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Calm Abiding Meditation

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There are three main points to take into consideration when discussing meditation: the correct sitting posture, the benevolent aspiration and application, and the wholesome benefits. I wish to speak about them.

1. The Correct Sitting Posture

Generally, one might think that one meditates with one's mind and it doesn't really matter what position the body is in, that one will still be able to meditate without taking the physical posture into account. But there is a very central factor of meditation involved with the physical posture in making the mind stable. It is said that if one is sitting with the body straight, the channels within the body will also be straight. What is the benefit if the channels in the body are straight because the body is straight? It means that the air flowing through the channels will then flow straight. Then there will be no blockages and nothing preventing the flow of the airs within the channels. What is the benefit if the airs flow straight through the channels? It means that the mind will be in accord if the channels are straight and the airs flow straight. This means that if the mind itself is wavering and unsteady, it is usually based on the wavering movements of the airs flowing through the channels. The nature of the air is related to the mind, so the movement of the mind depends on the movement of the airs. Therefore, if the airs are flowing in a straight way through the channels, then the mind itself will become still and stable; it will not be agitated or unstable. This is the reason why the

correct posture in sitting is important for meditation. There is what is called “the seven aspects of Vairocana” for the physical posture in meditation, which doesn’t refer to Buddha Vairocana but to the seven aspects of the physical posture that will bring clarity to one’s meditation.

Two faults can occur during meditation. The first is mental dullness, in which case the mind is not clear. So, first there is a lack of clarity, then a dullness of mind, then stupor, and finally sleep. When these occur, one doesn’t have the necessary clarity for the meditation; there is a lack of clarity in the meditation. That is one defect one has to be free of. Another defect is agitation of the mind, in which case one may think about things one likes. Feeling happy and glad, one becomes involved with those thoughts and then the mind becomes more and more unstable. Sometimes agitation may arise because one regrets something, in which case one ponders things one has done, e.g., thinking, “Oh, that was bad. I shouldn’t have done that.” One feels more and more regret, which creates instability in one’s meditation. Or agitation may arise due to thoughts of doubt, e.g., thinking, “Oh, it should be like this or like that.” One feels more and more doubt, which creates instability of meditation. That is the second fault of meditation, which has to be overcome.

One can eliminate the two faults arising in meditation by taking in the seven aspects of sitting that bring clarity to meditation. If one is sitting in the correct posture, sometimes one can have dullness or agitation, but one can eliminate these faults more easily by sitting in the correct posture.

The Seven Aspects of Vairocana

1) The first of the seven aspects of Vairocana is being seated, so one sits on a cushion and meditates while sitting. There is also a meditation that one can do while walking, but sitting is preferable to walking and more conducive for developing stability of the mind. Also, one can meditate while lying down, but that can cause dullness and stupor. Therefore, one does meditation by sitting on a cushion. It is said that one should sit in the vajra or lotus posture, if possible. Some people have healthy and supple bodies and experience no difficulties sitting in the vajra posture. If one can do that, then one should meditate in the vajra posture. This doesn’t mean to say that it’s impossible to meditate if one isn’t able to sit in this posture. Many people have difficulties sitting in the vajra posture, therefore, instead, one just sits cross-legged on the cushion. Many people have difficulties sitting like that, which doesn’t mean that they are unable to meditate; then it’s all right to sit on a chair. If one can, it’s preferable to sit on a cushion while meditating, because it will enhance developing stability of mind. So, that is the first of the seven points, sitting cross-legged on a cushion. If one can sit in meditation comfortably as described, one does so. Some people find it uncomfortable and have pain sitting in this way. In that case, there is no point in trying to force oneself. Then it is better to actually do walking meditation.

2) The second of the seven aspects of Vairocana is the placement of the hands. The hands are a condition that can cause one’s mind to be agitated and distracted, because one works with one’s hands, which are like the tools of the body. Therefore, one’s hands should be in a posture that will bring about stability of the mind. The left hand rests in the lap and the right hand rests on the left hand, called “the posture of resting evenly” in that both hands lie at the same level, i.e., one hand isn’t high and the other isn’t dangling on the ground or the like. One can also rest both hands on the knees, called “the earth-touching gesture.” Resting both hands on the knees is also the posture of resting evenly, because both hands are at an equal level.

In the Mahamudra tradition, the text called *“Direct Recognition of the Three Kayas”* speaks about visualizing the ultimate Buddha Vajradhara, who is described as having both hands on the knees in the earth-touching position. Therefore, in meditation one can also place one’s hands in that position, which is also resting the hands evenly. This is the second point that will aid developing stability in the mind.

3) The third aspect is having a straight back so that the channels in the body will also be straight. In particular, there is the central channel and the right and left channels. They aren’t like one’s arteries or veins through which the blood circulates, rather they are naturally existing channels present in one’s body due to karmic latencies. It is through these channels that air flows. So, if the back is straight, these channels will be straight and the air will flow through them in a straight way; that will also make one’s mind become stable. If one is sick and can sit up straight, one does so for as long as possible. So, that’s the third of the seven points, sitting up with a straight back.

4) The fourth point is having the shoulders lifted up slightly. If one stoops over, it brings a loss of confidence. To avoid that, the shoulders should be uplifted so that the lack of confidence is overcome and the meditation is tightened. That is the fourth point.

5) The fifth point has to do with the throat. One’s chin is bent slightly downward in a natural position. If the chin is lifted upward, it will naturally cause many thoughts to arise and thus will agitate the mind. Therefore it is said that the chin needs to be bent down slightly.

6) The sixth point concerns the tongue, which is held against the upper palate. This may seem insignificant, but it also has a great purpose. While meditating, saliva can collect in the mouth and the more saliva collects, one becomes aware of it and focuses one’s mind on it. This becomes the cause for thoughts to arise. If one holds the tongue against the upper palate, it prevents saliva from accumulating in the mouth. Holding the tongue against the upper palate creates a condition that will help develop stability of mind.

7) The seventh aspect of Vairocana concerns the eyes, which are important. Car-drivers say that if one keeps one’s eyes on the road, then the mind will follow naturally.

Some instructors say that one should meditate with closed eyes. Although meditating with closed eyes will prevent thoughts from arising, it also means that there will be a lack of clarity and one will be in a state of darkness. In the Hinayana tradition, there is the custom of meditating by looking downward, because they fear the defilements and negative thoughts, so there is the wish that defilements and thoughts do not arise. However, we do not meditate in that way. There are non-Buddhists who meditate looking upward, because they believe in a creator who lives high up in the sky; for that reason they meditate looking upward. However, we do not meditate in that way either.

In the Vajrayana tradition, there are instructions on looking straight ahead with vajra eyesight. This means that we don’t look upward or downward, but straight ahead. Someone may argue that various things will be seen that will cause many thoughts to arise, but we leave the eyes looking straight ahead and leave the mind unengaged in what is seen. Some people say that they see double after doing this a while, but this will not happen if the mind is not focusing on what is seen, rather is left to look naturally and directly ahead; then the mind doesn’t become engaged in what is seen and one will not get double-vision. Some people say that if one looks straight ahead, one can get pain in the eyes, the eyes start watering, or the eyesight becomes blurry. This happens because of putting too much effort in focusing on what the eyes are

looking at. If one just leaves the eyes to look ahead naturally and doesn't become engaged in what one sees, then this fault will not occur either.

When one is meditating in this way, one's eyes should neither be too widely opened nor shut, but they should be in a natural and even position. If one meditates in this way, it will help in the development of the stability of the mind. It has been observed from experience that it's better not to have too much white in front of oneself during meditation practice, but rather dull colours; this enhances development of meditation. So, that's the seventh aspect of meditation posture that brings clarity in meditation.

2. The Benevolent Aspiration and Application

We are in this world, are humans, and while being humans in this world having good thoughts about everyone else will make things easier and more pleasant, whereas having negative thoughts about others will create difficulties, suffering, and unhappiness. Therefore, one should have good thoughts about others, which means having love and compassion. It's important to have love and compassion and we need to have a method by which we can develop love and compassion so that if we don't have it, we will have it and if we have it, we can increase these qualities more and more.

In fact, everyone has love and compassion; there isn't really anyone who doesn't have love and compassion. But the love and compassion that people have is often limited and that isn't good. It is limited in that there is love and compassion for some and not for others. For example, some people have love and compassion for all humans but not for animals, others have love and compassion for animals but not for humans. Others have love and compassion for some humans and not for others. Such biased and partial love and compassion can create unhappiness, because it means that some people become one's friends and others become one's enemies. The kind of love and compassion one should have in accordance with the Dharma is a love and compassion that isn't limited but embraces every living being. One thinks that all living beings want to have happiness and that all living beings want to be free of suffering, just like oneself. So, one has love and compassion for all living beings with this attitude of seeing them equally.

Immeasurable love and compassion needs to be developed. The description 'immeasurable' makes it sound like they are very vast, but it doesn't have that meaning. 'Immeasurable' means that there is no limit by thinking, "I have love and compassion for just this many people and not for others." So, no limits are made for one's love and compassion – one has no partiality and isn't prejudiced. When one has partiality, one's attachment and aversion increase, and they create difficulties and unhappiness. Whereas if there is no limit to one's love and compassion, one won't develop aversion, attachment, or a biased frame of mind; there won't be some who are close and others who are far away, but one will have love and compassion equally for all, which will create happiness and joy for oneself as well as for others.

The Benevolent Aspiration: The Four Immeasurables

1) In order to develop immeasurable love and compassion, first one develops a sense of equality for all beings, a state of equanimity that is free of attachment and aversion. One sees all beings as the same and knows that everyone wishes to have happiness and be free of suffering. One develops the motivation to bring happiness to all beings and to free them from suffering. One doesn't think, "I wish that these people be free of suffering and have happiness

and I don't wish this for others." Instead of having partial and limited love and compassion while having attachment, aversion, and a biased attitude, one sees all beings exactly the same. Therefore, one first develops the sense of equality of all beings. Then one will be able to develop immeasurable love and compassion.

2 & 3) If one has love and compassion, it is possible that it doesn't turn out to be good, because sometimes one helps and benefits people and sometimes one doesn't. For example, let's assume someone is very sick. One has love and compassion for this person, wishes to help, finds that one cannot do anything, and becomes very sad. That is, someone is very sick, one isn't able to help, and one becomes miserable. Then both the sick person and oneself experience a worse state. This would be looking at it in a narrow way and from a short-termed perspective. Really, what one wishes to do is to bring beings happiness as well as the causes of happiness and to free them of suffering and the causes of suffering.

4) Even if one isn't able to immediately help someone who is sick, one is able to create causes for their future happiness - one is able to benefit beings in that way. Sometimes one can help in the present, but if it isn't possible, one can think, "Eventually they will have happiness and the causes of happiness. Eventually they will be free of suffering and the causes of suffering." Confident that one will be able to help beings at a later time, one can give rise to a sense of joy that eliminates the result of a limited attitude of love and compassion by just looking at the present, which would only bring oneself unhappiness. Looking at it from a more extensive angle, in terms of the future, will bring joy to one's love and compassion.

Some people think that Bodhisattvas must suffer very much and be sad all the time, because they are always looking at beings and see their suffering. But it isn't like that. As described in the "*Bodhicharyavatara*" by Shantideva: "If a Bodhisattva is able to benefit just one person, to free him or her of suffering, and then a second person, then each of them brings great and immeasurable joy." So, immeasurable love and compassion engender immeasurable joy.

The Benevolent Application: Giving and Taking

How does one develop and increase love and compassion? In "*The Seven Points of Mind Training*" by Atisha, there is an instruction saying that one meditates alternately on happiness and suffering; it also says that one meditates conjoining the breath. This means that as one breathes out, one thinks that all one's happiness and good fortune goes out with one's breath and is given to all beings and as one breathes in, one thinks that all the suffering and pain of beings is drawn into oneself and that one takes on the suffering of all beings. One does this repeatedly and alternately.

Normally, we think that it's important for us to be happy, to be free of suffering, and it doesn't really matter if others are happy or not. We are accustomed to thinking this way. To eliminate this habitual way of thinking, one does this practice and thinks, "It doesn't matter if I am happy or not. I will give all my happiness to all other beings. It's important that everyone is happy and free of suffering, so I will take on their suffering. It doesn't matter if I suffer or not." This is the attitude we rarely have. So, we do this meditation.

In doing this meditation, one imagines that one's happiness and good fortune go out with one's breath in the form of white light that reaches all beings and that the suffering and bad karma of all beings are taken into oneself in the form of black light as one breathes in. Some people worry and become frightened doing this, thinking that they will become sick or will have lots of suffering as a result. Others have great hopes and expectations and assume they

are taking on the suffering of others; they meditate hard and a lot, visualizing and thinking that they can actually take away the suffering of others. But, in fact, there is no reason to be worried or to have such hopes, because the suffering and happiness that everyone experiences is due to their own karma. One cannot give away one's happiness to someone else or take away their suffering. There can be no exchange of suffering and happiness, which are due to an individual's ripening karma. So, there's no reason to worry about doing this practice, to worry that one will lose one's happiness and will take on the suffering of others by practicing this way.

One might wonder, "If it's impossible to give away happiness and take on suffering, then what is this meditation good for?" In fact, the purpose of this meditation is not to take away others' suffering or to give away one's happiness. The purpose of this meditation is to get rid of the attitude of indifference about others' suffering and thinking one is very important. The purpose of this meditation is to develop one's love and compassion. This meditation is not carried out to actually give away one's happiness or to take on others' suffering, rather one does this meditation in order to develop and increase one's love and compassion. If one can, it means that one will be able to benefit others in the future; if one can't, it means that one won't be able to benefit others in the future. If one always has the attitude of wanting to help and benefit others, then one definitely will be able to do so. Should one have developed immeasurable love and compassion, then even if not directly in terms of present circumstances, one will finally be able to bring others freedom from suffering and attainment of happiness.

In doing this meditation, there's no danger of suffering coming to oneself or of one's happiness disappearing. But since we have the habit of being attached to and clinging to the self since beginningless time, we might think, "I don't dare do this meditation. If I do it, there's the danger that I will lose my happiness and suffering will come to me." Because of habitually clinging to the self, these thoughts spontaneously arise. In order to overcome them, one imagines that white light rays from one's heart go out to others and black light symbolizing others' suffering flows into oneself, sinks into the bright light in one's heart, and is completely consumed. Meditating like this will help one not be afraid of losing one's happiness or taking on others' suffering.

Calm Abiding Meditation

What one wishes to gain through meditation is a mind that is at peace and that is gentle and relaxed. Though one may wish to have such a mind, it will not come about because of one's habitual tendencies. So, one has to practice calm abiding meditation in order to gain that result. Calm abiding meditation is called *shamata* in Sanskrit and means 'peace and stability of mind.' It is a very beneficial practice.

When most teachers present instructions on shamata, they teach meditating on one's inhalation and exhalation. Most teachers of Theravada and Zen Buddhism and most teachers of Vajrayana teach focusing one's attention on one's breath. One just keeps one's mind focused on one's breath, as one exhales and inhales again. This is very good for developing stability and peace of mind. While it is good to do, it's also good to sometimes practice shamata without focusing on anything. Meditating on one's breath is called "shamata with a support," one's breath being the support. What is meditation without a support? It's a very good meditation to develop stability and clarity of mind. In the treatise entitled "*Differentiating Consciousness and Wisdom*" by the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, the different consciousnesses are described. To clarify six of the eight consciousnesses: Due to the coming

together of a sensory object of form and the eye faculty, there is the visual consciousness. Due to the coming together of a sensory object of sound and the ear faculty, there is the ear consciousness. Due to an object of smell and the nose faculty, there is the nose consciousness. Due to an object of taste and the tongue faculty, there is the taste consciousness. Due to an object of touch and the touch faculty, there is the body consciousness. These five consciousnesses experience the respective objects of perception and are without thought or conceptualization; that is how they are described in the Buddhist treatises. These consciousnesses cause no harm nor help meditation, therefore one doesn't need to do anything about them while meditating; it isn't necessary to stop or prevent them. They are non-conceptual consciousnesses of direct perception.

What does one principally meditate on? The sixth mental consciousness, which is the sixth in the order of the five just described. Sometimes the mental consciousness is engaged with the visual consciousness, sometimes with that of the ear, sometimes with that of the nose, and so on. Then the mental consciousness gives rise to thoughts such as, "This is pleasant and that is unpleasant" and so on. One will also think about the past, the present, and future. So, many thoughts arise in the mental consciousness. Like waves on the surface of water, thoughts come and go.

Nine Levels of Stability

There are nine levels of resting one's mind to bring about a peaceful, relaxed, clear, and calm state of mind.

1) In order to develop this state of mind one needs to have the mental events of mindfulness and awareness. With the mental events of mindfulness and awareness, one looks to see what is happening, what is going on, what thoughts are arising, asking, "I should be meditating. Am I?" One may also see, "Not many thoughts are arising now, are there? I'm in a state of stability." Or one sees, "Thoughts are arising. Thoughts are coming up." So, one maintains mindfulness and awareness. During this time, the clarity of the six consciousnesses will not cease, but due to having mindfulness and awareness, one can enter into a state in which the mind is stable for brief periods of time.

In terms of the teachings on the nine ways of resting or levels of stability, the first is called "placing the mind," which is how one enters into meditation. Rather than exerting oneself strenuously, one simply allows one's mind to relax and whatever comes about is fine. Whether one's mind relaxes for a long period or for a very short period of time, whether it is stable or not is fine. At this stage, one is trying to experience the mind at rest and not generating a lot of thoughts.

2) When one is able to set one's mind in this relaxed state, free from thoughts for a little while, one enters into the second stage, called "continuously placing the mind." At this stage, one is able to place one's mind in a state of relaxation somewhat longer. In the first state, there is more distraction than mindfulness. In the second, the balance shifts in that one doesn't follow after a distraction very long. Rather, one has mindfulness and one's mind becomes clearer. Then one is able to meditate again.

3) One still follows after a thought when it arises during the second stage, but one is able to see a thought that arises and returns to simply placing the mind in a relaxed state in the third stage, which is called "placing again." One is trying to practice shamata and wants to set the mind in a state of peace. At this point, one recognizes that one does indeed have thoughts that

keep occurring and becomes discouraged. Sometimes people say, “Here I am trying to meditate and I’ve got all these thoughts.” But there’s a reason not to be discouraged, because that’s just what one’s mind is like. One has an untamed eruption of thoughts that just occur and that’s why one needs to practice meditation. All this thinking was going on in the past, but one wasn’t aware of it. One didn’t have mindfulness and didn’t meditate then. But one develops the ability to recognize thoughts as thoughts through meditation practice, which is a good quality.

This discussion of having so many thoughts is set down in various manuals of instructions on meditation. It is said that one thinks that things are getting worse when one begins to progress a little bit in one’s practice. One thinks, “I didn’t have a lot of thoughts before I was practicing meditation and there are many more thoughts now than there used to be.” It’s also said in these books that this isn’t the case at all. One was always distracted and had many thoughts before one started meditating, but one recognizes them at this point in one’s practice. One is able to identify thoughts as thoughts after practicing for a while, and it’s said that feeling irritated by all these thoughts is actually a sign that one’s mind is beginning to rest somewhat.

One usually develops attachment to thoughts after one has been able to recognize them as thoughts. One begins to think, “These thoughts are very important and quite good,” so one goes on thinking about them. To avoid becoming fascinated by one’s thoughts, one has to apply an antidote. For example, if one finds that one is making plans about what one is going to do, it’s good to say to oneself, “Okay. I’ve got plans that I can carry out, but I can do that later. Right now I should be meditating.” A traditional example is that a gardener should come up to a pig the moment it breaks into his garden and hit it sharply on the nose before it starts eating the flowers and vegetables. Then the pig will run away. Whereas if a gardener is very gentle with an intruding pig, would try to coax and pat it, then the pig will soon have eaten up all the flowers and vegetables. It’s pretty much the same with thoughts. If a thought arises and one thinks, “Oh, that’s very important. I’ll have to think about it some more,” then one isn’t stopping it at the beginning but will get lost in distraction. It’s harder getting rid of it later than to immediately say “no” to it when it arises.

4) The fourth stage is called “close placement.” At this point in meditation, one is able to put thoughts aside when they come up, but it takes some force of discipline, which is applying the techniques of mindfulness and awareness. At this point, mindfulness is basically remembering that one is practicing meditation. Awareness is looking inside and seeing what’s going on in one’s mind. With mindfulness and awareness, one is able to accomplish the fourth level of resting the mind.

In the “*Bodhicharyavatara*,” Shantideva taught about the fourth stage by comparing thoughts with thieves. He wrote that if someone intends to break into a house and steal, they would check if there are strong and clever guards around. They would go somewhere else if they discover that it is so. On the other hand, if they see that the guards are timid and weak, then they will break in, tie the guards up, and carry off the valuable goods. It’s a little bit like that with mindfulness and awareness, which are like guards of one’s meditation. If one’s mindfulness and awareness are weak, then thoughts come along and just carry one away. If mindfulness and awareness are well-established, then thoughts cannot enter and take over. In this particular metaphor, Bodhisattva Shantideva pointed out that one’s mind is like a doorway. It’s like a doorway to a bank where very valuable things are kept. If the guard to the bank is alert and is armed, then the thieves will go somewhere else. They will simply say, “It’s not going to work. We can’t get in there.” Similarly, mindfulness and awareness guard

the treasures of one's mind, the treasures being virtue and merit one accumulates through one's practice. Disturbing emotions will not come in and wreak havoc, stealing the virtue one has been able to accumulate and harming one's meditation practice if mindfulness and awareness are well-established.

5) The fifth stage of practice is called "taming." At this point, one's mind becomes tired and one doesn't really want to practice after having done so for a longer period of time. One's mind has become thick and heavy, one feels that one lacks freedom and independence. This is the time to remember the purpose and good qualities of meditation. One encourages oneself and recalls the reasons for meditating by thinking, "If I'm able to succeed in this practice and pass beyond these obstacles, I'll achieve true happiness of body and mind and will attain fruition of practice. If I let my mind continue being heavy, I won't be able to achieve these things." Having brought this to mind, one will be glad to continue meditating and a sense of joyfulness will arise about one's practice.

6) This then brings us to the sixth stage, which is called "pacifying." One begins looking more closely at the thoughts that interrupt one's meditation. Rather than just noticing thoughts and making statements like, "Oh, it was a thought," one begins to look at them and sees, "Hm. Meditation isn't going so well today. What are these thoughts? Are they attachment? Are they aggression? Are they doubt? Are they discouragement? Just what is going on?" By recognizing attachment, aggression, doubt, and so forth, one can deal with them in the following way: If thoughts of attachment or desire arise, one can remember that there is no benefit that comes from attachment. One understands that desire is endless because it creates more desire. This is the key to abandoning attachment and desire. In the case of hatred or aggression, one recognizes that hatred harms oneself as well as others and doesn't do anyone any good. One realizes that abandoning hatred is good for oneself and others. This is really the key to being able to pass beyond hatred. To deal with doubt, one understands that one is being devoured by doubt the more one thinks about it and this only makes matters worse. Having doubts about things doesn't really resolve matters, but brings more doubts. So during meditation, it really is useless dwelling on doubts. It's a faulty way of doing things. Looking at things closely and overcoming them is how to pacify one's mind.

Up to this point, one has abandoned the coarser problems that come up in meditation. Now one needs to deal with the more subtle obstacles that are harder to vanquish. Although they've been present all along, one now begins to focus one's attention on them. These are heaviness of mind on the one hand and wildness of mind on the other. Wildness of mind means simply being unable to place one's mind in a state of tranquillity. One might be thinking about a game one enjoys playing or a place one would like to go. Basically, it means becoming excited and really interested in what one has thought about. Whatever it is, one's mind begins becoming released into a peaceful and relaxed state by not following after one's thoughts. Heaviness of mind means one's mind sinks into dullness and becomes extremely unclear and inflexible. To overcome wildness or heaviness, one must first notice that one has fallen into these states.

There are a number of ways to overcome wildness of mind, such as thinking about one's motivation to practice, or engaging in a particular behaviour, or visualizing a particular object during meditation. One can change one's motivation by contemplating impermanence, the faults of samsara, or the disadvantages of not being able to meditate. This will somewhat weaken the wildness of one's mind. One can change one's behaviour by meditating in a darker or warmer room. This will enable one to let go of one's tension and to relax. One counteracts wildness of mind by visualizing a black lotus in one's heart center with four petals

turned slightly downward. Then one visualizes a black drop descending from the lotus. This practice will reduce wildness and tension of mind.

There are three ways to overcome heaviness or dullness of mind. One changes one's motivation by cheering up and does this by thinking about the wonderful qualities of the Buddhas or the remarkable qualities of the Dharma. Thinking about these qualities tends to lift one's spirit. To change one's behaviour, one can adjust one's posture and sit very erect or one can make the room cooler and brighter. One changes one's practice by visualizing a white-petalled lotus with a white drop in the center of one's heart and sees the white drop slowly rise through one's body and stay at the aperture at the top of one's head.

7) The seventh stage of resting the mind is called "thoroughly pacifying" and is an extension of the sixth. As before, one is still dealing with obstacles of wildness and heaviness and continues practicing in the same way.

8) The eighth stage of resting the mind is called "one-pointedness." At this point, one is working on overcoming all sorts of obstacles and applies a variety of different antidotes. At the earlier stages, one was principally engaged in getting the mind to stay in the practice of meditation and working on wildness and heaviness of mind. Now a practitioner investigates what is going on in the mind and applies the appropriate antidote to an obstacle.

9) The ninth stage is called "placing the mind in equipoise." Further exertion is not needed, rather one desists from applying the techniques one used until now and simply allows one's mind to be in a relaxed and clear state that is called "thoroughly processed." In this case, there is a certain independence of mind. It's really just a matter of letting oneself be in a state of meditation.

3. The Wholesome Benefits

It's very beneficial for oneself and others to practice shamata in this way. It can bring peace and happiness to the mind. As it is, one has many thoughts. Most of them are unhappy or worrisome and serve no purpose. These troublesome thoughts will diminish if one rests in calm abiding meditation.

The many thoughts one has distract and disturb one's mind and consequently the channels in one's body. When they are unbalanced, one's body is harmed and becomes weak and sick. The channels will be in a good condition if one has a happy mind and is at ease. Then one's body will be well or can become healthy again if one is sick. So it's very beneficial to be able to develop peace and stability by practicing calm abiding meditation. One's negative thoughts will diminish, which helps oneself and others. It can be a burden for others if one has many thoughts when one is together with them, whereas things will be easier and one will be in harmony with people if one can stay in a state of peace and happiness. In this way, meditation is very beneficial. That's all I will say for now. If you have any questions, then you are most welcome to ask.

Questions & Answers

Question: "Does awareness of insight come gradually when meditating on the breath?"

Rinpoche: Going from *shamata*, 'calm abiding meditation,' to *vipashyana*, 'special insight meditation,' doesn't happen suddenly, rather gradually. The mind becomes purer and purer and develops into insight meditation through the practice of calm abiding. The view of special

insight is discussed in the meditation instructions. So, there is the view of the mind in movement and the view of the mind while still. Shamata gradually evolves into vipashyana through those methods of practice.

Next question: “I find that I can achieve brief moments of bliss. Can one mistake these brief moments of bliss for clarity of mind, when one is free of thoughts?”

Rinpoche: The idea is to find a gap between thoughts. There’s nothing wrong with having experiences of bliss; it isn’t an error, but one shouldn’t be attached to those experiences by hoping one will have them again and by seeking them. Instead, one should think that nothing is wrong if bliss occurs or if it doesn’t occur. Nothing is wrong as long as one doesn’t have attachment. Generally speaking, it’s a sign that meditation is going well if one has experiences of bliss. Thank you very much.

Dedication

Through this goodness may omniscience be attained
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then
Lead every being without exception to that very state!
May precious and supreme Bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so,
And may precious Bodhicitta that has already been never decline, but continuously increase!

A Long Life Prayer for Thrangu Rinpoche, composed by His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa

Within the edgeless, centerless mandala of Dharma expanse
Your life is space’s vajra essence, permeating space.
We ask that you please stay, indestructible within
The locket of the sun and moon, unchanging, never leaving.



Photo with Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche taken during a tea break at the Namo Buddha Seminar in Glasgow in 1994. Photo of California wild poppies taken & kindly offered by Josef Kerklau. Manuscript transcribed & edited in 1999, typed again & arranged for the website of Karma Lekshey Ling in Nepal & Karma Sherab Ling in Münster in 2009 by Gaby Hollmann from Munich, responsible for all mistakes. Copyright Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche & Vajra Vidya Thrangu House in Oxford, 2009. All rights reserved.