abiding and special insight are absent.

The glorious Atisha has said:

Even meditating with great effort for a thousand years, if the inner conditions for calm-abiding have degenerated, developing concentration will be impossible.

Before being able to teach and meditate on calm-abiding and special insight, we must have gathered all necessary prerequisites and have at the very least received instructions and empowerments on the subject. If even one of these conditions is missing, it will be very difficult to achieve any realization. For how can a plane fly if one of its parts is missing?

People sometimes wonder whether they should meditate in the morning or in the evening. It is important to know that when the body and mind are well-rested and the mind is alert and clear, generating calm-abiding and special insight is easier.

In the morning, the mind is clearer and energy flows more easily through the body channels. Furthermore, after a good night's sleep, the memory of activities and problems of previous days are temporarily forgotten. Thus the best moment to meditate on calm-abiding is before becoming involved in the daily routine that will once again occupy the mind.

2) Abandon afflictive desires

This means being detached from what is unnecessary, and especially avoiding desire-attachment to whatever complicates life and creates problems. Since we desire happiness and dislike suffering, we should free ourselves of desire-attachment; for by its very nature, it disturbs the mind and generates suffering.

In *The Compendium of Superior Knowledge* by Asanga:

What is desire-attachment? It is a mental factor aimed at the pursuit of and attachment to contaminated objects. Its function is to produce suffering. Once an object is considered attractive and desirable, we become attached and letting it go becomes very difficult. There are two kinds of desire-attachment: one to the world of desire, and the other to conditioned existence.

Removing an oil stain from a piece of cloth is difficult to say the least, but it is indeed still more challenging to let go of an object to which we have become attached. For

example, when we look at an object and then hold it, part of our mind desires it and becomes attached. Consequently, our attachment to the object increases and letting it go of it becomes even more difficult.

Desire-attachment is the root cause that prevents us from renouncing Samsara; it is therefore the main cause of our bondage. The antidote to desire-attachment is to meditate on detachment.¹³

This said, some people might then question whether a mind moved by the desire for liberation and omniscience is tainted with desire-attachment, and consequently, considered as an afflicted state of mind and cause of suffering. This is far from being the case.

In Buddhist terminology, the Tibetan word *dentchak*, desire-attachment, is used solely to designate the mental factor that generates suffering. The desire to attain a positive, virtuous objective is never referred to as desire-attachment, but rather simply as a wish, an aspiration, or enthusiasm. There is, therefore, an important difference between desire focused on virtue, and desire-attachment which is the cause of suffering.

3) Cultivate contentment

We should cultivate contentment with regards to the material conditions allotted to us, such as food and clothing, as well as the people near us (family, friends, etc.). Otherwise we will always be looking for more and better, making it difficult to achieve a calm mind. In

¹³ How to meditate on detachment is explained in *The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment*, in other works on the Lamrim, and also in *The Way of the Bodhisattvas* by Shantideva.

short, all beings bound to Samsara are dissatisfied by nature.

In *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*:

This is the affliction of being dissatisfied, of being uncertain, of continuously alternating between higher and lower positions, of having no true friends.

For example, we have found an excellent position, but remain dissatisfied and unhappy; so we continue searching for another job that offers more possibilities or a better salary. Similarly, when we go shopping for a new piece of clothing, we examine the item we like, check the size, style, material, colour, etc. We take time to weigh the pros and cons before deciding to make the purchase. Finally we decide to buy the item. Nonetheless, on our way home the thought comes to us that perhaps the colour or size is not quite right, and we end up returning it.

Likewise, after making a new acquaintance and allowing time to know the person, we decide to live together, marry and start a family. It seems that all ideal conditions are present. Later however, dissatisfaction arises in our mind, and we feel that conjugal life is no longer possible and we must separate. Whether in this situation or any other, if contentment is not cultivated, it will not only be difficult to obtain a calm mind, but this lack of contentment will also become the cause of much needless suffering.

It is very important not to misinterpret what is being said here. Even though it is important to *cultivate contentment and satisfaction* in order to attain calm-abiding, we must not mistakenly believe, as people sometimes do, that we must abandon everything.

4) Completely abandon social distractions

In this day and age, the incessant appearance of meaningless new activities greatly hinders the development of mental calmness. If such distractions are a hindrance for enlightened beings, how much more detrimental can they be to us, who are merely beginners?

Here are a few examples of distractions: politics, mundane conversations, shows and films that confuse the mind, drug and alcohol consumption, gambling, commerce, strolling in town, etc. In short, we are referring here to those activities that offer no long-term benefit. The best solution is to ultimately abandon activities that hinder mental calmness.

It is said that if we wish to attain calm-abiding, we should abandon worldly distractions since they will keep us from attaining our objective. We must not conclude, however, that we must also abandon external conditions conducive to calm-abiding. Certain material conditions are necessary, such as an area that is blessed, safe and free from disease, where good friends can share our point of view, and where there is access to the instructions needed for practice. Such conditions are in fact both beneficial and essential.

Nor does it mean that we must abandon parents, family, friends, our job, house, food or clothing. In the past, when people were more virtuous, those practicing meditation did not have to be concerned with getting their food. Many benefactors brought them all they needed. Today however, practitioners can no longer rely on such people; meditators must therefore be autonomous in creating conditions conducive to attaining mental calmness. Thus if we are to find lasting

happiness in this precious human lifetime, we must tend to both our physical and spiritual needs in a well-balanced way. It is therefore important to correctly understand the meaning of letting go of afflictive desires, cultivating contentment, and abandoning mundane distractions.

Today we are unbelievably fortunate to have a precious human rebirth. If we do not practice the three above-mentioned qualities in a sensible way, nothing could be more senseless or ignorant.

Such behaviour would be to grasp at the superfluous while refusing the essential; much like someone who would prefer the bark of the sugar cane to its sweet inner essence. By allowing our desires to increase, by never being satisfied, by giving in to worldly distractions, we close the door to the ultimate happiness made possible by this precious human life.

5) Possess pure ethics

Generally speaking, ethical behaviour is the foundation of all good qualities. Pacifying subtle internal distractions depends on whether or not we have pacified gross external distractions. If the mind is overwhelmed with gross conceptual thoughts, it cannot remain calm. For this reason, practicing pure ethics is very important. Being attentive to the actions of our three doors (body, speech and mind) will help maintain calm-abiding and special insight.

6) Completely abandon conceptual thoughts such as desire

Whether bound by a gold or iron chain makes no difference to the prisoner; either way, his hands and feet remain tied. Similarly, every conceptual thought of attachment to the objects of desire of Samsara - whether good or bad - is an obstacle to calm-abiding.

All the unwanted sufferings that arise time after time are produced in dependence on mental afflictions such as attachment. These afflictions are not self-arising, but stem from conceptual thoughts which are not in accordance with reality. These thoughts themselves originate in the conception of a self of phenomena.¹⁴ This means that if we truly wish to obtain calm-abiding, we must turn away from mental afflictions - the real creators of our suffering.

Madhyamaka philosophy affirms that the consciousnesses of all ordinary beings are deluded and deceptive because they are obscured by ignorance. Under the power of ignorance, all perceived objects appear as though they truly exist. It is said that if all the appropriate exterior and interior conditions were assembled, calm-abiding could be attained within six months.

¹⁴ See chapter on special insight for more details.

1.3 The actual meditation session

The unequalled Tsongkhapa wrote:

After having pacified the distraction toward contaminated objects and perfectly analyzed the meaning of reality, may I be inspired to quickly generate the path uniting calm-abiding and special insight in my own mind.

We will next explore calm-abiding and special insight. First, we will explain how calm-abiding is endowed with physical and mental bliss. We will see how this bliss depends on single-pointed concentration and a mind that is pacified, and no longer distracted by contaminated objects. Second, we will see how special insight arises from the wisdom of having perfectly analyzed the profound meaning of reality.

1.3.1 Calm-Abiding

1) The advantages of calm-abiding

In the *Sutra of the Great Nirvana*:

The Victor has declared: “Son of the lineage, the two phenomena of calm-abiding and special insight are to be developed with enthusiasm. Every Bhikshou who aspires to attain the state of *Those Thus Gone* must train in these two qualities with enthusiasm”.

And in the *Sutra Explaining the Intention*:

Maitreya, know that the entirety of the worldly and other-worldly qualities of the Auditors, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas are the result of calm-abiding and special insight.

In the *Sutra Showing the Great Compassion of Those Thus Gone*:

These are the two qualities that make up the path of liberation from Samsara: calm-abiding and special insight.

Cited below is an excerpt from the *Sutra of the Great Nirvana*:

Son of the lineage, a Bodhisattva, a great Bodhisattva, who is endowed with the two qualities, has the power of being of great benefit. What are these two qualities? They are concentration and wisdom. Son of the lineage, if for example, a blacksmith plunges gold into the fire, it will assume the desired form. The same applies to the concentration and wisdom of a Bodhisattva. Son of the lineage, for example, it is possible to behold the reflection of a face in a mirror that is clean and clear. The same applies to the concentration and the wisdom of a Bodhisattva¹⁵. Thus a Bodhisattva, a great Bodhisattva, will gain immense benefit from meditating on these two qualities. Son of the lineage, a Bodhisattva, a great Bodhisattva, who meditates on these two qualities will master his five senses. He will have the ability to endure many forms of suffering; he will not entertain temporary mental afflictions; he will not be fooled by false views; he will completely abandon negative thoughts, and will quickly and fully attain unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment so as to be of benefit to all sentient beings.

¹⁵ These examples aim at demonstrating the importance of concentration (and wisdom) as being the foundation for practicing the path – just as it is fire that enables the blacksmith to melt gold, and it is the mirror that allows a person to see their face.

The pioneer of Buddhist teaching in Tibet, Lama Tsongkhapa, also explains in *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*:

The branches, leaves, flowers and fruit of a tree are countless, but they all take their source in its roots. Likewise, the many levels of concentration mentioned in the various vehicles all originate from calm-abiding and special insight.

In *The Stages of Meditation, Vol. 2*, by Kamalashila:

All yogis must absolutely and always be aware of calm-abiding and special insight.

Kamalashila continues:

The mind of the yogi whose special insight is not accompanied by calm-abiding will not be fully focused on the object, as is the case of a butter lamp whose flame flickers in the wind.

Shantideva says:

Special insight fully endowed with calm-abiding destroys all mental afflictions. Knowing this, seek calm-abiding from the outset.

Calm-abiding is therefore the indispensable foundation for acquiring the qualities of the three vehicles. Just as it is necessary to pour water into a container, it is just as necessary to train in calm-abiding in order to develop certain qualities.

Briefly, among all the paths of the three vehicles (Shravaka, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva), or the Tantras, I have never seen mention of a path that does

not depend on calm-abiding and special insight. Moreover, I have never imagined or dreamed that such a possibility could exist.

2) How to attain calm-abiding

In *Distinguishing Between the Extremes and the Middle Way* by Maitreya:

It will be obtained by abandoning the five obstacles and applying the eight antidotes. Laziness, forgetting the instructions, laxity and agitation, non-application and over-application of antidotes are considered to be the five obstacles.

Hence the five obstacles to calm-abiding are:

- a) laziness
- b) forgetting the instruction
- c) mental laxity and agitation
- d) non-application of the antidotes for mental laxity and agitation
- e) over-application of the antidotes when neither mental laxity nor agitation are present

The eight antidotes for the five obstacles are:

- a) confident faith
- b) aspiration
- c) joyful perseverance
- d) meditative suppleness
- e) attention
- f) vigilance
- g) applying the antidote
- h) equanimity in not applying the antidote

a) Laziness

Antidotes: confident faith, aspiration, joyful perseverance, meditative suppleness

In his *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*¹⁶, Asanga defines laziness as the absence of heartfelt pleasure in what is positive. Its function is therefore to hinder virtuous activities. There are three types of laziness:

- *Procrastination* is postponing something until later, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, etc. In other words, it means to not accomplish an action immediately. Its antidote consists in reflecting on the difficulty of obtaining this precious human life and on the impermanence to which it is constantly subjected.

- *Pursuing negative activities* means investing great effort in mundane distractions and activities. In a Buddhist context, such effort is considered to be stubbornness rather than joyful perseverance. Buddhism qualifies perseverance as being joyful or enthusiastic only when pursuing virtuous objectives. Its antidote aims at abandoning worldly activities by meditating on their futility and their sole outcome, suffering.

- *Discouragement* is to think, “How could a person like me ever attain calm-abiding?” In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, Shantideva affirms that even flies will one day attain enlightenment. Why then, as humans born with the capacity to speak and understand the teachings, would

¹⁶ Throughout this text, definitions of the mental factors of aspiration, enthusiasm, etc. are all taken from Asanga’s *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*.

we not be able to develop calm-abiding? Of course, we can! We must train ourselves to think this way.

By giving in to laziness, we risk compromising both our short-term and long-term objectives, not only for this life, but future lifetimes as well. Even if highly intelligent, the lazy person will always find it too difficult to attain calm-abiding.

Laziness can be countered by applying the first four antidotes, the first leading to the second and so on, as in a series of causes and effects. The four antidotes are:

Confident faith, as explained in the *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*, necessarily implies the consideration of an existing object. It can be, for example, a profound conviction in the existence, truth, and infallibility of the principles of the law of cause and effect; as for instance, the fact that happiness is the result of virtuous acts. The confident faith of which we speak here, is one of the eleven positive mental factors.

Aspiration is also mentioned in Asanga's *Compendium* as yearning to obtain what is perceived as a desirable object. Because of this perception, interest in the object increases and enthusiasm is aroused. This leads us to explore the three forms of aspiration: aspiration to obtain an object, aspiration to not be separated from the object, and aspiration to simply pursue an objective. Generally speaking, aspiration arises from confidence. By allowing admiration and interest to grow, our aspiration generates enthusiasm, which in turn gives rise to qualities that would not otherwise be developed. As for the qualities already acquired, they remain and continue to mature. Since aspiration eliminates all negative mental factors and actualizes the positive ones,

making an effort to continuously cultivate it is very important. Asanga explains that the function of aspiration is to generate enthusiasm.

Whenever we act virtuously, our *enthusiasm* or *joyful perseverance* generates true joy in the mind. Its function is the realization of positive actions. There are five types of enthusiasm or joyful perseverance:

- *Perseverance like an armour* generates joy before undertaking virtuous action.
- *Perseverance in action* is the persistent and intense feeling of joy while engaged in action.
- *Courageous perseverance* refers to the joy that overcomes discouragement.
- *Irreversible perseverance* is the joy that prevents from giving up.
- *Insatiable perseverance* is the desire to always do more and better.

Enthusiasm can also be summarized in three categories: armour-like enthusiasm, enthusiasm to cultivate virtue, and enthusiasm to work for the benefit of sentient beings.

Suppleness is described in the *Compendium* as a mental factor that endows the body and mind with complete malleability, allowing both to be used as needed when considering a virtuous object. The function of suppleness is to eliminate all unfavourable physical and mental conditions such as the five veils¹⁷, which are:

¹⁷ This will be discussed in more detail in the section on the five kinds of application. The five veils are explained in depth in *The Essence of the Path to Enlightenment*, by Lama Samten, 2015.

- Aspiring to the objects of the world of desire
- Ill will or the wish to inflict harm
- Drowsiness and lethargy (darkness)
- Agitation and regret
- Doubt

Laziness is countered by the first four antidotes, the first being confident faith inspired by understanding the advantages of calm-abiding. For instance, if we are firmly convinced that a treasure is buried in our yard, we would not hesitate to begin digging at once. Similarly, when we see the great advantages of concentration, we will develop the wish to initiate a spiritual journey. In *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa presents the advantages of concentration:

When calm-abiding is attained, the mind is filled with joy and the body with bliss. Thus happiness becomes possible during this very lifetime. Moreover, because physical and mental suppleness have been attained, our attention can be directed towards any chosen virtuous object. Because we are no longer distracted by the uncontrolled attraction to inappropriate objects, we are not constantly preoccupied with negative acts, and the practice of any virtue becomes very powerful. With calm-abiding, developing such qualities as supernatural knowledge and powers becomes possible. More particularly, it is on the basis of calm-abiding that we develop the special insight that understands the true nature of phenomena, thereby eliminating the root of Samsara. Reflecting on any one of these qualities will increase our awareness, and enable us to meditate on the elements that will reinforce our motivation to further cultivate concentration. When this tendency arises in us, we will be consistently motivated to practice, and attaining concentration will be easy. Furthermore,

having obtained it, it will be equally difficult to lose, since it will be repeatedly cultivated.

By being aware of these advantages, we will *aspire* to attain calm-abiding, and the *joyful perseverance* or *enthusiasm* for its cultivation will naturally arise within us. The final result of this gradual application of antidotes will be achieving *physical and mental suppleness*. Hence by knowing when to apply these four antidotes, laziness will be overcome, and calm-abiding and special insight will be easily developed.

b) Forgetting the instruction

Antidote: attention

Forgetting the instruction means that our attention is no longer focused on the object of meditation. It is therefore an absence of mental clarity and mindfulness regarding an object of virtue. It is provoked by the memory of an object that generates a mental affliction. This mental affliction serves as the basis for the distraction. When the mind's attention is drawn to non-virtuous thoughts, it is referred to as *perturbed attention*. In the *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*, we are warned not to confuse this kind of perturbed attention with the positive mental factor that is attention.

The antidote to forgetting the instruction is *attention*.¹⁸ It helps to remember the object of meditation with which we have become familiar. Its function is to eliminate any mental distraction. In his *Compendium*, Asanga mentions that attention allows to pursue and clearly identify a chosen object without losing it. Attention also enables

¹⁸ Other terms also used when referring to attention are memory, recollection, and mindfulness.

us to recall ideas, kind actions and words which occurred in the distant past.

What instructions must we keep in mind? - Those that address the essence of all the excellent instructions and words of the Buddha contained in the three baskets or volumes.

Because it brings an end to external distractions, higher training in *ethical behaviour* is said to be the foundation for developing all qualities. Through the practice of stabilizing the mind in one-pointed concentration, higher training in *concentration* brings about calm-abiding. By realizing the true nature of phenomena, higher training in *wisdom* allows to obtain special insight.

These three higher trainings are necessary to cut through ignorance, which is the root of Samsara. For example, if we wish to cut down a huge tree, we must first have the muscular strength (ethical behaviour), a well-sharpened axe (wisdom), and the precision required to consistently hit the same spot (concentration).

Attention and vigilance¹⁹ are the special supports needed to obtain single-pointed concentration.

Concentration allows the mind to focus on one of the aspects of an object voluntarily chosen by the mind. Its function is to facilitate the development of wisdom. Asanga explains that concentration consists in presenting an object of meditation to the mind, stabilizing the mind on that object, and then focusing on it. Hence concentration serves as a support for wisdom.

¹⁹ Vigilance will be discussed in section c) Laxity and agitation.

Attention has three particularities. The first concerns the *unique characteristics of the chosen object of meditation* with which we have become familiar. As previously explained, Lama Tsongkhapa has given several reasons for recommending that we visualize the body of a Buddha.

Some prefer using an informal rather than formal object of meditation. For example, we can meditate on the nature of the mind. In keeping with Lama Tsongkhapa's thinking in his *Short Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Panchen Tcheugyen (the 4th Panchen Lama, 1570-1662) founded the Mahamudra Tushita tradition, which teaches how to attain calm-abiding by practicing a meditation technique focused on the mind itself. It is the same as meditating on the nature of the mind. It is also possible to attain calm-abiding during the generation and completion stages of Tantra by meditating respectively on the body of a deity or a letter.

Obviously, these instructions are meant for those practitioners who aspire to the happiness of liberation and omniscience. Those who meditate and seek only to attain *simple calm-abiding* need not follow these instructions. In fact, *simple* calm-abiding can be obtained by visualizing any object such as a stone, drop, flower, light, etc. Certain people prefer to concentrate on an object that is physically before them. However, attaining calm-abiding is not possible in this way, given that it is the consciousness of the mind, and not that of the eye, that attains calm-abiding.

The second characteristic of attention concerns the *mode of apprehension*: the particular aspects of the object of visualization appear clearly in the mind and are not

forgotten during the meditation session. This is similar to the way we remember food when we are hungry. Finally, the third characteristic is its *function*: attention prevents the mind from dispersing toward other objects.

The glorious Aryasura states in his *Compendium of Perfections*:

Stabilize your mind by fixing it firmly on a single object of meditation. Allowing it to move toward several objects will only subject the mind to disruptions.

Thus for a successful meditation, we should choose a single object upon which to fix our mind. It is impossible to realize calm-abiding while continuously changing objects. For instance: if we want to start a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together, but keep changing the two pieces of wood for others, the fire will never take. Only constant and repeated friction will generate the heat necessary to light the fire. The same applies for the mind that seeks calm-abiding.

When the crazy elephant of the mind is distracted, use the rope of remembering-the-instructions; tie it to the pole of the object-of-meditation visualized as solid as Mount Meru; then master it with the hook-of-wisdom. Once the undisciplined elephant of the mind is controlled, it will no longer wander off wherever it pleases.

c) Mental laxity and agitation

Antidote: vigilance

If we are unable to recognize and differentiate lethargy, sleep, laxity, distraction, dispersion, negligence and agitation, we will be like a doctor unable to diagnose a

disease, and therefore incapable of treating it. As a result, our meditation will not be ideal.

Lethargy obscures the consciousness and weighs down the body and mind as when we are falling asleep. It can be neutral or negative. As a cause of mental laxity, it is never positive. From the *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*:

What is lethargy? - It is an inept state of mind associated with ignorance. Its function is to contribute to the development of all primary and secondary mental disturbances.

What is the mental factor of *sleep*? Again, in the *Compendium*:

It is the involuntary withdrawal of the mind within, regardless of whether the object apprehended is virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral. It is a mental factor whose function is the cessation of all activity.

Despite having obtained a precious human existence, half of it can be lost in sleep if we are not careful. It is thus very important to ensure that our sleep is virtuous²⁰.

Mental laxity is described in *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*:

Because the mind loses hold of its object, visualization is no longer very clear nor solid. If there is clarity but the mode of apprehension of the object is not very clear, we have developed mental laxity.

²⁰ Hence the importance of training our mind and directing our motivation before falling asleep, so as to use sleep in a positive way.

In *The Stages of Meditation, Volume 2*:

It is like being blind, like being in darkness, or having closed our eyes: the mind that does not clearly see its object of meditation has become the victim of mental laxity.

There are two types of mental laxity: gross and subtle. Gross laxity occurs when the memory of the object of meditation is stable, but the image remains unclear. Subtle laxity occurs when we have a certain hold of the object, and the image is clear and stable, but our retention of the image lacks force and our visualization lacks intensity. It is like holding a book when we are tired or distracted: we hold the book firmly, yet it slips from our grasp. Serious meditators should be aware of this important point because this subtle form of mental laxity is the greatest obstacle to meditation.

Stability and clarity do not depend on the object, but rather on the state of consciousness of the meditator. Without clarity, it is as though a veil is drawn over the image. Laxity can be virtuous or neutral.

Distraction is also described in the *Compendium*:

The mind is dispersed and distracted regardless of the object it contemplates. Because the function of the mental factor of distraction is to prevent us from being free of desire-attachment, it belongs in the category with the three poisons (i.e. desire-attachment, aversion and ignorance).

While *agitation* and distraction are distinct from one another, they are both forms of mental dispersion. Agitation is a mental dispersion toward an attractive object and is in the same category as desire-attachment.

Distraction on the other hand, is dispersion toward several types of objects and is considered to be in the same category as the three mental poisons.

Dispersion and distraction differ from one another in that dispersion has the potential to be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, whereas distraction is always non-virtuous.

In addition, distraction has six terminological divisions:

- *Natural distraction*: is that of the five sensory consciousnesses.
- *Distraction directed outwardly*: refers to most mental dispersions, agitation, etc.
- *Distraction from within*: refers to gross and subtle mental laxity, as well as attachment to the experience of meditative concentration itself.
- *Distraction to specific phenomena*: is attachment to the trivial pleasures associated with the eight worldly preoccupations.
- *Distraction toward negative tendencies*: is the pride that thinks “I”.
- *Applied distraction*: is being committed to an inferior path despite the existence of an authentic path and concentration.

Negligence is defined in Asanga’s *Compendium* as the lack of restraint regarding non-virtuous objects when engaging in virtuous practice. Since it is a lack of perseverance in one’s spiritual practice, negligence reinforces negative actions to the detriment of positive ones. It also is associated with laziness and the three mental poisons of desire, aversion and ignorance.

Mental agitation is a non-pacified state of mind dispersed towards pleasurable objects, such as those that appeal to

the desire of the senses. The function of this mental factor is to hinder concentration. It belongs in the same category as attachment. Dispersion and agitation differ in that dispersion has the potential to be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, whereas agitation, because it is associated with desire-attachment, can only be non-virtuous or neutral. As mentioned in the *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*:

What is agitation? - A perturbed aspect of the mind associated with desire-attachment and attracted to what is pleasurable. Its function is to undermine calm-abiding.

When dealing with agitation, three points should be considered: the object, the aspect, and the function. The object both attracts and pleases the mind. As for the aspect: since agitation and desire-attachment are associated, the resulting afflictive state causes the mind to totally identify with the external object of attachment. Finally, its function consists in interrupting concentration on the object of meditation. When the mind is concentrated within, any attachment to forms, sounds and other sensory phenomena stimulates agitation, and the mind is distracted and automatically directed towards them. In *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa explains:

Is agitation present when there is dispersion in which other mental disruptions distract the mind from its object, or again when there is dispersion towards another virtuous object? Since agitation is included in the same category as desire-attachment, being distracted by other disruptions does not constitute agitation. Rather, this involves the mental process of distraction, one of the twenty negative mental factors. Dispersion toward virtuous objects may give rise to any number of mental processes or positive mental

factors. Thus all dispersions are not necessarily agitation.

The causes leading to the development of agitation and laxity are stated as follows in *Concerning the Reality of Lands*:

What are the causes of laxity and agitation? - Failing to protect the doors of the senses, not eating with moderation, not making an effort to avoid sleep in the first and last thirds of the night, not being vigilant, failing to develop skilful means, and liking laziness. Meditating without having all the necessary conditions for calm-abiding will easily give rise to mental laxity and agitation.

For example, because of agitation, an object or event witnessed during the day will remain in our mind and will be remembered that evening, the following day, the following week, and even a month later.

In *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa explains:

Merely knowing about laxity and agitation is not sufficient. One must generate the vigilance that not only recognizes them, but also accurately detects their presence during meditation.

At this stage, the antidote to apply is vigilance. Although it is not the actual antidote to agitation and laxity, vigilance nevertheless plays an important role. In fact, it functions like an army scout on the lookout for the presence or absence of laxity or agitation. This is how vigilance is described in *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

Maintaining vigilance consists in regularly and punctually examining the state of one's body and mind.

Vigilance protects by looking out for the presence of laxity and agitation; it functions like a surveillance camera. It belongs in the category of wisdom.

As for *wisdom*, when it observes an object of analysis, it can distinguish between what to keep and what to reject, thereby eliminating doubt and faulty cognitions. In his *Compendium*, Asanga states that wisdom takes as its object of observation any phenomena it chooses to analyze. Therefore, whether they are adopted or rejected, all phenomena are possible objects of analysis. In order to determine which phenomenon to adopt and which to reject, we must rely on various forms of logical reasoning. Wisdom can be gained in three ways: through listening, reflection, and meditation.

The nature of **listening** lies in remembering, memorizing and ultimately understanding an excellent teaching. More particularly, the nature of **wisdom gained through listening** consists in arriving at a clear certainty of what was taught. There are several kinds of listening: listening to words, their meaning, the five conventional sciences, the stages of the path to enlightenment, etc. In short, the variety and range of topics is almost unlimited.

The nature of **reflection** is to contemplate and analyze the meaning of what was heard, and to ascertain its validity through various forms of logical reasoning. The nature of **wisdom gained through reflection** is the conviction gained from having contemplated and analyzed the significance of the teaching. There are also

several types of reflection: reflecting on words, on their significance, etc.

The nature of **meditation** consists in drawing the mind inward by means of analysis and stabilization so as to familiarize it with the certitude acquired through the process of reflection. On the other hand, the nature of **wisdom gained from meditation** is to obtain a mind focused in single-pointed concentration endowed with extraordinary meditative suppleness. This suppleness arises from being well acquainted with the meaning of what was perceived with certainty through reflection. There are two types of meditation: analytical and stabilization.

d) Non-application of antidotes

Antidote: application of antidotes

In *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa explains that the real antidote to mental laxity or dullness consists in reflecting on the benefits of an enlightened mind, a precious human life, impermanence, etc.

In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*:

This precious human life which is so difficult to obtain, allows us to accomplish all our objectives. If we do not use it wisely now, when might this opportunity ever present itself again?

The omniscient Tsongkhapa has also stated in his *Commentary on the Fundamental Treatise of the Middle Path* (by Nagarjuna):

Having now reached the isle of abundant riches, let us work perseveringly so as not to return empty-handed.

In attempting to eliminate laxity, drowsiness and mental dullness, it is helpful to live in a cool, elevated place. Splashing cool water on your face, drinking some tea, or simply going for a walk can also be beneficial. Once the problem is resolved, we may resume our meditation.

The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment states that the real antidote to mental agitation is to meditate on detachment. Thus whether the object is good or bad, if it provokes agitation or reinforces attachment, we should pacify this disruptive state of mind by meditating on its opposite.

If, for instance, a flower causes us to feel attachment or agitation, we should at once carefully analyze why it has no autonomous existence and will therefore eventually end up decomposing, rotting, smelling bad, and becoming ugly. Since by its very nature, it is a compounded and impermanent phenomenon, the flower possesses neither the permanent nor autonomous nature of beauty that it evokes. In *The Essence of the Middle Way*:

Agitation is pacified by reflecting on impermanence, etc.

It is vital that we reflect on impermanence, as well as on the general and particular sufferings of Samsara and the benefits of liberation. If this is unsuccessful in countering agitation, it is because our conceptual thoughts are very deeply rooted, and eliminating them will require a more energetic approach. This is when we should focus on counting the breaths as previously

described. While doing so, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by anything else. Counting to 21 and remaining concentrated in this manner without being distracted, is an indication that we have attained the first level of calm-abiding. If, however, we are unable to follow our breath up to 21 without being distracted, we must persevere until we can. This is the easiest and most practical technique to end mental agitation.

There are two types of agitation: gross and subtle. In the presence of gross agitation, our attention is focused on the object and the image is clear, but there is a lack of stability. If the agitation is subtle, the object is clear and stable, while the mode of apprehension lacks intensity and stability. Even for seasoned meditators, these two forms of agitation remain the principal obstacles to calm-abiding.

When applying antidotes to mental laxity and agitation, the objective is always to discipline our own mind, and not that of others.

How do we recognize *subtle laxity*? It occurs when the mind is placed in concentration and there is clarity and stability, but the mode of apprehending the object of meditation is too lax and our visualization lacks precision. Its antidote is described in a sutra where the Bhagavan explains that the sounds produced by the strings of the sitar are beautiful when the instrument is perfectly tuned – when the strings are neither too tight or too loose. The same principle applies when we meditate.

Thus when the mind in meditative concentration seeks more clarity and stability while the mode of apprehension of the object is too tense, it risks falling

prey to agitation and must be a little more relaxed. If, to the contrary, the mode of apprehending these two aspects is too lax, the danger is then mental laxity. In this case, we must slightly intensify our visualization. The great yogis state that without the intelligent use of vigilance, it would be very difficult for beginners to focus the mind on a single point. Master Chandragomin said:

If I apply too much vigour, agitation appears; if I let go, mental dullness takes its place. Meditative equanimity is very difficult to attain. What should I do with my troubled mind?

Thus when these problems arise, it is important not to confuse mental laxity and concentration; just as it is important not to mistaken our enemies for members of our family. In this case, our ego-grasping is the real enemy because it causes us to cherish our own person more than others. Again, the enemy is *not our own person*, but rather the *attitude that cherishes* our own person in such an exaggerated way. If we confuse these two, the entire path of calm-abiding and special insight will be lost to us. It is for this reason that the great yogis have taken such care in clearly presenting this precious teaching.

To summarize, the mode of apprehension, stability, and clarity are all included in the three higher trainings. The mode of apprehension refers to higher training in ethics; stability represents the higher training in concentration; and clarity, the higher training in wisdom. For this reason, it is essential to meditate on how the three higher trainings mutually support each other and to clearly understand their order of progression.

When mental laxity, agitation, negligence, dullness, sleepiness, distraction, dispersion, etc. arise, not immediately applying the antidote will be an obstacle.

Hence our intention should be to apply the antidote as soon as we are aware of the presence of agitation and laxity.

It is in fact our *intention* that will determine how efficiently we apply antidotes. *Intention* acts as a magnet and causes the consciousness and accompanying mental factors to focus single-pointedly on nothing else but the chosen object. In his *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*, Asanga states that actions or karma, regardless of their mental, physical, or verbal aspect, are intentional karmas or intentions.

Just like a spy who denounces the enemy as soon as he is detected and then attempts to stop him, so too must we use vigilance to detect any mental agitation and laxity – gross or subtle – and if the situation calls for it, immediately apply the appropriate antidote.

e) Excessive application of antidotes

Antidote: equanimity in the non-application of antidotes

Even though the application of an antidote is an antidote in itself, once agitation and laxity are no longer present, excessive application of antidotes can also be an obstacle to attaining calm-abiding. Take for example a mother trying to put her baby to sleep by using different methods (songs, caresses, stories, etc.). When the child has finally fallen asleep, she will stop moving or making noise. Similarly, if the mind is already in single-pointed concentration, and we insist on applying the antidotes for agitation and laxity when they are no longer present, maintaining concentration will become impossible.

The eighth antidote counters the excessive application of antidotes by cultivating meditative equanimity in their

non-application. Lama Tsongkhapa explains in *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*:

What kind of equanimity is it? There are generally three kinds of equanimity: 1) the sensation of neutrality, 2) the impartiality found in the four immeasurables, and 3) the equanimity of application. We refer here to the third kind described by Asanga in *The Lands of the Auditors*: « What is equanimity? It becomes manifest when the mind observes an object associated with calm-abiding and special insight, while remaining engaged calmly and naturally in a state of mental well-being. It is a spontaneous mental function that emerges after having obtained suppleness, and gives rise to a mental equanimity that is free of disruptions. »

In the *Compendium of Superior Knowledge*, Asanga further describes the mental factor of equanimity as follows:

Regardless of the object on which the mind rests, *equanimity*²¹ renders the experience neutral. Its function is to leave no room whatsoever for disruptive states of mind.

After the eighth stage of calm-abiding, mental laxity and agitation are no longer present. If in spite of their absence, we nevertheless apply an antidote, we will interrupt the mental state we seek, and applying an antidote will subsequently become an obstacle. Unless the occasion demands it, we should avoid excessive vigilance. It would be preferable to let go a little and cultivate equanimity.

²¹ This is not a reference to one of the four immeasurables (love, compassion, joy, and equanimity), but rather to the equanimity necessary for the non-application of antidotes for calm-abiding.

Briefly, laxity hinders stability while agitation favours distraction. In general, once we reach a certain meditative stability, we are more likely to succumb to laxity. To prevent this, we should increase the clarity of our visualization and strengthen our mode of apprehension of the object.

On the other hand, if clarity is present, the risk is agitation. To counter this, we seek more stability.

Thus it is urgent to eliminate any misunderstanding regarding how best to attain the desired state of concentration. We must develop a single-pointed concentration endowed with a firm mode of apprehension of the two qualities which are stability and, more particularly, clarity. Serious meditators should take these instructions to heart.

Duration of the meditation session

The *Lands of the Auditors* and the majority of other classic texts do not clearly recommend any specific duration for a meditation session. However, in the third volume of the *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalashila does say that we may remain in meditation for as long as we can. Though this statement refers to a person having already realized calm-abiding and is subsequently seeking special insight, it is obvious that the same holds true for the duration of a meditation session on calm-abiding.

In *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, it is mentioned that sessions that are too lengthy largely contribute to developing mental laxity and agitation, which makes it difficult to attain perfect concentration. The great Tibetan masters of the past have taught that it

is better to do several shorter sessions instead. What is most important is to respect our own mental capacities and to meditate, as suggested in the last volume of the *Stages of Meditation*, « for as long as possible ».

We may remain in a state of meditative equilibrium for as long as we feel no physical or mental discomfort or obstacle. If an obstacle does arise which cannot immediately be eliminated, we should not insist, and end the session. Once we have succeeded in resolving the problem, we may then return to our meditation. This being the thinking of the masters, we should not hesitate to follow their suggestion.

3) Realizing the nine stages of calm-abiding

In his *Compendium of Higher Knowledge*, Asanga explains the stages of calm-abiding:

What is calm-abiding? - Stabilizing the mind within, continual stabilization, re-stabilizing, maintaining stabilization, becoming disciplined, pacification, complete pacification, single-pointed concentration, and mental equanimity.

In Maitreya's *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, the first stage of calm-abiding is described as « the mind that fixes its attention on the object ». This means that after completely withdrawing its attention from all external objects and directing it inwardly, the mind focuses on the body of a deity or any other object of meditation.

The same text defines the second stage as « continuing without distraction ». Having first fixed its attention on the object of meditation, the mind is now stabilized and

remains concentrated on its object without being distracted.

The third stage is described as « quickly recognizing any distraction, the mind is refocused ». At this point, if our concentration is lost through forgetfulness or distraction, we can quickly refocus the mind on the object of meditation.

The fourth stage is « the sage keeps his attention focused inwardly at higher and higher levels ». In the previous stage, distraction was quickly identified and eliminated. Here, we refer to a concentration wherein our ability to focus becomes increasingly refined.

This brings us to the fifth stage: « then upon seeing the advantages of concentration, the mind disciplines itself ». Concentration stabilizes the mind on its object in such a way that when agitation or laxity appear during meditation, simply remembering the qualities of meditative concentration produces a feeling of joy.

The Ornament of the Sutras goes on to describe the sixth stage as: « upon seeing the disadvantages of distraction, indifference toward meditation is pacified ». At this stage, when agitation arises, a simple analysis of the disadvantages of distraction pacifies all lack of interest in concentration meditation.

The seventh stage is attained when « as soon as attachment, melancholy, etc. appear, they are pacified ». Refined through meditation, concentration now instantly pacifies any attachment, melancholy, laxity, drowsiness, etc. that may arise during stabilization meditation.

The eighth stage is described as: « armed with restraint and enthusiasm, he who applies the antidotes to the obstacles in his mind, attains a state of spontaneity ». At this level of concentration, very little effort is required to keep the mind focused on its object of meditation for as long as desired.

Finally, *The Ornament of the Sutras* describes the ninth stage: « Due to familiarity, the application of antidotes is no longer needed ». At this level of concentration, the mind can now spontaneously and effortlessly abide on its object in meditative equanimity for as long as desired.

The following are the differences between each of the nine stages: between the first and the second stages, the difference lies only in the duration of concentration. Between the second and the third, the duration of distraction becomes shorter. The difference between the third and the fourth stages is in the possibility of losing our concentration on the object of meditation. In the fourth and fifth stages, the difference lies in the presence or absence of gross mental laxity. In the fifth stage, we remain alert for the presence of subtle laxity; whereas in the sixth, this is no longer necessary because subtle agitation is much less present than before.

As we progress from the sixth to the seventh stage, we no longer need to be greatly concerned by the presence of subtle laxity or agitation. The difference between the seventh and eighth stages is in the presence or absence of subtle agitation or laxity. The eighth and ninth stages differ in the amount of effort required to remain in meditative absorption.

4) Achieving the six powers

The six powers are: a) the power of listening, b) the power of contemplation, c) the power of attention, d) the power of vigilance, e) the power of enthusiasm, and f) the power of familiarity.

a) Through the *power of listening*, we achieve the first stage of calm-abiding. Having received the instructions on how to concentrate on the object of meditation, we begin by simply fixing our attention on it. However, we still need to cultivate familiarity with the object through our own repeated practice of contemplation.

b) The *power of contemplation* allows us to attain the second stage. Through repeated practice in stabilizing the mind or contemplating the initial object of meditation, we acquire the ability to maintain a certain meditative continuity for the first time.

c) The *power of attention* enables us to obtain the next two stages. In the third stage, when the mind is distracted from its object of visualization, we are aware of this and are able to refocus on the object. In the fourth stage, we avoid losing focus on the object by intensifying our attention from the start.

d) The *power of vigilance* brings us to the fifth and sixth stages. Vigilance helps us to understand the disadvantages of following conceptual thoughts and secondary mental afflictions. By being aware of these disadvantages, we can avoid identifying with them.

e) With the *power of enthusiasm* we attain the seventh and eighth stages. By persevering in eliminating any conceptual thoughts and secondary mental afflictions, we no longer give in to them. In doing so, agitation,

mental laxity and other obstacles to meditation no longer have the power to disrupt our concentration and, as a result, a continuous concentration is realized.

f) Finally, *the power of familiarity* brings us to the ninth stage. As a result of the great familiarity gained in the previous stages, single-pointed concentration is now developed without effort.

Such is Asanga's explanation of the nine-fold process in the *Lands of the Auditors*. We should follow these instructions.

5) How to use the four kinds of applications

The four applications are:

- a) intense application
- b) interrupted application
- c) uninterrupted application
- d) spontaneous application

Application is a mental factor that directs and fixes the mind on an object of observation. Its function is to prevent mental dispersion. At this point, a distinction must be made between application and intention: the intention directs the mind to an object in general, while the application fixes or keeps the mind on a particular aspect of the object.

Here is how we may understand the progression through the nine stages of calm-abiding by means of the four applications: in the first two stages effort and *intense application* are required. From the third to the seventh stages, concentration is short-lived because our *application is interrupted* by agitation and mental laxity.

In the eighth stage, *application is uninterrupted* because agitation and laxity have been mastered through prolonged training and are no longer a hindrance. Finally, in the ninth stage of calm-abiding, *application is spontaneous* since our visualization is never interrupted and no effort is needed to sustain it.

For example, by frequently rereading certain texts and reciting them, we will eventually know them by heart. Thus even when distracted, entire passages will spontaneously come to mind. Likewise in the ninth stage of calm-abiding, the mind has become so accustomed to focusing over and over again in the preceding stages, that it can now remain in a prolonged state of single-pointed concentration without effort. When the mind of desire abides in such a state of concentration, we refer to it as *approximate calm-abiding*. It is precisely by abiding in this state of single-pointed concentration and becoming familiar with it, that we will develop *authentic calm-abiding*, which is endowed with the two types of suppleness and bliss.

Briefly, meditative *suppleness* is a mental factor that renders the mind and body totally malleable, thereby allowing us to use them as needed in observing a virtuous object. Its function is to eliminate all unfavourable physical and mental conditions such as the five veils listed below:

- aspiring to objects of the world of desire
- the urge to cause harm
- sleep and laxity (or darkness)
- agitation and regret
- doubt

They are referred to as the five veils because they veil or obscure the preparation, main practice, and conclusion of the practice of concentration. The first two veils are obstacles to the practice of ethics; the third, an obstacle to wisdom; and the fourth hinders concentration. As for doubt, it is an obstacle to all three higher trainings since it prevents us from seeing what to abandon and what to practice as described in the Four Noble Truths.

When we speak of the mental factor of suppleness, we are referring to the suppleness of the mind. On the other hand, suppleness of the body refers to a physical sensation. Through the power of concentration, we eliminate the unfavourable conditions of the body which now becomes as light as cotton. This physical sensation then allows the body to carry out whatever virtuous activity we desire.

6) Developing calm-abiding

In the ninth stage of calm-abiding, concentration is free of subtle laxity and agitation. It is now possible to remain concentrated for long periods of time without effort. However, this is only approximate calm-abiding. To actually achieve authentic calm-abiding, we must be able to meditate while remaining in uninterrupted single-pointed concentration, until a certain familiarity is acquired. The resulting physical and mental suppleness will then give rise to an exceptional form of bliss.

First, however, mental suppleness must be generated by pacifying all the disruptive states of mind which are obstacles to cultivating virtue. Because once the body is free of all mental afflictions, the resulting physical bliss allows it to be easily used in accomplishing any virtuous activity. We can then use the body as we wish, for it

becomes as flexible and as light as cotton. Due to this extraordinary suppleness, we have a feeling of great bliss, and the body experiences extremely pleasant sensations. From that moment on, as soon as we are in a state of meditative equanimity, the body will immediately dissolve into the object of meditation, and we will perceive nothing else – not even our own body.

Such is the experience of the great bliss of mental suppleness. The mind becomes so immersed in felicity that it is almost impossible to remain focused on its object of meditation. This blissful state will diminish slightly and eventually become more balanced. We will consequently have attained a state of concentration firmly fixed on its object - along with its corresponding and abiding suppleness. The calm-abiding associated with the preparatory stage of the first dhyana is also obtained at this time. Attained as well, is the meditative mind with its consciousness of the higher realms. From this point on, we gradually advance through the next levels of preparation and the eight levels associated with the realms of form and no-form. This subject, however, will not be discussed here. *The Ornament of the Sutras* continues:

Thereafter, anyone having obtained great physical and mental suppleness is said to possess the application.

| Calm-Abiding | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Obstacles | Antidotes | | |
| 1. Laziness | 1. Confidence in the advantages of calm-abiding | | |
| | 2. Aspiration | | |
| | 3. Enthusiasm | | |
| | 4. Meditative suppleness | | |
| | 5. Attention | | |
| 2. Forgetting the instructions | | | |
| 3. Mental agitation and laxity | 6. Vigilance | | |
| 4. Non-application of antidotes | 7. Applying the antidotes | | |
| 5. Over-application of antidotes | 8. Equanimity in the non-application of antidotes | | |
| 6 powers | Stages of calm-abiding | 4 applications | |
| 1. Power of listening | 1. Stabilizing the mind within | 1. Intense application | |
| 2. Power of contemplation | 2. Continued stabilization | | |
| 3. Power of attention | 3. Re-stabilization | 2. Interrupted application | |
| | 4. Power of vigilance | | 4. Maintaining stabilization |
| 5. Power of enthusiasm | 5. Becoming disciplined | | 3. Uninterrupted application |
| | 6. Pacification | | |
| 6. Power of familiarity | 7. Complete pacification | 4. Spontaneous application | |
| | 8. One-pointed concentration | | |
| | 9. Mental equanimity | | |

Calm-abiding refers to the state of concentration obtained after having progressed through the nine stages. It is imbued with the bliss arising from meditative suppleness, and is capable of remaining in meditative equanimity on its object for as long as desired.

This state is called calm-abiding²² because it is where the mind rests in single-pointed concentration once all dispersion to external objects has been pacified. There are two types of calm-abiding: one whose object is the multiplicity of phenomena, and the other whose object is the true nature of phenomena.

Without having first understood and experienced meditation on calm-abiding and special insight, it is ill-advised to insist on practicing the less common forms of Mahamudra or Dzogchen²³ meditation. It is stated in *The Root of Mahamudra*:

We think, therefore, that our meditation is positive, but this is like mistaking a brass lamp for a gold one. We are on a wrong path that could not be more inadequate.

²² Calm-abiding (*sheenay* in Tibetan) is literally translated as residing (*ny*) in peace (*shee*).

²³ Mahamudra, or « Great Seal » refers to the emptiness that seals all Nirvanic and Samsaric phenomena. Dzogchen or « Great Perfection » refers to the realization of the true nature of the mind which is free from obscurations and naturally luminous. These two practices are included in the teachings of the supreme Vajrayana vehicle.

The Pandit Shakya also added:

The fool usually turns Mahamudra meditation into a cause for being reborn as an animal, or falling into the cessation of the Auditors.

In taking such a path, not only will it not help us counter our self-grasping, but our life will be without meaning and useless. We will be unable to attain any of the paths or grounds. Furthermore, meditation on calm-abiding must at least be accompanied by renunciation or taking refuge; otherwise, it will be of little help in preventing a possible rebirth in the lower realms. It is stated in *Praise to the Praiseworthy*:

They can rise to the pinnacle of existence, yet they will still suffer, creating only conditioned existence.

Lesser paths such as these cannot be considered virtuous. We must learn to distinguish between an authentic path and a pseudo path. According to our tradition, meditation on calm-abiding should be preceded by taking-refuge, renunciation, Bodhichitta, etc. Then in keeping with the great treatises such as *The Five Treatises*²⁴ of Maitreya, Asanga's *Compendium of Higher Knowledge*, *The Stages of Meditation* by Kamalashila, or *The Great Treatise of the Path to Enlightenment* by Tsongkhapa, we must cultivate the nine stages of calm-abiding by applying the eight antidotes to the five obstacles. These texts further explain how the nine stages are attained by developing the six powers and four applications. The

²⁴ Maitreya's five treatises are: 1) *The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*, 2) *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*, 3) *The Ornament of Clear Realization*, 4) *Distinguishing Phenomena from their Real Nature*, and 5) *The Sublime Continuum*.

Buddha himself predicted that these great pioneers would best explain his teaching. We can therefore refer to them with confidence.

If we seek to obtain the perfect concentration described by the Buddha, it is best to receive detailed instructions from an experienced master who is qualified to guide us in such matters. We should seek his counsel regularly. Of course, it is also possible to refer to various classical texts for a deeper understanding of this subject.

If after obtaining such instructions, we do attain calm-abiding, we will quickly achieve realizations. Our sleep will become single-pointed concentration, mental disruptions will greatly diminish, and every path will become easier to develop. We will also develop extra-sensory perceptions and other exceptional gifts, etc. In other words, achieving every objective of our present and future lives will become possible.

However, even after studying the great classical texts which provide excellent instructions for attaining calm-abiding, some people will, nevertheless, lay them aside in search of something more. Such a life is wasted and most unfortunate. It is said in *The Essence of the Middle Path*:

The wandering elephant of the mind is firmly tied to the solid pillar of the object of meditation with the rope of attention, and is gradually mastered by the hook of wisdom.

The great Tibetan masters of the past used the following illustration to represent the nine stages of progression toward the realization of calm-abiding.

Calm abiding



Nine Stages of Calm-Abiding

| Nine Stages of Calm-Abiding - Key | |
|--|---|
| Symbol | Significance |
| Hermitage at the bottom of the illustration | Place where the yogi meditates on calm-abiding |
| The meditator/yogi | The yogi progressing through the nine stages toward attaining calm-abiding |
| The hook in the yogi's right hand | Vigilance |
| The rope in the yogi's left hand | Attention |
| The six curves in the road | The six powers |
| The elephant | The mind of the yogi |
| The black colour of the elephant | Mental laxity |
| The monkey | Dispersion |
| The black colour of the monkey | Agitation |
| The intensity of the fire | The force needed to apply vigilance and attention |
| The whiteness gradually appearing on the elephant and the monkey | The development of clarity and stability |
| The rabbit on the elephant's back | Subtle mental laxity |
| The backward glance of the rabbit | Recognizing the least presence of gross or subtle mental laxity |
| The elephant's backward glance | Attention being refocused on the object after having detected the presence of distraction |
| The monkey walking behind the elephant | The intensity of agitation decreases before that of mental laxity |
| From the fifth stage on, the yogi walks ahead of the elephant and the rabbit | Through the power of vigilance, the mind is no longer dispersed; it is firmly stabilized in concentration |

Calm abiding

| | |
|---|--|
| The minimal presence of black on the elephant in the seventh stage, and the monkey advancing freely | Subtle mental laxity and agitation remain present, but rarely occur. If they do, they are immediately mastered |
| The absence of fire from the seventh stage on | Attention and vigilance are completely developed |
| The five sense objects scattered along the path | The objects of the world of desire that distract and excite the mind |
| The monkey picking fruit from the tree | Attachment to the objects of desire, obstacle to calm-abiding |
| The white elephant, without the monkey, moving from the seventh to the eighth stage | With minimal attention and vigilance, agitation, laxity and dispersion no longer have the power to hinder, and the mind abides in uninterrupted concentration |
| The yogi sitting on a cushion in the ninth stage | The mind of the world of desire abiding effortlessly in perfect single-pointed concentration, corresponds to the meditative equanimity of approximate calm-abiding |
| The tenth image of the yogi sitting on the elephant | Attainment of calm-abiding endowed with the bliss of mental suppleness |
| The yogi flying in the sky | Attainment of the bliss of physical suppleness resulting from having purified the impure states of the aggregates, elements, and sources of perception |

Calm abiding

| | |
|--|---|
| The eleventh image of the yogi seated on the elephant. He holds a sword in his right hand and the pure light of a rainbow of primordial wisdom emanates from his heart | The union of calm-abiding and special insight having emptiness as its object, cuts through the root of Samsara, i.e. the ignorance responsible for the conception of an autonomous self |
| The fire ignited at the end of the rainbow | Attention and vigilance vigorously seeking the view which realizes emptiness through analysis |

The attainment of authentic calm-abiding corresponds to attaining the path of accumulation. The union of calm-abiding and special insight corresponds to attaining the path of preparation. Thereafter, we advance step by step along the paths of vision, meditation, and beyond-learning.²⁵

²⁵ The five paths are explained in more detail in the document *Psychologie et vision philosophique bouddhiste*, Centre Paramita, 2014.

1.3.2 Special Insight

We render homage to the youthful Manjushri!

In order to awaken the aspiration to seek the profound and extraordinary view of the Madyamaka, and to leave an imprint on our stream of consciousness, we will now briefly explain how to look for the view. Having concluded the explanation of calm-abiding which is the essence of concentration, we will now introduce the topic of special insight, the essence of wisdom.

1) Conditions required for special insight

The following topic is divided into five parts: the first three are a general presentation and the last two are specifically concerned with ascertaining the view.

a. How to listen and reflect on the excellent words of the Buddha

The inevitable cause for developing special insight is realizing the view that arises from the wisdom gained from listening and reflection. First, we must have received the error-free teachings of wise masters who possess a perfect knowledge of the essence of the Buddha's words. If we are unable to establish the view of the nature of reality with certainty, it will be impossible for us to generate the special insight that realizes emptiness.

b. Following in the footsteps of the pioneers

We must rely on the commentaries of an authentic pioneer whose explanation of the Buddha's thought is

duly recognized. Otherwise, we will be reduced to wandering aimlessly like a blind person without guidance. Therefore, it is important to place our confidence in the great masters who have perfectly interpreted the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

It is also essential that this authentic teacher knows how to perfectly distinguish between the interpretable and definitive aspects of this view, and presents its definitive rather than interpretable meaning. The Muni has said:

Place your confidence in the Dharma, not in the person. Rely on the meaning, not on the words. Rely on the definitive, not on the interpretable meaning. Place your confidence in sublime Wisdom, not in ordinary consciousness.

c. The necessity of seeking Nagarjuna's view

Why should we particularly rely on Nagarjuna's tradition? It is very clearly stated in several Sutras and Tantras that the Buddha himself predicted that Nagarjuna would be the person to best explain the profound meaning of the essence of his teaching, free of the extremes of existence (Eternalism) and non-existence (Nihilism). Let us therefore seek the view realizing emptiness by relying on the classical texts of this master who is recognized in the three worlds. In the *Sutra on the Descent to Lanka*:

In Beda, from the south will come one known as the "Glorious Monk". He will be called Naga and will destroy the concepts of existence and non-existence. He will explain my teaching on the unsurpassable Mahayana to the whole world. He will attain the land of "Perfect Joy" and will go to Tushita.

In our tradition, the commentary that clarifies the thought contained in the Sutras on the *Perfection of Wisdom* is the *Golden Rosary of Eloquence* by Dje Tsongkhapa. It states:

The two commentaries on the Perfection of Wisdom that include the stages for generating clear realizations in the mental continuum of the students are those of the venerable Maitreya and Nagarjuna. They are the six works on logic [of the Madyamaka by Nagarjuna], which precisely elucidate the meaning of emptiness, as well as the explanations that implicitly define emptiness.

Four hundred years after the Victorious One left this valley of tears, the great pioneer Nagarjuna made his appearance in the world as foretold. Using numerous logical reflections, he expounded on the levels of emptiness in six treatises on logic. These levels are clearly presented in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. He also wrote the *Compendium of Sutras* in which he elucidates emptiness in accordance with the teachings.

The six treatises on logic are: 1) *Fundamental Treatise on the Wisdom of the Middle Way*, 2) *The Finely Woven*, 3) *Seventy Verses on Emptiness*, 4) *Refutation of Objections*, 5) *Precious Garland*, and 6) *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*. The first four are classical texts that demonstrate the emptiness of interdependence. The last two address the subject, namely the view realizing emptiness, which is the root of the path to liberation.

The *Fundamental Treatise on the Wisdom of the Middle Way* and *The Finely Woven* mainly refute the object of refutation, which is true existence. The *Seventy Stanzas* and *Refutation of Objections* prove that even though there is no true existence, the agent and action are plausible.

As for the *Precious Garland* and *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*, they show that the root of the path to liberation is the subject, namely the view that realizes emptiness. In his *Elucidation of Thought, an Extensive Treatise on Engaging in the Middle Way* [by Chandrakirti], Lama Tsongkhapa explains:

It is superfluous to mention that the Buddha attained the realization of the two truths. These two classical texts also demonstrate that it is also required in order to be liberated from Samsara.

And:

Both these classical texts also show us the path we need to follow in order to free ourselves from Samsara: abandon the view that upholds the extremes of existence and non-existence.

d. Identifying afflictive ignorance

To identify ignorance, an opposite cognition is needed. It cannot simply be any cognition: it must be the wisdom that knows the emptiness of selflessness²⁶. Its opposite therefore is not the mere absence of ignorance or another form of wisdom. It must be a wisdom that is diametrically opposed to ignorance itself.

The many kinds of suffering in Samsara are caused by contaminated karma. Karma itself is the result of mental

²⁶ In Buddhism, we define the « self » as autonomous or intrinsic existence. The « self » of a phenomenon is therefore the autonomous existence of this phenomenon. Similarly, the « non-self » of a phenomenon is its absence of autonomous existence. Since nothing exists in an autonomous manner, all that exists is consequently « non-self ».

afflictions whose only root is the ignorance that conceives a self. If we do not abandon this ignorance, freeing ourselves from Samsara will be impossible. No path, other than that of the wisdom realizing selflessness, will enable us to abandon ignorance. In the *Commentary on Valid Cognition*:

Because love and other similar qualities are not opposed to ignorance, they will be unable to destroy this great demon.

The Buddha said that the antidotes to the other mental afflictions such as attachment, are only partial antidotes. At best, they can only lessen the power of these afflictions. The antidote to ignorance, however, must be all-encompassing because ignorance is at the root of every fault and imperfection.

e. Exposing the root cause of the cycle of Samsara

It is fair to state that the conception of an innate self is the root of Samsara. This, however, is not the case for the acquired conception of a self. In his *Little Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, Lama Tsongkhapa says:

What keeps all sentient beings bound to Samsara is innate ignorance. Acquired ignorance, however, exists exclusively within philosophical systems, and for this reason cannot be considered as the root of Samsara.

Even though the great classic texts introduce the selflessness of phenomena first, as far as our practice is concerned, it is best to begin with the selflessness of person. In the *Sutra of Royal Single-Pointed Concentration*:

Apply to all the rest the same discrimination that you have for the “I”.

2) Establishing the non-existence of the self of person

a) Developing meditative equanimity resembling space

The emptiness resembling space appears when the object of refutation (i.e. true existence) has been refuted. This constitutes training in meditative equanimity resembling space. It refers also to the continuous training to develop the conviction that phenomena have no inherent or autonomous existence.

There are several different versions of the view among the four philosophical schools. We will concentrate primarily on the view of the Madyamaka-Prasangika which explains that the meaning of interdependent origination is emptiness, and that the meaning of emptiness is interdependent origination. Of all the versions, it represents the best and final thinking of the Buddha on this topic.

All internal and external phenomena, such as the person and the aggregates, are merely appearances. If we look for their true existence, we cannot find it because none are established independently. Absence of intrinsic existence, autonomous existence, real existence, natural existence, reality, and ultimate nature are all synonyms used to represent the ultimate nature of reality in the Madyamaka-Prasangika school. All that is contrary to this thinking must ultimately be refuted. The innate conception of a self perceives the self as truly existing. The object of this conceptualizing mind, namely a truly existent self, must be completely refuted.

In order to reach a true understanding of the Madyamaka view, we must request this of our Lama,

perceiving him as inseparable from our meditational deity. We must complete our accumulations of merit and wisdom, and purify our veils with enthusiasm. Then we must seek to understand the view by studying the great treatises of Nagarjuna and Tsongkhapa, the two protectors predicted by the Buddha, who established the view free of the two extremes. Any thinking contrary to that of Nagarjuna and his spiritual sons, or to that of Tsongkhapa, does not represent the ultimate thinking of the Buddha.

The great Tsongkhapa once asked the venerable Manjushri what method to use in order to quickly develop realizations in his mental continuum. Manjushri replied that he should rigorously practice three elements: 1) request the guidance of his Lama while seeing him as being of the same nature as his meditational deity, 2) enthusiastically persist in accomplishing his accumulations and purifying his veils, and 3) diligently practice the visualizations which are the primary cause of Buddhahood.

We begin by first studying and reflecting on an authentic classical text. Then we diligently practice the short or long form of a guru-yoga which contains all the points to be practiced, and finally, we meditate on the Madyamaka view. In *Engaging in the Middle Way* by Chandrakirti:

May my mind perceive that any faulty mental affliction arises from views that consider the self as being identical to the aggregates. Once the nature of this “I” is understood, the yogi must eliminate the “I”.

In Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*:

As long as there is conception of the aggregates, there will be conception of the “I”. By conceiving an “I”, we create karma, which in turn results in a new rebirth.

The great founders of the Madyamaka-Prasangika view, Acarya Chandrakirti, Shantideva and Buddhapalita, consider the very root of Samsara to be the innate conception of the real existence of phenomena, such as the person and aggregates. They clearly state that unless this conception of a real existence of the person and aggregates is reversed, eliminating the sufferings of Samsara will be impossible. The following four points of reflection will help us realize this.

a. Identify the object to be refuted

i) Reasons for this identification

Shantideva said:

If the correct element is not found, we will be unable to prove it is not real.

In other words, if we cannot identify the self - this element to be refuted, and which does not exist - we will also be unable to identify the “non-self” or absence of this self. For example, we cannot aim an arrow at an invisible target, any more than we can arrest a thief if his identity is unknown. Thus it is important to first identify the object to be refuted, in order to subsequently refute it.

ii) Identifying the object

The innately conceived self is vividly manifested when, for example, we are criticized, angry, or afraid; this is

when we can observe with a small part of our mind how the “I” appears. With experience, it will be possible to recognize it. If we succeed in doing this, we will see that what we identify as the “I” is not merely something that the mind imputes upon the aggregates. Rather, this “I” appears as though it really exists. When the object to be identified is revealed in this way to the mind, the object to be refuted will have been correctly identified.

In this case, the *self, me, person* and the “I” all have the same meaning. This “I” is in fact nothing more than a mere imputation on the basis of the aggregates. This does not mean, however, that the “I” does not exist. It is indeed this “I” that accumulates positive and negative acts, and experiences their effects. We must realize that it is this same “I” that returns to Samsara and will attain liberation. In short, even though we say that the “I” is but a simple designation based on the aggregates, we are in no way saying that it does not exist in the conventional sense. Such a statement would not be consistent with the Madhyamaka-Prasangika view.

b. Determine all the possibilities

In general, if a phenomenon exists, it must be either singular or plural. If the “I” we have identified exists, it must be either the same as the aggregates (its basis of designation), or separate from them. We must verify this, then arrive at the conclusion that there is no other possibility. If we cannot find the “I” in either of these two possibilities, it is because it has no real existence. For example, if we believe that someone is in the house and we search in all the possible places and find no one, we will conclude that the house is empty. The same holds for the “I”.

c. Determine that the self and the aggregates cannot be totally identical

If the self and the aggregates were identical, and since a person possesses five aggregates, there would also be five selves! On the other hand, if a person has only one self, he/she should have only one aggregate and not five! Thus at the moment of death, if the body is incinerated, the self would also be burned! It would also be impossible to feel cold because the mind does not get cold. If the body and mind were truly identical to the self, what would it serve to say « my body » or « my mind », and separate the “I” from the aggregates? This kind of incoherence leads us to conclude that the self cannot be identical to the aggregates and constitute a single entity. In *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

If the self were the aggregates, and since there are several aggregates, it would follow that there would also be several “I”s. Since the self would then have substance, we could see it, and it would no longer be a misconception. The self would be eliminated when Nirvana was attained.

d. Determine that the self and the aggregates cannot be entirely separate

If the self were truly separate from the aggregates, this would mean that there is no relationship between the two. We could then recognize the self without the aggregates having to be present. By separating the “I” from the aggregates, we would also be able to perceive this independent “I”. Also, if we were cruel or kind to the aggregates, the self would feel nothing since it would be separate from them. Such inconsistencies prove that the aggregates and the “I” cannot be entirely dissociated or distinct from each other. In *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

Consequently, there is no “I” other than the aggregates because the “I” cannot be apprehended except by means of the aggregates.

By reasoning in this manner, we can see that the “I” is absolutely inexistent and is apparent only because of the innate conception of self. If this “I” did exist, it would be either identical to or separate from the aggregates. However, the “I” cannot exist in either of these two ways. As we develop a certitude in these four considerations, we will be able to analyze the “I” when it arises intensely at the centre of our being. Once we develop a clear understanding that the aggregates are falsely conceived as being the self, and that this self has no real existence, we have begun to understand the view of the Madhyamaka. This understanding is comparable to suddenly realizing that what we perceived as a snake, is in fact only a rope. Zhogpa Donyo Khedroup states:

Once a valid realization of the non-existence of a real and autonomous “I” arises, we have realized the view.

Experienced meditators whose faculties have been refined will feel they have discovered something very precious here. Those less experienced will be frightened because they believe they have suddenly lost something precious, i.e. the self. This reaction is perfectly natural. We must then refer to the four points of reflection, and immediately use the same process of analysis previously applied to the person, to every other phenomenon.

b) Between meditation sessions, train the mind to see all phenomena as illusions

After ending a session of meditative equanimity, and subsequently examining what is left after negating the object to be refuted, all that seems to remain is the simple designation “I”. As if in a dream, this simple conventional “I” accumulates positive or negative karma; and it is upon this same “I” that the positive and negative consequences will ripen. We must always remember this.

To summarize, all phenomena must be considered as illusions or as a dream, appearing - but not having the least bit of autonomous existence. For example, a magician undoubtedly sees the horse or the elephant that he causes to appear, yet in his mind he knows very well that he has merely created an illusion. Thus while never doubting their appearance to be an illusion, the magician quite obviously sees the horse or the elephant come and go. Similarly, the imputed “I”, even though it is not real and has no inherent existence, nevertheless accumulates karma and experiences happiness and suffering. Hence, while admitting the undeniable interdependence between the agent and the action, we must train ourselves to see everything as an illusion - to see that what appears is in fact empty, and what is empty, also appears – exactly as an illusion.

When seeking the view, it is difficult for the mind’s eye to accept emptiness because of our enduring habit of believing in true existence. In other words, while using emptiness as the reason to prove interdependency, emptiness must necessarily contribute to appearances; and in using interdependency as the reason to prove emptiness, interdependency also necessarily contributes

to emptiness. In Nargajuna's *Fundamental Treatise on the Wisdom of the Middle Way*:

Since no phenomenon exists that is not interdependent, there are therefore no phenomena that exist that are not empty.

In *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

Because all things arise dependently, your conceptions do not stand up to scrutiny. The logic of interdependent origination cuts through the network of wrong views.

Lama Tsongkhapa has said:

When these two do not alternate but are simultaneous, and the mere perception of the infallibility of interdependent origination entirely destroys all modes of apprehending the object, analysis of the view is complete. Furthermore, once you understand that appearances eliminate the extreme of existence, that emptiness dissipates the extreme of nothingness, and how emptiness appears as cause and effect, you will never again be subjected to false views.

When we develop the certitude that emptiness and interdependent origination do not contradict each other but rather mutually imply each other, we will understand the interdependence of the agent and action as the cause and effect. We will consequently attribute great importance to abandoning faults and reinforcing virtue. We will work untiringly to develop universal love, compassion, Bodhichitta, and associated practices. In so doing, our practice will be imbued with both method and wisdom. In *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

In order to liberate all migrant beings, the non-self has been presented under two headings: phenomena and person. The Teacher also defined and explained selflessness in many ways to his various disciples.

3) Ascertaining the non-existence of the self of phenomena

a) Ascertaining that compounded phenomena do not exist independently

a. Ascertaining that matter does not exist independently

Having acquired the certitude that a person is not established by his/her own nature, we now apply the same logic to the formal bases of designation of the person: the aggregate of form, sources of perception, elements, etc. A sutra states:

Apply the same discrimination you have for the self to everything else.

In the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

The view that holds for one thing is the view that holds for all things. The emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of all things.

As ordinary beings whose consciousness is afflicted with ignorance, forms and all other phenomena appear to us as truly existing. The object to be refuted only appears to us in this way. We must refute this appearance as being real by using the four points of logical analysis previously cited.

External matter (the six sources of external perception such as form, etc.), as well as internal matter (the six

internal faculties such as vision, etc.), do not exist independently.

b. Ascertaining that consciousness does not exist independently

For example, this involves valid and invalid cognition, i.e., the mind and mental factors.

c. Ascertaining that compounded non-associated phenomena do not exist independently

Here are some examples: impermanence, compounded phenomena, the product, functional things, the person, year, month, etc.

b) Ascertaining that uncompounded phenomena do not exist independently

The following are examples: cessation, space, emptiness, that which is permanent, the un-born, the indestructible, etc.

Briefly, the Madhyamaka-Prasangika view distinguishes two kinds of selflessness in relation to the bases (the person or phenomena), which are empty. However, the process of refutation is the same for both. Taking the person as a basis, we refute the independent existence of the self of person and ascertain the subtle selflessness of person. Taking the aggregates as the basis of phenomena, we refute the independent existence of the self of phenomena, and we ascertain the subtle selflessness of phenomena. Even though we make a distinction between these two kinds of objects to be refuted, at the subtle level, there is no difference between them. Both objects apprehended are different, but the mode of apprehension is the same. In believing that the basis of designation, which is the person, has an inherent

existence, we develop the concept of the self of person. In believing that the bases of designation which are the aggregates and other phenomena are inherently existent, we develop the concept of the subtle self of phenomena.

After attaining calm-abiding, suppressing only superficial mental afflictions will not lead to developing supramundane special insight. Since our ultimate goal is final liberation, it is paramount to develop this particular form of special insight because it alone both analyzes the meaning of selflessness, as well as eradicates the roots of cyclic existence. By developing such insight, it becomes possible to prevent the many misfortunes of cyclic existence, without having to resort to meditation in the higher states of concentration. In *Praise to the Praiseworthy*:

Even if those who follow your teaching do not attain higher levels of concentration, they nevertheless overcome cyclic existence, while Mara looks on helplessly.

What is special insight? It is a form of wisdom capable of discriminating every kind of phenomena, and is based on calm-abiding combined with the meditative suppleness induced by the power of analysis. It is referred to as *special* because it is superior to calm-abiding, and as *insight* because of the specific quality of its perception.

4) Developing special insight

Based on calm-abiding, we seek clarity in emptiness. Having found this clarity, we repeat the four-point analysis in a state of stabilized concentration. We can illustrate this meditative state with the analogy of a fish gliding through the very clear, calm water of a lake. We must nevertheless take as much time as necessary to

become familiar with this state, by making equal use of meditative stability and the wisdom of conceptualization.

After achieving the nine stages of calm-abiding previously mentioned, through the power of analysis, we will attain a particular form of meditative suppleness even greater than that experienced upon achieving calm-abiding. Analytical meditation will now spontaneously accompany concentration meditation. It is at this point that true special insight focused on emptiness is attained. From hereon, special insight will always be coupled with calm-abiding. We will know when special insight is obtained when, based on calm-abiding, the power of our analysis of emptiness will lead us to experience a new form of meditative suppleness. Thus there is more involved here than simply being able to analyze emptiness based on calm-abiding.

Finally, in keeping with the profound view of the Madhyamaka, the following is an explanation of special insight according to the noble Nagarjuna and his three spiritual sons, Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti and Shantideva. The great Lama Tsongkhapa, king of Dharma in the land of snow-capped mountains, was the unsurpassed pioneer of this tradition. After scrupulously practicing the essence of the extraordinary verbal instructions received from the protector Manjushri, Tsongkhapa later set them in writing in his short *Lamrim*. Then based on the latter, Panchen Tcheugyen founded the *Mahamudra of Tushita* tradition, and committed the teaching to writing in a text bearing the same name.

5) Combining calm-abiding and special insight

In order to combine calm-abiding and special insight, it is obvious that we must have previously developed both. In fact, from the moment we obtain authentic special insight, we also obtain the union of calm-abiding and special insight.

For example, to take flight, a bird absolutely needs its two wings. Similarly, if part of either the method or wisdom is missing, the ultimate state of Buddhahood will remain inaccessible. If we wish to be free from Samsara, it is crucial to train simultaneously in the method (calm-abiding) and the wisdom realizing selflessness (special insight). In *Engaging in the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti says:

With the two white wings of the conventional and ultimate fully deployed, and propelled by the force of its virtuous acts, the swan king overtakes the other swans and reaches the shores of the Victors' ocean of qualities.

The following is a list and brief description of the twenty emptinesses, the twenty kinds of sublime wisdom that realize them, and the twenty bases of refutation.

First, we read in *Engaging in the Middle Way*:

He spoke at length of the sixteen emptinesses and again, to recapitulate, he spoke of the four emptinesses. The Mahayana repeatedly mentions this.

And in a Sutra:

Subuthi²⁷, the great enlightenment that is omniscience consists in: 1) the emptiness of the internal, 2) the emptiness of the external, 3) the emptiness of the internal and external, 4) the emptiness of emptiness, 5) the emptiness of immensity, 6) the emptiness of the ultimate, 7) the emptiness of compounded phenomena, 8) the emptiness of non-compounded phenomena, 9) the emptiness of what has passed beyond the extremes, 10) the emptiness of what is beginningless and endless, 11) the emptiness of what should not be rejected, 12) the emptiness of independent nature, 13) the emptiness of all phenomena, 14) the emptiness of specific characteristics, 15) the emptiness of the inconceivable, 16) the emptiness of things, 17) the emptiness of non-things, 18) the emptiness of the nature of non-things, 19) the emptiness of nature itself, and 20) the emptiness of other nature. These are the twenty emptinesses.

Also listed in the same sutra are the twenty sublime wisdoms that realize the twenty emptinesses. Beginning with the Mahayana path of accumulation, the different levels of wisdom are listed up to the Land of the Buddhas. These levels include the realization of emptiness in 1) the lesser, 2) the middle, and 3) the great path of accumulation of the Mahayana, 4) the path of preparation, 5) the first ground, 6) the second ground, 7) the third ground, 8) the fourth ground, 9) the fifth ground, 10) the sixth ground, 11) the seventh ground, 12) and 13) the eighth ground, 14) and 15) the ninth ground, and lastly 16) and 17) the tenth ground. The first seventeen primordial wisdoms are equal or inferior to

²⁷ The name of one of the Buddha's main disciples.

the tenth ground. The last three primordial wisdoms (18, 19, 20) belong to the Buddha Land.

Here now is the list of the twenty bases of refutation: 1) the six internal faculties: eyes, etc., 2) the five types of external objects: form, etc., 3) the abiding place²⁸ of each of the five senses, etc., 4) the absence of true existence of the emptiness of all phenomena, 5) the ten directions, 6) nirvana and the ultimate path to its attainment, 7) the three worlds brought about by causes and conditions, 8) non-compounded phenomena not produced by causes and conditions, 9) the reality that is free of the two extremes of Eternalism and Nihilism²⁹, 10) Samsara without beginning or end, 11) the non-abandonment of that which is opposed to the two extreme views, 12) the natural emptiness of compounded and non-compounded phenomena, 13) all phenomena: aggregates, elements and sources of perception, 14) the particular characteristics of every phenomenon: the constituents, birth, destruction, the objects of the senses, etc., 15) the three times: past, present and future, and 16) the unsubstantial fundamental nature of all phenomena included therein and which arise from causes and conditions, 17) the nature of functional things, 18) non-functional things such as space, etc., 19) the inherent nature of emptiness which is the exact nature of all phenomena, and 20) the attainment of pure states whose nature is other than that of Samsara.

²⁸ The precise and very subtle place of a sensory faculty. If this element is damaged or absent, the sense (vision, taste, etc.) cannot function.

²⁹ Nihilism (denying the existence of what exists) and Eternalism (belief in autonomous and permanent existence) are two extreme views that prevent knowing the real nature of things and phenomena.

1.4 Conclusion

When we end a meditation session involving all aspects of calm-abiding and special insight, we should make a dedication:

Imbued with the great bliss induced by the serenity of wisdom knowing emptiness, may I be so inspired as to complete the perfection of wisdom in total meditative absorption resembling space.

May the precious spirit of Enlightenment grow where it has not yet grown.
Where it has grown, may it never decline, and may it flourish for evermore.

Whether during or between meditation sessions, it is very important to always meditate on calm-abiding and special insight. If we can set aside a given time for practice, as is the case during a retreat, let there be four sessions: one at sunrise, mid-morning, afternoon, and evening. At first, it is preferable to have several shorter sessions. Otherwise, sessions which are too lengthy will predispose us to mental agitation and laxity. Our tradition has always emphasized the importance of respecting one's personal limitations, time, environment and health.

2. Between meditation sessions

Not a single moment passes that is not included in an actual meditation session or between sessions. Training our minds during meditation sessions, only to give in to distraction between sessions will greatly hinder subsequent practices. Therefore, we should be careful to avoid being sidetracked at such times.

For example, indulging in distractions between sessions, reading adventure novels, etc., will only serve to increase our attachment and aversion. It is best to avoid such activities and look for ways to increase our wisdom. Furthermore, to prevent afflictive emotions from arising, we need to guard the doors of our senses from being influenced by objects that tend to generate afflictions. For instance, when our visual consciousness perceives an attractive form, our mind should not be allowed to wander. Instead, our constant vigilance and attention should protect our body, speech, and mind. In *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*, it is stated in the chapter on vigilance:

In short, the function of vigilance is this: to examine the state of your body and mind over and over again.

Atisha has said:

In the company of others, observe your words; when alone, observe your mind.

Between meditation sessions, it is suggested to read such works as the biography of the Buddha, from whom we have received this teaching, as well as the biographies of the great masters such as Lama Tsongkhapa.

DEDICATION

These words are offered for the benefit of all those who have an interest in learning more about Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, more particularly those who, in these turbulent times, seek to attain calm-abiding and special insight. This text is presented in accordance with the three volumes (“baskets”) and is an anthology of all the excellent teachings of the Victorious One. It includes all of the three higher trainings. Other than what was already presented in these works, the author added no new information.

May the effort devoted to writing this text contribute to ensure the continuing presence in our world of the Dalai Lama and that of other precious masters for eons to come. May their wishes be immediately fulfilled. May all problems be resolved and may happiness, joy and peace quickly shine forth!

May the essence of this teaching radiate in all directions!

Geshe Lobsang Samten
Quebec, Canada

Caring for Dharma books

Books containing the Dharma are precious. They should be considered with respect and not be treated as any other book. We should avoid placing them on the ground or the floor, stepping over them, sitting on them, letting an animal walk on them, etc. Even though Dharma texts may be considered conventional objects, the respect shown for them reflects the importance we give to the teachings.

GLOSSARY

Abhidharma: The teachings of the Buddha pertaining to metaphysics.

Aggregates: (Skt. *skandha*) The five psychosomatic constituents of our being according to the Abhidharma. They are the physical form, sensations, perception, formations and consciousness.

Arhat: Sanskrit designating a ‘destroyer of the enemy’; namely, the inner enemy, our mental afflictions. The ‘destroyer of the enemy’ or *arhat* is one who has attained liberation from cyclic existence.

Auditor: See *Shravaka*.

Arya: Noble, ultimate, superior. One who has realized the wisdom of emptiness.

Bhaghavan: An epithet for the Buddha.

Bhikshou: Skt. for monk.

Bodhichitta: Spirit of enlightenment, the wish to obtain enlightenment or Buddhahood for the good of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva: One in whom the spirit of enlightenment or *Bodhichitta* has arisen.

Buddha: One who is totally enlightened, whose mind is free of all veils to omniscience and who has obtained perfect wisdom, compassion and power.

Compounded phenomenon: Any phenomenon fulfilling a function or producing an effect, i.e., any compositional and impermanent phenomenon.

Dharma: Literally, the nature of phenomena, the path of liberation from suffering. It generally designates the teaching of the Buddha.

Dharmakaya: One of the four bodies of a Buddha. The omniscient mind of a fully enlightened being who, free from all obscurations and veils, abides fully absorbed in the realization of emptiness while possessing perfect knowledge of every phenomenon.

Dhyana: (Skt. designating states of concentration) It is often translated as “absorption”, though etymologically, it simply means meditation or contemplation.

Enlightenment: The state of one who has attained full awakening, who is a perfect Buddha.

Emptiness/Suchness: The real nature of things, of reality. Reality as it is.

Hinayana: Literally, little vehicle. That part of the Buddha’s teaching aimed at bringing every individual to his/her own personal liberation or *nirvana*. It is the foundation of the great vehicle, or *Mahayana*.

Karma: Action of the body, speech or mind. It refers to the law of cause and effect that governs the world. According to this law, any action carried out with either a good or bad intention will create a similar result. It is the motor of samsaric existence.

Lama: (Skt. *guru*) Master, spiritual friend.

Lama Tsongkhapa: Great master and pioneer of Tibetan Buddhism prophesied by the Buddha. He founded the Geluk tradition which includes all the Dalai Lamas. He is the author of *The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (Lamrim Chenmo).

Lamrim: The stages of the path to enlightenment. Name given to texts presenting the gradual stages to enlightenment inspired by *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, written by Atisha while in Tibet.

Madhyamaka: *School of the Middle Way* founded by the great Indian master Nagarjuna, and presenting the ultimate and final thought of the Buddha. It holds that all phenomena are interdependent productions, thereby refuting the two extreme views of independent existence (Eternalism) and non-existence (Nihilism). The Madhyamaka includes two schools of thought: Svatantrika and Prasangika.

Mahayana: The great vehicle. The teaching of the Buddha based on the little vehicle or *Hinayana*. The goal of the Mahayana is to bring all beings to perfect enlightenment based on the development of Bodhichitta, the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. It has two parts: the vehicle of perfections (*paramitayana*) and the vehicle of the tantras (*vajrayana*).

Mara: Personification of the passions and objects of desire, and in certain cases, of death.

Nirvana: Liberation from suffering and Samsara, the cycle of existence.

Paramita: (Skt. for perfection) Bodhisattvas progressively practice the six perfections (generosity,

ethical behaviour, patience, joyful perseverance, concentration, and wisdom) to attain full enlightenment.

Paramitayana: Vehicle of the *paramitas* or perfections, a division of the Mahayana.

Prasangika: The consequentialist branch of the Madhyamaka school.

Pratyekabuddha: Solitary Realizer or self-made Buddha. The pratyekabuddha practices the *Hinayana* vehicle and lives alone, without the help of a master. He also practices the Four Noble Truths with the aim of attaining the peace of *Nirvana* (the state of *Arhat*).

Samsara: The cycle of existence. The state in which a continuum of consciousness repeatedly takes rebirth in the aggregates of one of the six realms of existence due to karma and mental afflictions.

Sangha: Conventionally speaking, the spiritual community or a group of monks or nuns. In the ultimate sense, it refers to those who have attained the state of an *Arya*.

Shakya: The original clan of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as Buddha Shakyamuni and the Sage of the Shakyas.

Shantideva: A great Indian Bodhisattva of the eighth century who practiced and taught the Mahayana. He is the author of *The Way of the Bodhisattvas*.

Shravaka: Auditors/Hearers. Practitioners of the *Hinayana* who rely on listening to the teaching of the Buddha to attain *nirvana* (state of *Arhat*).

Solitary Realizer: See *Pratyekabuddha*.

Sutras: Texts of the discourses of Buddha Shakyamuni on the *Hinayana* and the *Mahayana*.

Svatantrika: The autonomist branch of the *Madhyamaka* school.

Tantra: Text or teaching of the *Vajrayana*.

Tathagata: « A Being Gone Beyond ». Epithet for the Buddha signifying that he has realized suchness or the emptiness of phenomena.

The Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: See *Lama Tsongkhapa*.

The Way of the Bodhisattvas: (Skt. *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*) A Mahayana text in poetic form by the great Bodhisattva Shantideva, in which he describes the actions of a Bodhisattva.

Three baskets: The three phases or volumes of the Buddha's teachings concerning ethics, concentration and wisdom. They are called, respectively, Vinaya, Sutra, and Abhidharma.

Tsongkhapa: See *Lama Tsongkhapa*.

Tulku: Recognized reincarnation of a realized being.

Vajrayana: Literally, the Adamentine Vehicle. The supreme or uncommon vehicle of the Mahayana. It allows those having integrated the common path (renunciation, Bodhichitta and wisdom) to attain enlightenment more quickly due to subtle meditation techniques.

Vehicles: (Skt. *yana*) Paths which, when put into practice, lead to the attainment of their respective results.

Victor: Epithet for the Buddha.

Vinaya: Rules of ethical discipline and monastic rules.

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Lama Samten's photo on back cover
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All the teachings of the Buddha concern the practice of two kinds of meditation: the meditation of concentration and analytical meditation. The first aims at attaining calm-abiding (*samatha* in Sanskrit) or the temporary cessation of mental afflictions. The aim of the second is to obtain special insight (*vipassana*) which allows to eliminate the very source of these afflictions. The present text is a brief presentation on how to develop these two qualities in accordance with the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni and those of the great Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters who commented on them. It is meant to be used by practitioners as a complementary manual to the verbal explanations and empowerments of the teacher.



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Lama Samten is a native of Tibet. He began his monastic studies in 1980 at Ganden monastery near Lhasa. He then went on to obtain the title of Geshe (the equivalent of a doctorate) in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy at the same university, rebuilt in the south of India at the request of the Dalai Lama.

While visiting Quebec in 1998, he developed friendships and decided to settle there. Since that time, he has been sharing his knowledge of the 2500-year-old Buddhist philosophy with all those who express an interest. May *How to Meditate* be of benefit to all, and foster a growing interest for Buddhist philosophy.

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