

Buddhist Studies Program

Subject: Lam Rim Chen Mo Module 3

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We're into the section on *in particular, how to train in the last two perfections*. We've covered the section on *how to train in the bodhisattva deeds in general* and are now focused on *how to train in the last two*. In this section there are a number of different parts including *why it is necessary to cultivate both calm abiding and insight*. We're dealing with the section *how to train in each* and *how to train in calm abiding* in particular.

So *how to train in calm abiding, how to train in insight* and *how to unite them* (how to integrate the two). In the section on how to train in calm abiding there's *relying on the preconditions for calm abiding, how to cultivate calm abiding on that basis* and *the measure of successful cultivation of calm abiding*. We've covered the first on the prerequisites and are dealing with *how to cultivate calm abiding on that basis*.

In the section on *actual practice* you have two sections, one on *meditative posture* and one on *the meditative process* itself or the stages of meditation. We've covered the *meditative posture* and are looking at *the meditative process* itself.

In relation to this meditative process there are different ways to cultivate calm abiding, so sometimes you speak in terms of the five faults and the eight applications, whereas other times you talk about the nine stages of mental abiding, the six forces and the four attentions. Usually when we talk about calm abiding we refer to these different terms.

The Lam Rim Chen Mo mentions that the presentation of the five faults and the eight applications comes from Maitreya's *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*, and the presentation of the six forces, the four types of attention and the nine mental states is based upon the personal instructions passed down from Geshe Lak-sor-wa (dGe-bshes Lag-sor-ba), which in turn are based on Asanga's *Hearer Levels*. Now you'll find this on the bottom of page 31 and on the top of page 32 – it's important that we understand the source for these different types of presentations or explanations.

The explanation of the meditative process has two sections:

- 1. How to develop flawless concentration (Chapters 2-4)*
- 2. The stages in which the mental states are thereby developed (Chapter 5)*

(I") How to develop flawless concentration

This has three parts:

- 1. What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation*
- 2. What to do while focusing your attention on an object of meditation. (Chapters 2-3)*
- 3. What to do after you focus on an object of meditation (Chapter 4)*

What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation – it's important that we try to abandon the five faults, in particular that of laziness, and rely upon the eight applications as explained in the *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*. So before you begin to focus your attention on an object of meditation you must take steps to stop laziness and other faults that are disadvantageous for concentration. Why laziness? Because here laziness is understood as a lack of delight for, or no desire to cultivate concentration.

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In order to develop enjoyment of cultivating concentration you must be able to see the good qualities that come from concentration, so that you develop faith. From that comes aspiration and along with that joyous effort, and from these comes pliancy. Those four applications are remedies for laziness.

What to do while focusing on an object of meditation.

This section has two parts:

- 1. Identifying the object of meditation upon which your attention is set*
- 2. How to focus your mind on the object of meditation*

The text goes into an explanation of all the different types of objects that you might place your attention on, but if we just follow the order of the text it says:

Identifying the object of meditation upon which your attention is set.

This has two parts:

- 1. A general presentation of objects of meditation*
- 2. Identifying objects of meditation for this context*

A general presentation of objects of meditation

This has three sections:

- 1. The objects of meditation themselves*
- 2. Who should meditate on which objects?*
- 3. Synonyms of the object of meditation*

The headings carry their own implications, so that by reading through the headings themselves we can develop some understanding of what the author is talking about.

Let's think for a moment about the different types of objects that are talked about – you've got *universal objects of meditation*, *objects of meditation for purifying your behaviour*, *objects of meditation for expertise*, and *objects of meditation for purifying afflictions*. Within those there are subdivisions as well. So we think about the various subdivisions that are found within the larger divisions and reflect upon these, knowing what exactly is found in this category and what's found in that category.

On page 38, it reads:

There are those who suppose that if you focus on an object of meditation and keep your attention on it, this is an apprehension of signs.

There are some people who look at this presentation of *universal objects of meditation*, *objects of meditation for purifying your behaviour*, *objects of meditation for expertise*, and *objects of meditation for purifying afflictions* used in achieving calm abiding. They say that these types of objects of meditation create a point of reference for the meditation, or as it says here *an object of meditation that you keep your attention on*, and that having this object of meditation amounts to an apprehension of signs, and therefore it's not acceptable to have such a focus.

So they claim that meditation on emptiness means just stabilizing your mind without any basis, without focusing on any object of meditation. But this is a total misunderstanding of how to meditate on emptiness. Because if you have no consciousness at that time, then neither will you have a concentration that cultivates emptiness. If you have no consciousness you have no concentration.

On the other hand, if you have consciousness, then you are conscious of something, so you have to accept that there is an object of consciousness in terms of which consciousness is posited. The point

The definition for consciousness is that which is clear and knowing, or clear and aware. In either case, if there's knowing or you're aware, you must know or be aware of something. So:

If there is an object of consciousness, then precisely that is the object of meditation of that mind, because "object," "object of meditation," and "object of consciousness" have the same meaning. As explained in the Collected Topics literature.

In that case, they would have to accept that even their method of concentration would apprehend signs. Thus, their approach is not correct. Concentration has an object and so if by virtue of it having an object it necessarily were an apprehension of signs then this would not be acceptable, their position is not correct.

Let us not be confused or misapprehend this term 'apprehension of signs' – Geshela trusts that since it's translated into English it's clear. Here apprehension of signs refers to grasping at true existence, a type of wrong awareness, wrong consciousness.

Furthermore, whether something constitutes meditation on emptiness is determined by whether it is meditation founded upon the view that knows the way things are; it is not determined by whether there is any conceptualization vis-a-vis the object. This will be demonstrated at length below.⁶⁹

What makes a meditation, a meditation on emptiness? It must be founded upon the view that realises the way things are. What is a view that realises the way things are? A view that realises lack of inherent existence, a view that realises lack of true existence, a view that realises a lack of existing by way of its own character. The objects of such a view would be the lack of a true existence, etc. A meditation on emptiness must be founded upon this type of view.

An awareness that realises emptiness has a particular view, and this is the view that you must base a meditation on emptiness on. This is the distinction between a meditation upon emptiness and one that is not. So meditation on emptiness does not refer to simply not conceiving of anything at all or not paying attention to anything at all.

Even those who claim to stabilize their minds without an object of meditation must think first, "I will keep my attention such that it does not stray toward any object whatsoever," and then keep their attention in that way. After they have focused like that on the mind itself as an object of meditation, they must be certain to fix on this object without straying in any way. Thus, their own experience contradicts their claim that they have no object of meditation. In this way, the classic texts on achieving concentration explain that there are many objects of meditation. The purposes of these meditative bases for stabilizing your mind are as explained above, so you should gain expertise in them.

In the previous section we had a discussion about different objects of meditation, like those that help us to purify our behaviour. A person might have a particular disturbing emotion predominant within themselves, so to focus on an object of meditation that purifies behaviour might help them to deal with that. These are very helpful so Lama Tsong Khapa's saying "Please become knowledgeable about these things."

Kamalasila's Stages of Meditation explains that the object of meditation of calm abiding is indeterminate,⁷⁰ and Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment says, "[It is] whatever object or objects of meditation that are appropriate. These statements mean that you are not required to stick with one particular object of meditation; they do not show how to define the range of existing objects of meditation.

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Interpreter: the English translation for the last sentence in that paragraph is perhaps slightly misleading. So what it means is – the point of these texts is that there's not one single object of meditation that you must hold to and what's more, it's not teaching that those are all of the objects of meditation that could possibly exist, in other words it's not exhaustive.

(2')) *Who should meditate on which objects*

*As there are various kinds of people, from those with a preponderance of attachment to those with a preponderance of discursiveness, Asanga's Sravaka Levels cites an answer to a question of Revata:*⁷²

Revata, if attachment uniquely dominates the behavior of a monk-yogi, a practitioner of yoga, then he focuses his mind on the object of meditation of ugliness. [496] If hatred dominates his behavior, he meditates on loving kindness; if ignorance dominates his behavior, then he meditates on the dependent-arising of this condition; if pride dominates his behavior, he focuses his mind on the differentiation of the constituents.

And:

If discursiveness uniquely dominates his behavior, then he focuses his mind on an awareness of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath. In this way, he focuses his mind on an appropriate object of meditation.

We have another quote from Asanga's *Levels of Hearers*. Essentially Lama Tsong Khapa's just quoting these texts as sources for his material. So:

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels also states:*⁷⁴

In this regard, persons whose behavior is dominated by attachment, hatred, ignorance, pride, or discursiveness should, for a while at the outset, just purify those behaviors by contemplating objects of meditation for purifying behavior. After this they will see the stability of their minds, and they will ascertain only their objects of meditation. So they should definitely persevere at using their objects of meditation.

Thus, you certainly should work with these objects of meditation.

*If you are a person whose behavior is balanced, or one whose afflictions are slight, then it suffices to keep your attention on whichever of the aforementioned objects of meditation you like; it is not necessary to have a particular one. Asanga's Sravaka Levels states:*⁷⁵

Those whose behavior is balanced should work at whichever object they like so as to attain just mental stability; this is not for the purpose of purifying behavior. Understand that the same applies to those with slight afflictions.

If a person has a very strong affliction, a predominance of a particular one, then it's very important that that person focuses on an object of meditation that purifies their behaviour. If there is not such a strong affliction and the affliction is slight, or the behaviour is balanced, then this is not necessarily required.

We might wonder why a person has a predominance of a particular affliction or why a person has slight afflictions – Lama Tsong Khapa addresses those questions in the following advice:

Being dominated by attachment — or another of those five afflictions — means that in a previous life you were fully involved in that affliction, became accustomed to it, and expressed it frequently, so that now even if there is a minor object of attachment — or another of the five — that affliction arises in a strong and long-lasting form. [497]

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Balanced behavior means that you were not fully involved in attachment and the others in your previous lives, you did not become accustomed to them, and you did not express them frequently. Still, you have not recognized that they are faults and you have not suppressed them or repudiated them, so while attachment and such are not predominant or of great duration, it is not as though they do not occur.

It's like it mentions in Six Session Guru Yoga in the section on Bodhisattva Vows where they go through the binding afflictions – they talk about not regarding these as a shortcoming or as a fault. It's very important that we see shortcomings as shortcomings, that we view such things as faults.

Considering shortcomings to be shortcomings helps to lighten them a bit. For instance if we are able to view or consider these things as shortcomings then we still might fall prey to a disturbing emotion and act negatively but by viewing that behaviour as a fault, as a shortcoming, we have a lighter outcome than we would if we were to rejoice in it. So viewing a fault as a fault, a shortcoming as a shortcoming is quite important.

We're not being advised to get upset about these - this is the consistent and constant advice that Santideva gave. Getting upset about these behaviours and faults does not do any good, so view a fault as a fault, confess and purify it, but don't get upset by it.

Having slight afflictions means that you were not fully involved and so on in attachment — or another of those five — in your previous lives, and you do see their disadvantages, etc. Therefore, with respect to objects of attachment and such that are major, many, or intense, your attachment and such arise slowly, while for moderate or minor objects, these afflictions do not arise at all.

Also, when attachment or another of those five afflictions is predominant, you take a long time to realize stability; with balanced behavior, you do not take an excessively long time; with minor afflictions, you do so very quickly.

There's some good advice here, isn't there? Stuff that we should really hold on to.

We talk about past lives, you know - "In a past rebirth blah blah blah," but eventually we'll die and take rebirth again, in which case when we talk about past rebirth we'll be pointing our finger at this one. So from a future perspective this is a past rebirth. (Geshela: Therefore be careful!)

An answer to a question of Revata [as cited in the Sravaka Levels] also explains who works on objects of meditation for expertise:⁷⁶

Revata, if a monk-yogi, a practitioner of yoga, is confused about the characteristic nature of all composite things, or confused about the thing called person, self, living being, life, that which is reborn, or the nourisher, he should focus his mind on the objects of meditation for expertise in the aggregates.

Here focussing on who should utilise the objects of meditation for expertise.

If he is confused about causes, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in the constituents. If he is confused about conditions, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in the sources. If he is confused about impermanence, suffering, and selflessness, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in dependent-arising, and on what is and is not possible.

As this states, you mainly use these five objects of meditation to stop confusion.⁷⁷

What are the five objects of meditation here?

Geshela: That's right aggregates, constituents, sources, dependent arising and what is and what is not possible. If we know these well then we'll overcome confusion so these are very important.

Which persons should focus their minds on objects of meditation for dispelling afflictions is also stated in the same sutra [answering the questions of Revata]:⁷⁸

If you wish to be free from the attachment of the desire realm, focus your mind on the coarseness of the desire realm and the calmness of the form realm; [498] if you wish to be free from the attachment of the form realm, focus your mind on the coarseness of the form realm and the calmness of the formless realm. If you wish to become disenchanted with all of the perishing aggregates, and wish to be free from them, then focus your mind on the truth of suffering, the truth of origins, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path.

As it says, if you wish to be free of the perishing aggregates focus on the four truths.

You can use these objects of meditation both for analytical meditation with insight and for stabilizing meditation with calm abiding, so they are not exclusively objects of meditation for calm abiding. Still, since some serve as objects of meditation for newly achieving calm abiding and others are used for special purposes after attaining calm abiding, I have explained them here in the section on the objects of meditation of calm abiding.

Hence these objects of meditation are useful both for newly achieving calm abiding and for increasing that which you have already achieved.

(3')) Synonyms of the object of meditation

There are synonyms for the images or mental appearances of these objects of meditation explained above, these "points upon which the attention is kept," or "meditative bases for concentration," as stated in Asanga's Sravaka Levels:

Also, that image is called "image"; it also is called "sign of concentration," "object in the domain of concentration," "technique of concentration," "door to concentration," "basis of attention," "body of internal conceptualization," and "appearing image." Know these as synonyms of the image which accords with the object that is known.

You might remember last week we used this term “image” when discussing the different types of objects of meditation – these are synonyms for that term “image”.

The concentration we're talking about developing here is a mental consciousness. So to develop this type of concentration something must arise and appear to the primary mental consciousness. You must have some type of image in order for that concentration to be developed – that's what we're talking about.

So long as you're not able to get the image to appear to mind then you need to actually view the object with your eyes. So view the object with your eyes until you're able to cause this image to arise to the primary mental consciousness. When you're actually cultivating concentration you do not use your eyes, you're focused on it with your primary mental consciousness.

(b')) Identifying objects of meditation for this context

The context is one in which you're trying to achieve calm abiding.

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Now, from among the many objects of meditation I have explained, on which object of meditation should you base yourself so as to achieve calm abiding. [499] As stated in the sutra passage cited above, there is no single, definite object; individuals require their particular object of meditation. Specifically, if you are determined to achieve calm abiding at the very least, and if your behavior is dominated by attachment or another affliction, then you need to use a certain type of object of meditation. For if you do not, then you may attain a concentration that approximates calm abiding but you will not attain actual calm abiding. It is said that even if you train with an object of meditation for purifying behavior, you will not achieve calm abiding unless you do so for a very long time, so how could you ever achieve it by rejecting objects of meditation for purifying behavior?

The point is this – if a person is continually troubled by something like attachment, that person must make a special point of cultivating the object of meditation that helps them to purify that. If they do not do so they will have difficulty in cultivating concentration, calm abiding.

In particular, if you have a predominance of discursiveness, then you definitely have to meditate on the breath.

The majority of us have a predominance of discursiveness right, so this is one of the main things that troubles us. In particular when you sit down to relax and you've got no jobs to do, then discursive thought really begins to flood in. It says to meditate on the breath in this case.

If you are a person of balanced behavior or a person with slight afflictions, then, as explained before, "make your meditative base whichever of the objects of meditation explained above most appeals to you."

Alternatively, Kamalasila's middle and last Stages of Meditation follow the Sutra on the Concentration Which Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face (Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammukhavasthita-samadhi-sutra) and the King of Concentrations Sutra in stating that you achieve concentration by focusing on the body of the Tathagata. Here we have the specific object - the body of a Tathagata.

Also, the master Bodhibhadra explains a multitude [of objects]:⁸¹

Here, calm abiding is twofold: that attained by looking inward and that [based on] an object of meditation viewed outwardly. Of those, looking inward is twofold: focusing on the body and focusing on what is based on the body. Of those, focusing on the body is threefold: focusing on the body itself in the aspect of a deity; focusing on ugliness, such as skeletons; and focusing on special insignia, such as a khatvanga.

Focusing on what is based on the body is fivefold: focusing on the breath, focusing on subtle divine insignia, focusing on the drops, focusing on the aspects of light rays, and focusing on delight and bliss. [500]

Calm abiding based on an object of meditation viewed outwardly is twofold: special and common. Of those, the special is twofold: focusing on a deity's body and focusing on a deity's speech.

Atisha's commentary on his own Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (Bodhi-marga-pradipa-panjika) also cites this passage.

When it distinguishes between looking inward and looking outward, it's probably referring to on the one hand phenomena included within the continuum and on the other hand phenomena that are not included within the continuum. Here looking inward and outward probably doesn't refer to whether you close your eyes and look at the mind or keep your eyes open and look at things outside. Rather, either you focus on phenomena included within the continuum and hence are looking inward or you focus on

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phenomena that are not included within the continuum, something possessing form for instance, and therefore are looking outward.

If you were to focus on a statue or an image of a buddha's body, this would be a case of looking outward. Geshela said there's a difference between buddha's body and a statue of a buddha because buddha's body could be a phenomenon included within a continuum whereas a statue would not be.

In this regard, to keep your attention on the physical form of the Buddha is to recall the Buddha, so it gives rise to limitless merit. When your image of that body is clear and firm, then there is a special intensification of your meditative focus on the field in relation to which you amass merit through prostration, offering, aspirational prayer, etc., as well as on the field in relation to which you purify obscurations through confession, restraint, etc. This kind of meditation serves many purposes. As stated earlier in the extract from the King of Concentrations Sutra it has advantages such as your not losing your mindfulness of the Buddha as you die. And when you cultivate the mantra path, it heightens deity yoga, etc.

The Sutra on the Concentration Which Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face gives a very clear and detailed treatment of these benefits, as well as the method for directing your mind toward the Buddha. Therefore, you should definitely come to know them from there, as Kamalasila states in his last Stages of Meditation. Fearing verbosity, I do not write of them here. So even Kamalasila's text mentions these extensive benefits.

Consequently, it is skill in means when you seek an object of meditation by which you achieve concentration and also fulfill, along the way, some other special purpose.

In short, what's being said is that the best object to focus on to achieve calm abiding is a statue of a buddha.

If you have a special or particular problem with an affliction then you must clarify or dispel that first. So let's not forget the order - if you have a problem with a particular affliction then address that before moving on.

*How do you use something like the bodily form of the Tathagata as an object of meditation? Kamalasila's last Stages of Meditation states:*⁸⁴

In that regard, practitioners should first fix their attention on whatever they may have seen and whatever they may have heard about the bodily form of the Tathagata, and then achieve calm abiding. The bodily form of the Tathagata is a golden color like that of refined gold, adorned by the signs and exemplary features, dwells with its retinue, and effects the aims of living beings through various means. By continuously directing their minds toward it, yogis develop a wish for its good qualities and quell laxity, excitement, and so forth. [501] They should continue meditative stabilization for as long as they can see it clearly, as though the Buddha was sitting in front of them.

The next quote is from *The King of Concentrations Sutra*, which is what Kamalasila was remarking on and explaining in detail in his text. So *The King of Concentrations Sutra* also says that you should use this kind of object of meditation:⁸⁵

*The glorious protector of the world
With a body the colour of gold —
The bodhisattva whose mind engages this object
Is said to be in equipoise.*

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Of the two ways to do this, newly imagining the Buddha's form and visualizing the Buddha's form as though it were naturally present, the latter has a distinct advantage in developing faith and fits within the context of practices common to both sutra and tantra vehicles. Therefore, use a visualized image of the Buddha's form as though it was already naturally present.

When cultivating calm abiding by focusing on the physical form of a buddha there's two approaches a person might take. On the one hand they might visualise the buddha's form as if it were being newly created by the mind and direct the mind towards that. On the other hand that person might focus on the buddha's form thinking that this is naturally present in front of you. The second approach has greater benefits and helps to also have more stable mindfulness and so forth.

We oftentimes talk about the omnipresence of a buddha, how there's no place where buddhas do not exist.

When you seek your object of meditation, the basis upon which you first keep your attention, look for an excellent painting or sculpture of the Teacher's body and view it again and again. Remembering its features, firmly familiarize yourself with the mental appearance of the object.

That is assuming that you're using a statue of buddha as a support for your focus.

Or, seek your object of meditation by reflecting upon the meaning of the eloquent descriptions of the Buddha's form, which you have heard from your guru and make this image appear in your mind.

There are certain descriptions of Buddha Shakyamuni that are given in scripture. You read through these explanations so that you can then create a mental image and then focus on that mental image. When a mental image of buddha appears to your mind it should accord with the descriptions. In fact with any deity you'll find a description of their physical form within the texts - it has this particular form and this particular shape, etc, so focus on that type of thing. As it says here *make this image appear in your mind*.

Furthermore, do not let the object of meditation have the aspect of a painting or sculpture; rather, learn to have it appear in your mind with the aspect of an actual buddha.

You might be using a statue as a support for your focus. If that's the case the mental image of the buddha that you focus on should not be like a statue in the sense that it cannot move or it cannot open its mouth, that it's just this frozen image. Rather the mental image should be that of an actual buddha, one in the process of teaching the dharma to its disciples for instance. So you should be focused on an image that resembles an actual buddha, not just an inanimate statue.

In fact we can achieve such a thing. When you achieve the great level of the mahayana path of accumulation, you develop what's known as the concentration of encountering the dharma – it's at that point you can actually directly receive teachings from buddhas and so forth. So this idea of encountering an actual buddha is actually something that can be developed along the way. At that point you can even ask questions of and discuss issues with the statue [image] of the buddha.

Some set an image before them and immediately meditate on it while staring at it. The master Ye-shay-day's (Ye-shes-sde) rejection of this practice is excellent. Lama Tsong Khapa rejoices in the fact that Ye-shay-day rejected this idea of staring meditation.

This means that putting a statue in front of yourself and meditating while looking at it doesn't work – this is just staring at it. Rather first you must look at it and then you must be able to get that to appear to your mind.

As it says quite clearly here:

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Ye-shay-day says that concentration is not achieved in the sensory consciousnesses, but in the mental consciousness; thus, the actual object of meditation of a concentration is the actual object of a mental consciousness. Therefore, you must keep your attention on this.

He also states what I explained above,⁸⁶ that you have to focus your mind on the appearance of the actual concept, or mental image, of the object of meditation. (Concept being generic image.) Furthermore, there are both subtle and gross features of the Buddha's bodily form. It is stated elsewhere that at first you focus on the gross features, and later, when these are solid, you must focus on the subtle. [502] As experience also shows that it is very easy to raise an appearance of the gross features, you must develop your object of meditation in stages starting with the gross features. An especially important point is that, until you have accomplished satisfactory concentration as explained below, it is never appropriate for you to cultivate meditative concentration by shifting your focus to many different types of objects of meditation. For, if you cultivate concentration by moving to many dissimilar objects of meditation, it will be a great impediment to achieving calm abiding.

This is advice that Geshela is often giving us about any type of meditation - whatever object that you set out to focus on in your meditation, stick with that even if another object appears very clearly to your mind. Don't shift to that one but rather stick to the one that you set out to focus on. This is very important.

Thus, authoritative texts on achieving concentration, such as Asanga's texts on the levels and Kamalasila's three Stages of Meditation, explain that when first achieving concentration, you do so in relation to a single object of meditation; they do not say that you shift among many objects of meditation.

Aryasura also clearly states this [in his Compendium of the Perfections (Paramita-samasa)]:

*Solidify your mind's reflection
By being firm on one object of meditation;
Letting it flow to many objects
Leads to a mind disturbed by afflictions.*

He says this in the section on achieving meditative stabilization. Also, Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment states:⁸⁸

*Settle your mind in virtue
On any single object of meditation.*

He makes his point with the phrase "on any single."

Thus, having first focused on one object of meditation and attained calm abiding, you may then focus on many objects of meditation. Kamalasila's first Stages of Meditation states:⁸⁹

Only when you have earned concentrated attention should you focus in detail on the particulars of objects, such as the aggregates and constituents. It is in light of the particulars of yogis' meditation on objects such as the eighteen emptinesses that the Buddha states in sutras such as the Sutra Unravelling the Intended Meaning that there are many aspects of objects of meditation."

Now please read along carefully, pay attention, this is one important point – this deals with the measure of having found the focal support that you initially hold your mind to.

Accordingly, the measure for having first found the object of meditation upon which you keep your attention is as follows: Visualize several times in sequence the head, two arms, the rest of the trunk of

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the body, and the two legs. [503] After that, if when you bring your attention to the body as a whole you can raise before your mind just half of the gross components, then — even without radiant clarity — you should be satisfied with just this and fix your attention upon it.

Initially focus on the body in general. Of course you must recollect the head and the arms and so forth, but when you initially place your attention on the body in a general way then the head and the arms and the form is not going to stand out in its entirety as they actually are. But still you must be satisfied or content with that. First you're just focusing on it in a general way.

Lama Tsong Khapa is saying that once you get the physical form in general to appear like this then try to get your mind to stay on that. If you were not to try to develop some stability at that point but rather were to begin to think "oh, what are the arms like, what is the face like?" this would be an impediment. So at this point even though the arms etc. are not perfect, still try to get your mind to remain on that for some time.

Why? If, dissatisfied with just that, you fail to fix your attention on it and want more clarity instead, then, as you visualize it again and again, the object of meditation will become a bit clearer but you will not obtain a stable concentration; in fact, you will prevent yourself from getting this.

Lama Tsong Khapa's encouraging us to try and develop this aspect of stability.

Even though the object of meditation is not very clear, if you keep your attention on precisely this partial object of meditation, you will quickly obtain concentration. Since this then intensifies clarity, you will readily achieve clarity.

There's an aspect of stability and an aspect of clarity. Initially the aspect of stability is important, then once you've gotten this aspect of stability, in dependence upon that, you can accomplish the aspect of clarity

This comes from the instructions of Ye-shay-day; it is of great importance. As for the manner in which the object of meditation appears, you can describe two sets of four possibilities: for various types of persons, it is easy or difficult to have an image appear, and its appearance may be clear or unclear; moreover, both clear and unclear images may be either stable or unstable. However, as there is considerable variation, you cannot definitely determine what will occur.

The point of this paragraph is that things will occur differently for different people.

When you are practicing deity yoga in the mantra vehicle, you definitely have to establish a clear image of the deity. So until this arises, you must use many methods for developing it. However, in this non-tantric context, if you have great difficulty in making an image of a deity appear, you may adopt any one of the objects of meditation presented above and keep your attention on it because the main purpose is simply to achieve a concentration of calm abiding.

Also, in this non-tantric context, if you practice by focusing on the body of a deity and you keep your attention there even though the image is not appearing, then you will not achieve your desired aim. Thus, you have to keep your attention on an image that does appear. Keep your attention on the entirety of the body to the extent that it appears. If some parts of the body appear especially clearly, keep your attention on them. When they become unclear, return your attention to the entirety of the body. [504] At that time, there may be uncertainty as to colour, as when you want to meditate on gold, but red appears; or uncertainty as to shape, as when you want to meditate on a sitting shape, but a standing shape appears; or uncertainty as to number, as when you want to meditate on one thing, but two things appear; or uncertainty as to size, as when you want to meditate on a large body, but a tiny body appears. As it is utterly inappropriate to pursue such distortions, you must use only the original object of meditation, whatever it may be, as your object of meditation.

If you are focused upon the form of a deity and specific parts of that deity are appearing clearly then you can hold your mind to those and try to develop stability on that. If they are not appearing clearly then you can draw back and focus on the body in its entirety and try to develop stability on that.

(2)) How to focus your mind on the object of meditation

This has three parts: (1) presenting the flawless method, (2) eliminating flawed methods, and (3) indicating the length of sessions.

(a')) The flawless method

The concentration that you will accomplish here has two special features: vivid intensity — an intense mental clarity — and non-discursive stability, staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation.

Two features – vivid intensity that is this sharpness of clarity and non-discursive stability.

Some add bliss to these, making three features; others add limpidity as well, making four. However, limpidity is included in the first feature, so it does not have to be listed as a separate item. Delight and bliss which impart a sense of well-being do occur as results of the concentration that you will accomplish here, but they are not concomitant with all of the concentrations which are included in the access to the first meditative stabilization. (That is to say they don't accompany all of those.) Also, the concentration of the fourth meditative stabilization — which is said to be the best basis for achieving the good qualities of all three vehicles — is not associated with any physical or mental bliss.

Lama Tsong Khapa only talks about the aspects of sharp clarity and stability here. In this context these are the only two he's discussing. You could also talk about this quality of being limpid but that can be included in the first quality of clarity, so it does not have to be listed as a separate item. Others add bliss to this list but not all concentrations are accompanied by bliss. For instance, take the fourth meditative stabilisation, in developing that you must separate from your attachment to bliss or pleasure, so that you do not pay attention to bliss or take that to mind. *Thus, delight and bliss are not counted as features here. [505]*

While some of the concentrations on the formless levels lack highly vivid intensity, there is nothing wrong with presenting vividness (this is the clarity) as one of these two features. For, Maitreya's Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras refers to "meditative stabilization other than the formless realm." This means that bodhisattvas — except for those who have achieved this control, powerful bodhisattvas — achieve good qualities by relying on concentrations within the levels of meditative stabilization. So the Precious Lord refers back to the Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras in defence of his inclusion of clarity.

We're trying to achieve these paths - path of accumulation, path of preparation, path of seeing, etc. What is the best mind for cultivating these paths? You've got desire realm minds, form realm minds and formless realm minds. They say that the mind of meditative stabilisation is the best. Why might that be? Well, they say that the minds of the formless realm are too subtle, whereas desire realm minds are too coarse. The minds of the meditative stabilisation are best or ideal. This is why Lama Tsong Khapa is saying that it's permissible and defensible to include the quality of clarity – because even if formless realm minds don't have this aspect of clarity, it's still acceptable in this context because those are too subtle for our purposes anyway.

Bodhisattvas don't really concern themselves with trying to utilise these actual concentrations of the formless realm – this is not really their main concern.

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Since the development of this sort of vivid intensity is blocked as long as there is laxity, while one-pointed non-discursiveness is blocked as long as there is excitement, laxity and excitement are the chief obstacles to achieving genuine concentration. So if you do not understand how to identify accurately the subtle and coarse forms of laxity and excitement, or if you do not know how to correctly sustain a concentration which stops these once you have identified them, then it will be impossible for you to develop calm abiding, not to mention insight. Hence, those who diligently seek concentration should master these techniques.

We'll leave it there for today.

The best object for us to focus on in cultivating calm abiding would be the physical form of a buddha, given that in doing so we accumulate merit and achieve all sorts of other different purposes along the way, as Lama Tsong Khapa described. But if you have a particular problem, for instance with discursiveness, then you must work on purifying that first.

Buddhist Studies Programme

Subject : Lam Rim Chen Mo Module 3

Teacher : Geshe Tashi Tsering

Interpreter: Ven Lozang Zopa

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We left off on page 48 towards the top. It says

So if you do not understand how to identify accurately the subtle and coarse forms of laxity and excitement, or if you do not know how to correctly sustain a concentration which stops these once you have identified them, then it will be impossible for you to develop calm abiding, not to mention insight. Hence, those who diligently seek concentration should master these techniques.

Later on in the text Lama Tsong Khapa will explain the way to actually achieve calm abiding in much greater detail. Today our new material starts:

Laxity and excitement are conditions unfavorable for achieving calm abiding. Later, I will discuss how to identify these unfavorable conditions and how to actually stop them. Now I shall explain how to develop concentration in a manner conducive to achieving calm abiding.

The precious lord says:

Here, concentration refers to your attention remaining one-pointedly on an object of meditation; in addition it must stay with the object continuously. Two things are needed for this: (1) a technique in which your attention is not distracted from whatever it had as its original object of meditation, and (2) an accurate awareness of whether you are distracted and whether you are becoming distracted. The former is mindfulness; the latter is vigilance.

Whether our concentration is good or not depends on mindfulness and vigilance as it says here.

Vasubandhu's Commentary on the "Ornament/or the Mahayana Sutras" (Mahayana-sutralamkara-bhasya) states:⁹³

Mindfulness and vigilance bring about close mental focus because the former prevents your attention from wandering from the object of meditation and the latter clearly recognizes that your attention is wandering.

If a lapse in mindfulness leads to forgetting the object of meditation, you will be distracted and will immediately lose the object upon which you are meditating. Therefore, the foundation of cultivating concentration is mindfulness which does not forget the object.

Of the five faults, the second is forgetting the instructions. The remedy for that is mindfulness.

How does such mindfulness focus your mind right on the object of meditation? [506] Once you have at least visualized the object of meditation in the minimal manner as explained above, generate a powerful apprehension of the object that tightly holds it with your attention. After you have set your attention at a high level, stabilize it on the object without newly analyzing anything.

The material we are dealing with here is presented quite clearly, so we are just going to read through it.

With regard to mindfulness, Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge says:⁹⁴

What is mindfulness? In regard to a familiar object, your mind is not forgetful and operates without distraction.

This is the nature of mindfulness.

The precious lord says that mindfulness has three features.

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This indicates that mindfulness has three features. In short these three features are that its focus is on a familiar object, its not forgetful, and it stops you from wandering or distraction. So we'll cover these in more detail in the following paragraph. It reads:

(1) Its observed object is "a familiar object/" since mindfulness does not occur with regard to a previously unfamiliar object. In this case, the image of a previously ascertained object of meditation appears. (2) Its subjective aspect or manner of apprehension is your mind's not forgetting the object, as indicated by the phrase "your mind is not forgetful." In this case, it is your mind's non-forgetfulness of the object of meditation.

What does non-forgetfulness mean? It is not mentioned in reference to merely being able to remember what your guru taught you about the object of meditation, thinking or saying "The object of meditation is like this" when you cast your mind to it or when someone asks you about it. Rather, it refers to how your attention is fixed on the object of meditation and brings it to mind clearly without even the slightest distraction. If you are distracted, you lose your mindfulness to the extent that you are distracted.

In the earlier quote from Asanga it mentions that mindfulness operates without distraction. Now here in the explanation it mentions how non-forgetfulness refers to how your attention is fixed on the object of meditation and brings it to mind clearly without even the slightest distraction. If you are distracted, you lose your mindfulness to the extent that you are distracted.

Therefore, after you have set your attention on the object of meditation in the manner explained above, you think, "In this way, I have fixed my attention on the object of meditation." Then, without new examination, you sustain the force of that awareness in unbroken continuity. This is the most critical point in the technique of maintaining mindfulness.

This is very good and clear Without examining anything new or conceiving of anything else, you sustain the force of that awareness in an unbroken continuity. Now we go to the third feature.

(3) Its function is to keep your attention from wandering from the object of meditation.
These are the three features of mindfulness. These are things that we really need to retain. The discussion here takes place in the context of achieving calm abiding. But these three features of mindfulness are important in any type of meditation we might engage in.

We need to know the object that we're focusing on, and then consider the other aspects. For instance if you were to begin to think about different things, then you run the risk of losing your object – straying. So without doing that you stay with the object. These different features are very important in developing one-pointed concentration.

Next we have an analogy to illustrate this.

Fixing your attention on an object of meditation in this way and controlling it is said to be like taming an elephant. An elephant trainer ties a wild elephant to a tree or sturdy post with many thick ropes. [507] If it does as the trainer teaches it, then fine; if not, it is subdued and controlled, struck repeatedly with a sharp iron hook. Your mind is like the untamed elephant; you bind it with the rope of mindfulness to the sturdy pillar of an object of meditation such as I explained above. If you cannot keep it there, you must gradually bring it under control by goading it with the iron hook of vigilance.

*Bhavaviveka's Heart of the Middle Way states:*⁹⁵

*The erring elephant of your mind
Is securely bound by the rope of mindfulness
To the sturdy pillar of the object of meditation
And is gradually controlled with the iron hook of intelligence.*

*Also, Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation states:*⁹⁶

With the ropes of mindfulness and vigilance, tie the elephant of your mind to the tree trunk, the object of meditation.

It is not contradictory that the former text likens vigilance to an iron hook while the latter text compares it to a rope. Mindfulness directly and continually fastens your attention to the object of meditation. However, indirectly vigilance also focuses your attention on the object of meditation, for you depend on noticing actual or incipient laxity and excitement with vigilance, and then stabilize your attention on the primary object without falling under their influence. Also, as cited above, the master Vasubandhu⁹⁷ says that both mindfulness and vigilance focus your mind on the object of meditation.

The things that actually bring our mind under control are actually mindfulness and vigilance. These can be compared to an iron hook or both compared to ropes. It's getting towards the same point that mindfulness and vigilance are the most important in bringing our mind under control. It's says that mindfulness will directly and continually fasten your attention to the object whereas indirectly vigilance focuses your attention on the object of meditation also for you depend on noticing actual or incipient laxity and excitement with vigilance. It's clearly stating that vigilance is necessary as well. Also as stated above, Master Vasubandhu says that both mindfulness and vigilance focus your mind on the object of meditation.

It is said that you achieve concentration on the basis of mindfulness and that mindfulness is like a rope that actually fastens your attention to the object of meditation continuously, so mindfulness is the main technique to sustain in achieving concentration.

Also, mindfulness has a way of apprehending its object that carries a sense of certitude. If, while maintaining concentration, you stabilize your mind casually without a solid sense of certainty about the object, then your mind may take on a limpid clarity, but it will not have the vivid intensity of certain knowledge, so you will not develop powerful mindfulness. [508] Therefore, subtle laxity will be unchecked, and only flawed concentration will ensue.

Mindfulness is one of the five object ascertaining mental factors. The point is that then mindfulness is an awareness that ascertains its objects, that is realises it. In fact it says here that mindfulness has a way of apprehending its object that carries a sense of certitude. Certitude or certainty of ascertainment. This section continues and says:

If, while maintaining concentration, you stabilize your mind casually without a solid sense of certainty about the object, then your mind may take on a limpid clarity, but it will not have the vivid intensity of certain knowledge ...

Lama Tsong Khapa says it will not have vivid intensity of certain knowledge so notice that there's two aspects of clarity, this limpid clarity and the sharpness of clarity associated with knowledge. It's not enough just to have the limpid clarity; in addition to that we need the vivid intensity or the sharpness of clarity that comes from these certainty or ascertainment. We might have this limpid clarity but if we lack the vivid intensity or sharpness then we will not develop powerful mindfulness, subtle laxity will be unchecked so only flawed concentration will ensue. So since only flawed concentration will ensue we will not have flawless concentration. This is quite nice. We ought to be mindful of this so that when we meditate we're alert. This is what Lama Tsong Khapa's advice is to us: Be alert! Generally it's difficult for us to develop even this limpid clarity but most of the time our concern is with relaxing a bit, isn't this the case. Most of the time our approach is to try and relax a bit which is a big impediment to our cultivating concentration. Relaxing without needing to work hard. Actually the mind needs to be very alert so we need to do a bit of hard work even if the body might not be doing hard work but the mind needs to.

Those who cultivate just non-discursive attention without stabilizing their attention on other objects of meditation, such as a divine body, bring to mind the personal instruction, "Stabilize your mind without thinking of any object at all." Then they must keep their attention from being distracted and wandering. This non-distraction is synonymous with mindfulness that does not forget the object of meditation. Thus, since this meditation is simply the technique of maintaining mindfulness, those who meditate in this way must also rely on a mindfulness that carries the force of certain knowledge.

Earlier the precious Lord was talking about how you might have an external or an internal focus. Do you remember this? We made this distinction? So it might be that you do not base your focus in meditation upon something external, for instance a divine body but rather you base your concentration on an internal focus like that of the mind, in which case you would direct your attention towards the clear and knowing aspect of the mind which is the mind's relative nature. You might also reflect on how the mind lacks inherent existence in which case that would involve analysis of how the mind's final nature. In either case you're directing your mind internally, towards the clear and knowing aspect of mind. As you do so you do not think of any object at all as it says but simply stabilise your mind without conceiving of anything else for instance. Yet in this case where your focus is on the clear and knowing aspect of mind you still must keep your attention from being distracted, your attention cannot wander from the clear and knowing aspect of mind but rather must stick with this. So there is non-distraction then involved with placing your attention upon the clear and knowing aspect of mind. This non-distraction is synonymous with mindfulness that does not forget the object of meditation.

Referring to last part of quote from text again:

Thus, since this meditation is simply the technique of maintaining mindfulness, those who meditate in this way must also rely on a mindfulness that carries the force of certain knowledge

So this last quote here points to a certain doubt or issue that has arisen.

We could actually look at two different points here. On the one hand you've got the approach where the meditator does not conceive of anything whatsoever, they do not take any object to mind whatsoever and simply meditate in this vacuous state. This approach is symbolised by Ha-shang. And there is another, second point that we must consider and that relates to this tradition in which the introduction to mind is given so in a tradition in which an introduction to mind is given then the teacher instructs the student to not conceive of anything but simply direct their mind towards the mind itself, for instance the clear and knowing aspect of mind. So by simply directing one's attention to the nature of mind the student doesn't conceive of anything else, doesn't take any other objects to mind. The second type relates to these personal instructions that are passed on through the process of introducing the student to the nature of his/her mind. Yet this also requires mindfulness. There must be mindfulness present. In this second approach the practitioner is mindful of the personal instructions and does not allow the attention to stray or wander, is not distracted. So this non-distraction refers to not forgetting the focus, which requires of course mindfulness. So it's not as if there is another type of meditation that does not rely upon sustaining mindfulness even in these different meditation approaches. So you require mindfulness because clearly there must be mindfulness if you're not to be distracted from your focus. And non-distraction and non-wandering are essential parts to that type of meditation.

We can say a lot. But after all is said and done it comes back to the point that when you cultivate concentration you need to sustain mindfulness. It is not as if you have some alternative way to cultivate concentration, that can do without mindfulness.

In this second approach where non-distraction is taught there is mindfulness since non-distraction is the function of mindfulness. That's the reasoning that Lama Tsong Khapa is basing his position upon.

Next it says:

(b')) Eliminating flawed methods

There are misconceptions to dispel, such as the following.

Wrong position: If you set your consciousness at a high level as you have explained above and then tightly stabilize it without discursiveness, there will indeed not be even the slightest fault of laxity. However, since this increases excitement, you will see that you cannot prolong stability, and your elevated consciousness is brought down. As you will see that relaxing a well-tightened mind quickly leads to stability, this technique is a great personal instruction.

Reply. With a sense of assurance, these words proclaim in a loud voice, "Good relaxation is good meditation." Yet, they fail to differentiate laxity and meditation.

The people that put forward this wrong position: what is it that they're scared of? Excitement, right? Excitement is the thing that they're scared of isn't it. So they think that in order to avoid excitement then you have to slacken or relax this well-tightened mind a bit. And they think, 'oh yeah you might stray into laxity but that way you avoid the excitement.' So it's excitement that they're trying to avoid right.

Now excitement occurs through the influence of all sorts of different discursive thoughts or ideas. So for instance you might recollect a past experience of pleasure and your mind is drawn towards that. As you do so though you completely lose the object of meditation. So in order to try and avoid the consequences of excitement then they are encouraging us to relax the well-tightened mind. So then they're saying in effect not so tight or not so alert but maybe a little bit slack or a little bit relaxed is the approach you should adopt.

Excitement is a derivative or classed as attachment.

Yet, they fail to differentiate laxity and meditation. Thus, as I explained above,⁹⁸ flawless concentration must have two features; the firm stability of non-discursive attention does not alone suffice.

Wrong position: At that time, laxity is when your mind darkens and becomes clouded; without this, your mind has a limpid clarity, so your concentration is flawless.

Reply: As this statement does not differentiate lethargy and laxity, I will elaborate on them later." It's quite clear. As Lama Tsong Khapa says we'll elaborate on them later.

Thus, if you use an intense cognition that is too tight, you may have clarity, but excitement will predominate so that it will be hard to develop stability. [509] If you sustain your meditation after becoming greatly relaxed, then you may have stability, but laxity will predominate so that there is no vivid intensity. It is very hard to find the right balance of tension so as to be neither too taut nor too relaxed, and for this reason it is hard to develop a concentration free from laxity and excitement. With this in mind, the master Candragomin stated in his Praise of Confession (Desana-stava):¹⁰⁰

*If I use exertion, excitement arises;
If I abandon it, slackness ensues;
It is hard to find the right balance in this—
What should I do with my troubled mind?*

The meaning of this is as follows: "Use exertion" means your mind is too tight; when you do this, excitement arises. When you let the tightness go and relax too much, you produce slackness, with your attention remaining inward. So it is difficult to find the proper balance for an even state of mind, free from laxity and excitement. Again, Buddhasanti's Commentary on the "Praise of Confession" (Desana-stava-vrtti) says:¹⁰¹

"Exertion" here refers to tightly focusing your mind on virtue with clear enthusiasm.

And:¹⁰²

After you see the problem of incipient excitement, you abandon your exertion; that is, you give up your effort. Thereupon, your attention becomes slack.

*Candragomin's Praise of Confession also states:*¹⁰³

*If I strain to engage the object, excitement occurs;
If I relax, slackness develops.
It is hard to find a practice midway between these two—
What should I do with my troubled mind?*

*Buddhasanti's commentary on this is clear:*¹⁰⁴

If you strain for a tight focus on the object and exert yourself, your mind becomes excited and distracted, and you thereby destroy your concentration. Therefore, you are not attaining mental stability through exertion. This is problematic, so in order to avoid it you relax your mind, which has been straining to engage the object, and give up your exertion. [510] Then faults such as forgetting the object of meditation lead to slackness and laxity.

These different quotes are essentially repeating the same thing. They all carry the same meaning. Lama Tsong Khapa is citing sources for this notion that it is difficult to cultivate concentration that is free of laxity and excitement. Why does Lama Tsong Khapa feel the need to incorporate so many scriptural citations in making this point? Well, it has to do with this position that was stated earlier which is that relaxing a well-tightened mind quickly leads to stability, so this technique is a great personal instruction. What these other people are saying is that you shouldn't have tightness - it is best to be slack or loose. If that's the case, if what they say is true, then why did the master Candragomin and others express such anxiety about relaxing which leads to slackness and so forth. Clearly by quoting Candragomin and these other masters, it illustrates that their whole notion that this looseness is ideal, is not correct. If it were, there would be no need for these masters to be afraid of it.

As it says on page 51:

As you will see that relaxing a well-tightened mind quickly leads to stability, this technique is a great personal instruction. With a sense of assurance, these words proclaim in a loud voice, "Good relaxation is good meditation." Yet, they fail to differentiate laxity and meditation. They're saying that the best form of meditation is a loose form. But why then do the master Candragomin and these other masters here express this fear of what happens when the mind is loose or relaxed. It says here (that) slackness develops. If it were best to be slack, what point were these other masters making? They wouldn't need to feel the fear that they do about it.

Why bother with the hard work if slack is best?

Therefore, Candragomin says "it is hard to find" a concentration that is the right balance or midway practice free from the two extremes of laxity and excitement. If getting quite relaxed were adequate, there would not be any problem at all. Since the text says that this leads to laxity, it is obviously improper to use this method to achieve concentration.

So Lama Tsong Khapa continues, saying:

It is not enough to have the clarity which is simply the limpid quality of a very relaxed mind; there also must be a degree of tightness in the way you apprehend the object. In his discussion of the method used in the first two of the nine mental states,¹⁰⁵ the noble Asanga says:¹⁰⁶

For stabilizing and properly stabilizing your mind on this object, there is the attention of tight focus.

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This is a discussion carried out to clarify these points. To eliminate doubts. To ensure that we develop the best forms of concentration. This is the discussion aimed at bringing those three things about – nothing more.

You read through this text and you might get the impression ‘oh well if people who took another approach and explained things in a different way were here, they sure would have lots of objections to make. They would really pick a fight over this.’ But there’s no need to pick a fight over this. In fact this is the type of topic or discussion that the masters of the manuals of Sera, Ganden, Drepung would have. You get together and you have a discussion in this kind of way. Discussing the points and the validity of a position and so forth. It’s a discussion, right? In order to have a debate you have to have one person say it’s like this, and other person saying it’s like that. Or someone saying it is like this and someone saying it’s not like that. If everyone’s just saying yeah yeah yeah, it’s like this, it’s like this, it’s like this, then you can’t have a debate can you? So when you’re debating, someone has to say yes and someone has to say no, right.

It's like the story of the blind monk Chodzin. Anyway he wasn't completely blind but he had a fault with his eyes. Anyway he wasn't studying – he went and learned how to drive tractors as a service to the monastery. Anyway he would say to the rest of the monks as they went off to debate and so forth, or after it was finished – he'd be sitting around and he'd see them walking by – and he'd say ‘someone’s still gotta say that it is like this, someone’s still gotta say that it isn’t like this. You guys better not come to some definitive conclusion otherwise the people that come after you won’t have anything to debate about. So just leave it like that – someone saying it is, someone saying it isn’t.’

Of course he was being very pointed and sharp, maybe even attacking them. He wasn’t actually doing it in a very nice way.

The point at stake here is whether or not it’s good for the mind to be slack in meditation. And there are some that say that being slack is best. But Lama Tsong Khapa quotes these other masters like Candragomin saying that if slackness were adequate then these other masters would have no need to be troubled by slackness. But clearly they are. They talk about how it’s too relaxed or too slack and therefore try and overcome that.

We need both limpid clarity and also tightness in the way that you apprehend the object, just as the noble being Asanga says.

Also, Kamalasila's first Stages of Meditation says:¹⁰⁷

After you clear away laxity, firmly hold just the object of meditation.

And Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation states:¹⁰⁸

Then, after you have quelled laxity, by all means make it so that your mind very clearly sees just the object of meditation.

In his texts on meditation, Kamalasila speaks about the need to dispel laxity. The people who are putting forth the earlier positions aren’t so concerned with laxity. They’re just thinking entirely of how to avoid excitement. Without considering laxity they focus on excitement. But here these great masters like Kamalasila are saying actually we really need to dispel laxity.

This is quite nice actually. Because, as they say, we do need to try and avoid excitement. So we take their statements and recognise we must stop excitement. Then you look at what Lama Tsong Khapa says and the scriptural citations he gives and recognise the need also to dispel laxity. So we take the two together and realise that we need to dispel both laxity and excitement.

When Kamalasila says "your mind very clearly sees," he does not mean only that the object is clear; he means that your mind's way of apprehending the object is clear and firm.

What's the difference? The mind's way of apprehending the object must be clear. It's not enough for the object simply to be clear. There's a difference isn't there. When you say that the mind's way of apprehending the object is clear and firm this is a reference to being alert. Alertness.

The above-mentioned way of maintaining mindfulness is extremely important. Without knowing it your meditation will show a great number of faults, such as slipping into great forgetfulness commensurate with the amount of your meditation or dulling the wisdom that differentiates phenomena. Nevertheless you mistakenly presume that you have a solid concentration.

This seemed to happen quite a bit in Tibet in former times. Some people would think that they were meditating properly when in actual fact they were unable to meditate in a flawless way. So they would go off to a cave and spend a long time cultivating what they believed was a proper meditation, but since their concentration was not flawless their mindfulness declines and they become quite forgetful. Their wisdom becomes quite dulled. So that for instance if you were to ask them a question or engage them in discussion then they were unable to respond quickly. In other words all sorts of different faults came from accustoming themselves to a flawed meditation.

Lama Tsong Khapa says quite clearly that without knowing that their meditation has a great number of faults, they slip into great forgetfulness and they dull the wisdom that differentiates phenomena. Yet they still mistakenly presume that they have a stable concentration.

Next we have a question.

Question: While mindfulness fixes your attention on the object of meditation as explained above, is it appropriate to monitor your meditation and think about whether you are holding the object of meditation well?

Reply: You have to do this, for Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation states:¹⁰⁹ [511]

After you have thus set your attention on whatever your chosen object of meditation may be, fix it there continuously. While you stay right with the object, analyze and investigate your mind, thinking: "Is my mind apprehending the object of meditation well? Or is it lax? Or is it distracted by the appearance of external objects?"

You can look in this way. In fact it is saying that you *should* look in this way.

We were speaking earlier about this idea that when you put your mind one-pointedly upon a thing then you're not meant to think of anything other than that, simply putting your mind on the object and thinking of absolutely nothing else. That position was dealt with earlier - that when you place your mind one pointedly upon an object, then you should not entertain thoughts of anything else. For instance, Geshela just illustrated that it might be that you're focusing on something but the object doesn't appear very clearly to you, but another object occurs to you and that appears very clearly. You shouldn't then begin to think about that. Do not entertain thoughts about any other objects or think about anything else, but stick with the object that you set out with. So that, indeed, holds. But that raises the question, does that mean that, as it says here;

While mindfulness fixes your attention on the object of meditation as explained above, is it appropriate to monitor your meditation and think about whether you are holding the object of meditation well?

And the answer is; yes, indeed, you need to do that. So while you do not entertain thoughts of other

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focal objects, still you must be thinking about whether or not you're holding the object of meditation well.

The point here is that you should not exchange one focal object for another focal object once you start. So when you sit down, you're meditating on a particular object. Let's say it's a form of a deity with a white colour. And the white deity's form is appearing, but then a blue deity's form appears even clearer than the white one. Do not exchange, or switch to that one. Rather, keep your mind or your attention directed towards the white deity's form without swapping your focus. That's the point here. Don't swap or switch your focus.

You try to achieve a concentration free of laxity and excitement while sticking to the initial object of meditation that you prepared.

As Geshela was mentioning yesterday, that if you switch often between objects of meditation that will be an obstacle to developing concentration.

So does that mean that it's not appropriate for us to monitor our meditation? It's not appropriate for us to try and determine whether laxity and excitement are present? We must do that. In fact, we must monitor the meditation in this way as Kamalasila says in his *second Stages of Meditation*.

In fact, Kamalasila says as part of previous quote; *While you stay right with the object, analyze and investigate your mind...*

Further:

It is not that you stop your concentration and then look at your mind. Rather, while maintaining your state of concentration, you just look to see whether your attention is staying where it was previously set on the primary object of meditation and, if it is not, whether there is laxity or excitement. After you have settled into concentration, you monitor this at moderate intervals, neither too often nor too seldom.

It's not as if you suspend your cultivation of concentration and then look to see whether or not there is laxity and excitement. Rather, you look for laxity and excitement from within your cultivation of concentration. This would seem to be possible, wouldn't it?

If you do this while the intensity and force of the previous awareness are not quite gone, it takes place within the perspective of this awareness. This has the purpose of both enabling long-lasting, intense stability, and letting you quickly recognize laxity and excitement.

So before the sharpness or intensity of the previous awareness subsides, then you look and in doing so you can achieve these special purposes, *enabling long-lasting, intense stability, and letting you quickly recognize laxity and excitement.*

Accordingly, this is how you sustain your mindfulness, for a necessary cause of powerful and continuous mindfulness is sustaining your meditation by repeatedly reminding yourself, at intervals, of the intended object of meditation.

The Tibetan here is somewhat ambiguous. There's the chance that a person might read it and think that the author is talking about having many objects of meditation when in fact that's not the case. As you sustain your attention for some period of time, then of course you have change. But throughout the change you have the previous focus and a later focus. You're still focussed on the same thing. The English translation is convenient in the sense that it doesn't have this possible source of confusion. So when the English says *this is how you sustain your mindfulness, for a necessary cause of powerful and continuous mindfulness is sustaining your meditation by repeatedly reminding yourself, at intervals, of the intended object of meditation*, it's really quite clear and that's an accurate representation of the reading that Geshela just gave. So the English translation stands.

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels says:*¹¹⁰

In this regard, what is a one-pointed mind? Any continuum of attention that remembers again and again, focuses on a consistently similar object, and is continuous, free of misdeeds, and possessed of delight is called "concentration," as well as "a one-pointed virtuous mind."

What does it remember again and again? You perceive the object of meditation That is, to say, you hold the object of meditation—the characteristic of someone in equipoise—from the viewpoint of any teaching that you have memorized or heard, and upon which you have received instructions and explications from your gurus. You engage and focus on this object with continuous mindfulness. [512]

*Also, Sthiramati's Explanation of the "Separation of the Middle from the Extremes" states:*¹¹¹

The statement "Mindfulness means not forgetting the object of meditation" means that you mentally express the instructions on stabilizing your mind.

Therefore, you maintain mindfulness to stop forgetfulness wherein you stray from the object of meditation. Hence, non-forgetfulness of the object of meditation—wherein forgetfulness is stopped—is when you "mentally express" the object of meditation; you bring the object of meditation to mind again and again. For example, when you are anxious about forgetting something you know, it will be hard to forget if you recall it again and again.

Thus, you have to remind yourself of the object of meditation at moderate intervals in order to develop strong mindfulness. The way to strengthen your vigilance, which notices laxity and excitement, is to lock your attention on the object of meditation without distraction, and then to monitor it. Realize that if you repudiate such a procedure by thinking, "This is discursiveness," it will be extremely difficult to develop powerful mindfulness and vigilance.

Mindfulness does not forget, nor is it distracted from a familiar object. We need mindfulness that has these three features.

This section has been quite long and a number of different points have been made, but that's done to illustrate the importance of mindfulness possessing these three different qualities. It's also made necessary by the fact that there's a great deal of debate and discussion about how to cultivate concentration properly. Because we don't have so many doubts, then it seems as though; 'Oh we could probably get away with a little less material.' But that's because we haven't developed those doubts to begin with.

(c')The length of sessions

Question: When you fix your attention on the object of meditation with mindfulness, is there a definite length for the session, such that you say, "I will stabilize my mind on the object only until then"?

Reply; On this matter, all earlier gurus of the various Tibetan lineages say that you have to do numerous short sessions. Numerous short sessions.

So why is it that all these earlier Gurus said that you should do numerous short sessions?

Why? Some say that if you meditate in brief sessions and stop when it is going well, you will still be eager to meditate at the end of each session, while if the session is long, you will become weary. So if you stop when you think; 'Oh yeah, I could continue', then you'll want to meditate again. Whereas if you carry on for too long then you come a bit apprehensive or scared about the prospect of meditating and will not want to meditate again.

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So let's say you meditate and it's going well and it's quite pleasant. If you stop at that point, then later you'll remember how well it went, how nice it was, and you'll want to meditate again.

Others explain that if the session is long, it is easy to fall under the sway of laxity and excitement, so it is hard to develop flawless concentration.

Asanga's Sravaka Levels and other classic texts do not state the length of sessions clearly.

However, Kamalasila's third Stages of Meditation does say:

At this stage engage in meditative equipoise for twenty-four minutes, an hour-and-a-half, three hours, or as long as you can. [513]

While this statement occurs in the context of the length of the session for cultivating insight after you have already achieved calm abiding, it is clearly similar when you are first achieving calm abiding, so do it this way.

Here, it says in meditative equipoise for twenty-four minutes. The Tibetan word now, in contemporary terms, is translated as 'an hour'. The word itself means 'measure of water'. There's a word, chu.tsod (chu tshod) which means 'measure of water' but it's the word that you use for 'clock' and it's the word you use for 'an hour'. So the Tibetans, the initial clocks – they would talk about this in Vinaya and so forth as well, are based on the amount of time it would take for water to drip out.

Geshela: The point is this - as long as you can. So when you're about to be tired of it, then at that point take a rest. Which is a general principle. Don't make yourself get tired. But when you're on the verge of getting tired, set it aside. Have a break.

At this stage engage in meditative equipoise for as long as you can. So although this statement occurs mainly in reference to insight, it can also be applied to cultivating calm abiding.

If you practice the techniques of mindfulness and vigilance explained above—reminding yourself of the object of meditation and monitoring your meditation at moderate intervals—it does not matter if the session is a little long. However, usually one of two things will happen when you are a beginner and have a long session. On the one hand you may become distracted due to forgetfulness. In this case, you will not recognize the occurrence of any laxity or excitement quickly but only after a long period of time.

On the other hand, though you may not lose your mindfulness, it is easy to fall under the sway of laxity and excitement, and you will not quickly recognize them when they occur.

The first situation hinders the development of strong mindfulness; the latter hinders the development of strong vigilance. Hence, it is very difficult to stop laxity and excitement.

In particular, failing to recognize laxity and excitement after you have become distracted due to forgetting the object of meditation is much worse than failing to quickly recognize laxity and excitement while not forgetting the object of meditation. So the techniques for maintaining mindfulness—the previously explained remedies which stop the breakdown of mindfulness ensuing from distraction—are very important."

If you have great forgetfulness ensuing from distraction, as well as vigilance so weak that it does not quickly recognize laxity and excitement, then your session must be short. If it is hard for you to forget the object and you can quickly notice laxity and excitement, it does not matter if the session is a little long. This is the idea behind Kamalasila's statement above that the duration of a session is indefinite—twenty-four minutes and so forth.

In short, since the duration has to comport with your mental capacity, Kamalasila says "as long as you can." Which is exactly what Geshela was saying – as long as you can.

But of course if you're sitting with others it's a bit difficult.

In which case you just get up and leave. You've gone as long as you can, you get up and leave, and for the people who still have the ability to keep going, they can stay.

Geshela: Isn't it? What doing better?

Because every one doesn't have the same abilities, or capacities do they?

So when we do retreats together with others, we have to be patient. It's possible that someone is a bit unwell, they have to go to the toilet, so they might get up and leave. They might come back. In which case you just sit there and close your eyes!

In fact, if you're meditating and something quite inappropriate...or not inappropriate, but something quite troubling happens. Maybe just the laxity and excitement is strong, then at that point you don't have to necessarily get up and walk away. You could relax the meditations, in other words, stop that meditation, and say mantras for instance, or make aspirational prayers. You don't have to get up and go away.

If temporary injury to your mind or body does not occur, set your mind in equipoise. [514] If such injury does occur, do not persist in meditating, do not persist in meditating but immediately stop your session and then clear away the impediments in your mental and physical constituents. Then meditate. This is what the adepts intended, so recognize that doing this is an aspect of how long a meditation session should be. It's clear, isn't it?

Student: What does Lama Tsong Khapa mean by injury?

Geshela: So injury in the sense of harming your body, for instance in terms of physical. Like causing very sharp pain would make you need to go. Or maybe you have some type of intestinal or stomach illness. So this kind of not pushing through so that you exacerbate or create that type of physical problem or perhaps strong headaches for instance. It possible also that there could be certain difficulties with mind as well. So you should not persist or push.

Immediately stop your session and clear away whatever impediments there are, obstacles there are in your physical and mental constituents.

It's much like what Geshela said before. If you're working to meditate but it's just not happening, then say some mantras or make some aspirational prayers. It's kind of similar advice.

So, *What to do after you focus on an object of meditation.* This has two sections.
What to do when laxity and excitement occur. And, *What to do when laxity and excitement are absent.*

Now these two sections relate to two of the five faults, of non-application and over-application. So remember we were talking about the five faults this morning. Non-application when an application is required, over-application when application is not required. That's what we'll talk about in these two sections.

Do you have any questions?

Student: While we're focusing on the object of meditation, vigilance is encouraged to monitor the mind. So is this vigilance a mental factor in the retinue of the mind that is focused on the object?

Geshela: Yes that's correct. The mindfulness and the vigilance would be in the retinue of the one pointed mind.

Student: It sounds like the object, vigilance, is the mind itself.

[Lozang Zopa: You mean, the focus, which is where the fault ensues, right? So it seems like the focus is....]

Student: So it sounds like there are two different objects.

Geshela: So Geshela says they don't need to have the same focus.

The mind is focused on the object, whereas the vigilance is analysing to determine whether the mind is properly on that or not. Properly placed on that or not.

There is no reason why vigilance ought to be focused on the statue or the image. It's the thing that analyses mind. The thing that's looking at the focus, or concerned with the focus, is mindfulness. So mindfulness is holding to the object so that it is not forgotten.

So any other questions?

(Response to unrecorded question)

Yes concentration is a mental factor. Although the word mind creeps in, in certain discussions, we're talking about concentration, which is a mental factor.

Concentration is a mental factor. And concentration remains one pointedly upon its object. As it does so, the mind that it accompanies assumes five aspects of similarity.

Student: Don't the other mental factors in the retinue of that mind have the same aspects – the same five aspects of similarity?

Geshela: Mind is something that apprehends mainly the mere entity.

The mental factors apprehend the features, don't they?

There are five omnipresent mental factors that accompany every primary consciousness, correct?
So here, when we cultivate concentration we've got this attention that is holding the mind towards a specific or special object. So the mind assumes certain similarities with that. The mind is in meditation as well.

As one meditates, one might experience different feelings. One might have a pleasant feeling, or sometimes an unpleasant feeling. In any case, different feelings will occur. This is the function of feeling after all. So those also come into play for the mind.

Now discrimination then is looking at the, for instance, physical form of the Buddha. Looking at the arms, looking at the head and so forth. So it's making these distinctions, isn't it?

Then you have the mental factor of intention, which casts the mind toward the object in general. But it's function is to create karma or perform action.

So then you have attention, which is the last of the five, which is the one that directs the mind towards a specific aspect of the physical form of Buddha. It's the meditator in a sense.

So each of these have their own different aspects, don't they?

So each of these are concerned with different features. So then you say 'so take the mind. It follows that it focuses on the features.' Why? 'Because it has similarities with the mental factors.' 'Take the mental factors. It follows that it apprehends the basic entity.' Why? 'Because it has aspects of similarity with the mental factors.' Mental factors apprehend the features of an object. Whereas the mind apprehends mainly the basic entity.

So we're left with a question then. Does mind apprehend the features? Perhaps you could say that mind does apprehend the features, but doesn't mainly apprehend the features. Just the mental factors apprehend the basic entity, but mainly apprehend the features. So it would seem acceptable to say this. Otherwise you are left with another position which is that mind doesn't apprehend the features. There's a different situation with vigilance and mindfulness. Mindfulness is aimed at the focus, or the object of meditation and it doesn't forget that. We need to newly create mindfulness, don't we? Mindfulness does not occur simply through the presence of a mind. Rather mindfulness needs to be cultivated or created. Similarly, with vigilance. You must act in order to create vigilance.

Vigilance is the monitor of the mind. It's what helps us to guard the mind. Perhaps it will become clearer as we go along.

This table (handout of stages of mental abiding) includes material that is drawn from *The Ornament of Mahayana Sutras*, as well as *Separating the Middle from the Extremes*. So texts by Asanga and Maitreya. So it would be good to read over it again and again. It is just a translation of something found in Geshela's text. They even have the table in the Tibetan.

Last night, some of the students, Jamieson in particular, who were doing discussions around here asked Geshela a question, which he answered in a very loose way and left it at that, because he noticed that it had become quite late and thought that people were quite tired and thought now is not the time to really address it.

The question was, first of all; 'the gompa's door is part of the basis for imputing gompa. So if you take away the gompa's doors, does that mean that you no longer have the gompa?' And Geshela responded by saying that if you are somebody who accepts that a gompa doesn't require doors, I suppose you could say that a gompa is still there. But if you're someone who maintains that a gompa must have doors, you would of course have to say there is no longer a gompa. But just left it at that, thinking that a more extensive answer would take time. It is actually an important question. It comes back to another point, which is that the basis of imputation must be one in nature or a single entity with the imputed phenomena. If it is a basis of imputation it is necessarily one in nature with the imputed phenomena. And the imputed phenomena are also necessarily one in nature with the basis of imputation.

So if the gompa's door is one in nature with the gompa, that doesn't necessarily mean that if you don't have a single part which is one in nature with it you lose it. So just because you lose a part of the gompa, doesn't mean you would lose the gompa.

This relates back to a question that Tsewang was asking Geshela earlier about the forest. A forest is an imputed phenomenon. So if you cut one tree in a forest, it doesn't necessarily mean you no longer have a forest. Even in conventional worldly terms the forest doesn't cease to exist because you've cut a single tree down. However many trees there are in a forest, those trees are one in nature with forest. But just because you cut one down, doesn't mean you destroy the forest.

Now we come back to gumpa. If you remove the doors of the gumpa, then can you still have the gumpa? Conceivably, as long as you accept that there is such a thing as a gumpa without doors. From that perspective then, just because you take out one part, doesn't mean that you destroy the gumpa. Then that raises another question, which Geshela mentioned last night, which is that, 'Is a vase a vase if it has a hole in it?' We would say; 'Yeah, it's a vase. It's a vase with a hole in it.' But you would have to maintain that it's not a vase because it has a hole in it and is not capable of holding water. So it doesn't fulfil the definition.

The definition of vase includes this ability to hold water. And this vase with a hole in it does not have that ability and does not fulfil the definition, and therefore cannot be a vase. If we were to hold it up and say, 'this is not a vase' everyone would laugh, wouldn't they?

So perhaps you could say you could have a gumpa without doors. Or maybe you'd say, 'No. In that case it's not a gumpa because a gumpa necessarily has doors.' Which way do you want to go? Geshela doesn't know.

The important point is this. Even when things are single nature or single entity by moving a part, which is a single nature with it, does not necessarily mean that you destroy or overturn it. For instance, a forest as this is probably the easiest. You don't necessarily lose the thing when you lose something, which is a part that is one in nature with that thing.

Now if you don't have the imputed phenomena you necessarily don't have the basis for imputation. For instance if you don't have 'thing', you necessarily don't have 'vase'. Where as if you don't have vase, you don't necessarily not have thing. But here, you must consider how things are related.

Those of you who studied Tarig, the types of reasons, might remember that vase is related to thing, but thing is not related to vase. So how does this impact upon our understanding of this same nature or this single entity? It's difficult. Geshela's not sure. Do you still maintain that they're a single entity? It would seem so. But then you say that they're not related as a single entity. Geshela's not sure. Even Geshela is a little confused about this issue. But the point is, when we talk about relations, we're actually talking about a one-way relationship unless otherwise specified. So you can say that vase is related to thing, but thing is not related to vase. You must actually consider.

The reason for this relates back to the definition for relation or related, whereby if the object it's related to is thrown out, then the thing that is related must necessarily be thrown out as well. In other words, if you can't have the thing that it's related to, then you cannot have the thing that's related to it. Which is fine when we look at vase and thing. Because if you don't have thing, you necessarily don't have vase. So you could say that vase is related to thing. But if you don't have vase, it doesn't necessarily mean that you don't have thing. So you cannot say that thing is not related to vase. You have to say that the gumpa's door is related to gumpa. They have an intrinsic relationship. A relationship as a single entity.

Because if you don't have gumpa you necessarily don't have gumpa's door. So if you then take away the gumpa's doors and put them over there, you'd have to say that those are not the gumpa's doors.

There's a lot of discussion about 'chariots' in this regard. Or 'carts' as the Jeffrey Hopkins school translates them. Then you also have body and mind, which are the basis for imputing person. In this case the body and mind are the things that are related to the person, while the person is the related. The body and mind are related to person, so the person is the object that they're related to. If you don't have a person you necessarily don't have body and mind.

So you'd have to say that a corpse is not a body. Rather, to be more specific, you'd have to say; 'a corpse is not the persons' body.' Otherwise then you have 'persons body' with out 'person'. I mean, properly speaking, it's not the persons' body, is it?

In a similar vein there are many different points that need to be investigated about the way things appear and the way things exist. Which is why Geshela says thank you to everyone who is participating in discussions and really looking into these different questions. Upon investigation we find these interesting things. And this is why we say there is a discrepancy between the way things appear and the way things exist. The way things appear is different from the way they exist.

For instance a mind is the basis for imputing person. But person is related to mind. It fulfils the definition for relation because if you don't have a mind you necessarily do not have a person.

So it's like what Chodzin, the monk with eye problems said; 'we don't come to definitive conclusions about this.' Don't come to definitive conclusions or later, people who study the BSP will have nothing to debate about!

Buddhist Studies Programme

Subject : Lam-Rim Chen-Mo Module 3

Teacher: Geshe Tashi Tsering

Interpreter: Ven Lozang Zopa

Number of the teaching: 23

Date of the teaching: 25th November 2004

It's a good thing that the weather is nice and cool. We're dealing with a very tough text with a lot of material and it would be probably much more difficult with a lot more problems otherwise.

We left off yesterday on page 57: *(c) What to do after you focus on an object of meditation*

Translator: this could also be translated as; 'What to do after you've directed your mind towards the object of meditation'.

Where does this fit in terms of the outline?

It comes under the section: '*How to train in each*'. That is, in calm abiding and in insight'. There are two parts within that section: a part on '*how to train in calm abiding*', and a part on '*how to train in insight*', aren't there?

Within '*how to train in calm abiding*', the first section is on '*relying on the preconditions [or prerequisites] for calm abiding*', and the next is on '*how to cultivate calm abiding on that basis*'.

In this section on '*how to cultivate calm abiding on that basis*' there's a piece on '*how to develop flawless concentration*', and the next is '*the stages in which the mental states develop*'.

The first; '*how to develop flawless concentration*' has three sections:

1. *What to do prior to focusing the attention to an object of meditation,*
2. *What to do while focusing on an object of meditation,*
3. *What to do after you focus on an object of meditation.*

These are three very important sections that the Precious Lord has outlined. In order to develop flawless concentration, these are the three jobs that we must do.

What must we do before directing our attention to the object of meditation? Mainly we stop laziness. That's the main point, isn't it? This is a laziness that does not feel like, is not inclined towards, cultivating concentration. We need to stop this laziness before we can direct our attention towards the object

Then what do we find in the section on 'what to do while directing your attention to the object of meditation'?

This is mainly about identifying the various objects of meditation you might focus on. There's a lot discussed in that section. We find that there are a number of objects of meditation that we might direct our attention towards. For instance, there are certain objects of meditation that are appropriate for certain persons. So when directing our attention to an objects of meditation, we must work out what a good, unmistakable object of meditation would be, and what object of meditation is appropriate for us. This is very important, isn't it! The conclusion was that the best object of meditation here would be the physical form of a buddha.

Along the way you must also work out what things you must do as preliminaries to directing your attention towards the object of meditation. For instance, there are certain things that those with very

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strong afflictions, or very strong discursive thoughts, must do - certain objects of meditation they must focus on as preparation.

When doing a lam-rim retreat, when we arrive at a particular section of the outline we must be able to identify that “this section is about this”. We need to work so that we are able to say that “in this part of the outline this type of thing is talked of”. When you’re actually meditating on these, if you have the resources available, you might choose to meditate quite extensively on a topic - you could recall quite a number of things in relation to a single topic, or alternatively you could keep it quite brief.

(c) What to do after you focus on an object of meditation

This has two sections:

- 1. What to do when laxity and excitement occur*
- 2. What to do when laxity and excitement are absent*

Laxity and excitement are, after all, the two main adverse conditions for cultivating concentration so we must stop them.

(1) What to do when laxity and excitement occur

This has two parts:

- 1. Using the remedy for failing to recognize laxity and excitement*
- 2. Using the remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized*

To stop laxity and excitement we must understand what they are. Actually it is quite crucial to know just what laxity is, and what excitement is.

(a') Using the remedy for failing to recognize laxity and excitement

Using the remedy for failing to recognize laxity and excitement also has two sections:

- (1) the defining characteristics of laxity and excitement, and*
- (2) the method for developing vigilance that recognizes them during meditation.*

(1') The defining characteristics of laxity and excitement

Excitement is defined in Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge:

What is excitement? It is an unquiet state of mind, considered a derivative of attachment, which pursues pleasant objects and acts as an impediment to calm abiding.

This quote is also mentioned in the text on mind and mental factors [by Kachen Yeshe Gyaltsen], isn't it.

There are three aspects to this definition:

Excitement is a consciousness, and as a consciousness, it must have an object, or *mig pa* (*dmigs pa*) [This word may also be translated as ‘focus’]. It also has a subjective aspect, and a function. So we have three features to this mental factor:

- (1) Its object is an attractive and pleasant one.*

(2) Its subjective aspect is that your mind is unquiet and scattered outward. As it is a derivative of attachment, it engages its object with a sense of craving.

The text says; ‘*it engages its object with a sense of craving*’. Geshela would think this is basically equivalent to saying that it engages its object with a sense of attachment. It therefore means that it engages its object in such a way that it exaggerates or superimposes the pleasantness or pleasant qualities of that object.

(3) Its function is to impede stabilization of your mind on its object.

This is quite clear, isn’t it?

Is that adequate for the three features of excitement? The focus, the subjective aspect, and the function.

This subjective aspect is quite obvious. Suppose someone tries to cultivate concentration but then remembers this really delicious meal that they have eaten previously. They think; “Oh boy! That food was really tasty!” In recollecting this very pleasant, tasty food they previously had, a sense of craving comes with that, doesn’t it.

When your attention is inwardly fixed upon its object, excitement—which is attached to form, sound, and so on—pulls your attention helplessly toward these objects and causes distraction. As it says in Candragomin's Praise of Confession:

*Just as you are focused on calm abiding,
Directing your attention toward it again and again,
The noose of the afflictions pulls your attention
Helplessly with the rope of attachment to objects.*

Excitement is identified as a factor that causes the mind to be distracted towards external objects. Now an issue is raised with respect to that below:

Question: Is it excitement when there is scattering in which other afflictions distract your mind away from the object—or, for that matter, when there is scattering toward other virtuous objects?

Is this excitement?

Reply: Excitement is a derivative of attachment, so being distracted by other afflictions is not excitement; rather, it is the mental process [mental factor] of distraction which is one of the twenty secondary afflictions.

No, it’s not excitement, it’s distraction.

Scattering toward virtuous objects may involve any virtuous mind or mental process, so not all scattering is excitement.

We now very clearly understand what excitement is. Today we have found a very clear explanation of it.

Our minds may be scattered to other objects due to the influence of other afflictions such as envy, yet this is distraction, not excitement. This opens up a number of debates that we don’t need to go into right now. Rather, let’s try to come to a conclusion about this. When you’re distracted towards other objects through some disturbing emotion other than attachment, this is not considered excitement. It’s considered distraction which is one of the twenty secondary afflictions. Excitement also happens to be one of the twenty secondary afflictions so we must consider what the differences between excitement

© Chenrezig Buddhist Study Programme Lam Rim Chen Mo 2004 – lightly edited transcripts for course participants only and distraction are. Lama Tsong Khapa has said very clearly that ‘*being distracted by other afflictions is not excitement; rather, it is the mental factor of distraction*’.

Many translations render laxity (bying ba) as "slackness" (zhum pa), but this "slackness" should not be construed as meaning discouragement (zhum pa).

There’s an interesting misprinting in Geshela’s text. The translation says just ‘discouragement’ but the Tibetan includes a little more so that it could even read ‘the discouragement that comes when a person dies’. So Geshela was wondering “what does a person dying have to do with anything”?

As for its definition, most yogis among these snowy peaks seem to consider laxity to be a lethargic state of mind that stays on its object of meditation without scattering elsewhere but lacks limpid clarity.

There are twenty secondary afflictions but ‘laxity’ is not found among them. Laxity, therefore, is not one of the afflictions. Lethargy, however, is one of the twenty secondary afflictions. That would seem to indicate that lethargy and laxity are different, despite the claims of other people in ‘the snowy peaks’; that is, Tibetans.

This is [an] incorrect [position], for lethargy is said to cause laxity, so the two are distinct, as suggested in Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation:

If, being oppressed by lethargy and sleepiness, you see your mind become lax, or in danger of laxity....

Buddha Shakyamuni says essentially the same thing:

Also, the Sutra Unravelling the Intended Meaning says:

If there is laxity due to lethargy and sleepiness, or if you are afflicted by any secondary afflictions in meditative absorption, it is a case of internal mental distraction.

This states that when your mind becomes lax due to lethargy and sleepiness, it is distracted inwardly. Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge also discusses laxity in the context of the secondary affliction of distraction, but distraction as he explains it may also be virtuous, so it is not necessarily afflictive.

It seems that Asanga did indeed mention laxity when discussing the secondary affliction of distraction. Nevertheless, since distraction, as he explains it, can also be virtuous, then you cannot say that everything mentioned there is necessarily afflictive.

Of lethargy, then, Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge says:

What is lethargy? An unserviceable state of mind classified as a derivative of delusion, it works to assist all root afflictions and secondary afflictions.

So, this derivative of delusion is the heaviness and unserviceability of body and mind.

Lethargy is ‘a derivative of delusion’. Is that clear?

Vasubandhu's Treasury of Knowledge Auto-commentary (Abhidharma-kosa-bhasya) says:

What is lethargy? The heaviness of the body and the heaviness of the mind which are the unserviceability of the body and the unserviceability of the mind.

So, the heaviness and unserviceability of body and mind is lethargy.

What has been stated up to this point? That laxity is not lethargy. It's not acceptable to hold that laxity is lethargy. That much has been clarified. This is the point.

Laxity means that your mind's way of apprehending the object of meditation is slack, and it does not apprehend the object with much vividness or firmness. So even if it is limpid, if your mind's way of apprehending the object is not highly vivid, then laxity has set in.

Here then, with laxity, your mind's way of apprehending the object of meditation is somewhat slack, so there is not the vividness or firmness in its mode of apprehension. This seems to indicate then that there's a lack of the sharpness or intensity... 'so even if it is limpid, if your mind's way of apprehending the object is not highly vivid, then laxity has set in'. Earlier [page 47] we heard mention of 'intense clarity'. Here this term is translated as 'highly vivid' (*shin tu gsal ba*).

Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation states:

When your mind does not see the object vividly—like a person born blind, or a person entering a dark place, or like having one's eyes shut—then recognize that your mind has become lax.

The translation uses the words 'vivid' and 'clear' but its actually a single word in Tibetan; *sel-wa* (*gsal ba*). So when you see 'vivid' in the English, you can read that as 'clarity'.

Lama Tsong Khapa says:

I have not seen a clear presentation of the definition of laxity in the other classic texts. Laxity may be virtuous or ethically neutral, whereas lethargy is either a nonvirtuous or ethically neutral mental obstruction [obscuration], and it is invariably a derivative of delusion.

Consider a situation where you focus on a statue of a buddha as described by Geshela over the past few days. Even should subtle or coarse laxity set in you're still dealing with a virtuous entity, aren't you? It might be that there is not a great deal of clarity, but the mind still remains as it was placed. The mind is there even if it lacks much clarity. Equally, you could also hold to your mind, using that as your focus. In that case the entity you're concerned with is a neutral one, yet laxity may set in while focused on that also. Perhaps therefore, laxity arises in relation to either virtuous or ethically neutral things?

It doesn't seem likely that you would cultivate concentration focused on a non-virtuous object, does it? It's probably not the case. With laxity, you're dealing with a situation in which your attention has become loose with respect to the object. It's not that another affliction has come in and distracted you or pulled you away from your object. Rather, with laxity, your attention becomes loose with respect to the object so that there's not much clarity. For this reason then, Geshela says that probably laxity only occurs with respect to ethically neutral and virtuous objects

If you look at the way Lama Tsong Khapa has explained this, could you conclude that if something is laxity, it's necessarily either virtuous or ethically neutral? We must consider whether this is necessarily so. Whether it is pervasive.

Laxity occurs when concentration becomes loose or becomes relaxed, doesn't it. So we must ask, "Is there a concentration that is a non-virtuous entity?" "Is there such a thing?" So this is what you're considering. Look into this. Try to address this question.

Moreover, the classic texts say that to dispel laxity, you must bring to mind pleasant objects such as the body of the Buddha, or meditate on light so as to stimulate your minds. Therefore you have to stop the object from appearing unclearly, as though darkness were descending on your mind, and you have to put an end to the quality of attention which has become flaccid. You need both a clear object of

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meditation and a tight way of apprehending the object. Put an end to the quality of attention which has become flaccid.

This is clear, isn't it? This passage addresses the ways that you can dispel laxity. It talks of focusing on an object that you delight in. For instance, if you have faith in the Buddha, then focus on the body of a buddha in order to illuminate the mind. Alternatively, you could meditate on light so that you can, as it says, 'stimulate your mind'.

'Therefore you have to stop the object from appearing unclearly, as though darkness were descending on your mind'

Lama Tsong Khapa is presenting different ways to dispel laxity as taught in the classic texts. When he mentions the need to stop the object from appearing unclearly and to stimulate your mind, he's talking of reintroducing the aspect of clarity, whereas when he talks of putting an end to the quality of attention which has become flaccid, he's speaking of the need to reintroduce a tight or firm way of apprehending the object.

Earlier, Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned a similar thing. On page 59 it says, '*laxity means that your mind's way of apprehending the object of meditation is slack, and it does not apprehend the object with much vividness or firmness. So even if it is limpid, if your mind's way of apprehending the object is not highly vivid, then laxity has set in*'. This is quite similar to the explanation above where he mentions that '*you have to stop the object from appearing unclearly as though darkness were descending on your mind, and 'put an end to the quality of attention which has become flaccid*'.

This is how we must identify laxity. It's on the basis of these statements that we gain an understanding of what laxity is. It doesn't have a definition in the way that excitement does. Lama Tsong Khapa cries out saying "I have not seen a clear presentation of the definition of laxity in other classic texts!"

You need both a clear object of meditation and a tight way of apprehending the object. Neither a clear object alone, nor transparency of the subject alone is enough

A concentration which involves either a lack of a clear object, or a lack of transparency of the subject, does not constitute flawless concentration. When he says that neither is enough, what does he mean? He's saying that if you have one but not the other, that's not flawless concentration.

It is easy to recognize excitement, but laxity is hard to comprehend since it is not clearly identified in the authoritative classic texts. It is also very important because in this case it is a major point of misunderstanding concerning flawless concentration.

It's right there! Lama Tsong Khapa was just saying above that if you have an aspect of clarity and limpidity, that doesn't necessarily make it a flawless concentration. This is what the Precious Lord is saying; those alone are not enough.

Therefore, you should experience laxity with an exacting awareness, and on that basis examine it well and identify it in accordance with Kamalasila's Stages of Meditation.

This is a bit of a funny way of putting it in English. It's saying that drawing upon your own experience, you should examine laxity with an exacting awareness and identify it in accordance with Kamalasila's *Stages of Meditation*.

The mind needs to be both clear and alert when concentrating. Without these we won't be able to induce a clear ascertainment or clarity of certain knowledge. This is why they are necessary. After all, the purpose of cultivating concentration is to develop wisdom so that we become more and more clear. For

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this we need both clarity and the alertness associated with it, or, as it says here, ‘the tightness of the subject’.

When reciting prayers, you might reach a point where you don’t know what you’ve recited and what you haven’t. This wouldn’t be quite an inattentive awareness, after all you have recited it, but still, due to the lack of an alert awareness, that act of reciting is not all that beneficial. This happens; you forget what you’ve recited and what you haven’t. If, however, you’re alert as you recite, then you remember what you’ve done. In fact you’re quite clear about it. You think ‘Yes, I’ve recited this’.

Anyway, the point here is that Lama Tsong Khapa is saying we must identify laxity, and that our concentration should have both this aspect of clarity, and also sharpness. We need to be alert and clear.

(2') The method for developing vigilance that recognizes laxity and excitement

It is not enough just to have an understanding of laxity and excitement; you have to be able to develop vigilance that accurately detects whether laxity or excitement is present during meditation. Moreover, by gradually developing powerful vigilance, not only must you develop vigilance that recognizes laxity and excitement as soon as they occur, you must also develop a vigilance that recognizes them when they are on the verge of occurring, before they have actually arisen.

The point of this section is to show that of course vigilance is required to recognise laxity and excitement that has arisen, but that we also need vigilance that’s able to recognize them before they arise - when they are on the verge of arising.

This is demonstrated by statements in Kamalasila's last two Stages of Meditation:

If you see your mind become lax, or in danger of laxity...

And:

You see your mind become excited or in danger of becoming excited.

So you need a vigilance which is able to stop these when you suspect they are going to occur.

Until you develop such vigilance, you cannot reliably conclude that you have had flawless meditation—free of laxity and excitement— during a given period of time. This is because, not having developed powerful vigilance, you cannot be sure whether laxity and excitement have occurred. Likewise, in a passage that begins, "There is recognition of laxity and excitement...", Maitreya's Separation of the Middle from the Extremes says that you need vigilance in order to recognize laxity and excitement. Accordingly, if you have not developed vigilance such as would preclude any failure to recognize the presence of laxity or excitement, then even if you try to meditate for a long time you will pass the time under the influence of subtle laxity and excitement, failing to sense laxity and excitement while they are occurring.

Geshela thinks that this issue will be covered in more detail later. If not, we can address it at some point in the future. Geshela would just call our attention to this passage that begins; ‘*"There is recognition of laxity and excitement..." Maitreya's Separation of the Middle from the Extremes says that you need vigilance in order to recognize laxity and excitement*’. An issue we can consider is whether you can realize or recognise laxity or excitement without vigilance. It says that ‘*if you have not developed vigilance such as would preclude any failure to recognize the presence of laxity or excitement, then even if you try to meditate for a long time you will pass the time under the influence of subtle laxity and excitement*’.

Question: How do you develop this vigilance?

Where is the section found in which Lama Tsong Khapa explains the way to maintain mindfulness?

It can be found on page 49 where he says; *‘Therefore, after you have set your attention on the object of meditation in the manner explained above, you think, “in this way, I have fixed my attention on the object of meditation.” Then, without new examination, you sustain the force of that awareness in unbroken continuity. This is the most critical point in the technique of maintaining mindfulness.’*

This is indispensable for developing vigilance. It says that this is the most important cause in developing vigilance. When you’re actually meditating on the object, you direct your mind towards the object and think, “I am viewing this object. This is the object that I am focusing upon.” There must be that awareness that ‘this is the object that I am focusing upon’.

‘Then, without new examination, you sustain the force of that awareness in unbroken continuity’ - without shifting, without introducing new examination, you think “this is the object that I’m focusing upon and I’m staying with this one”.

Do you understand? This is the way to maintain mindfulness which is also very important for vigilance.

If you can develop continual mindfulness, you will be able to avoid forgetting the object of meditation and becoming distracted. Thus, since this prevents a prolonged failure to sense the presence of laxity and excitement, you can easily recognize laxity and excitement.

What is the work or job of vigilance? Vigilance’s job is to look to see whether mindfulness has forgotten its object or not. Its job is to detect whether or not laxity or excitement have occurred. That’s its job, isn’t it?

If you first develop a good way of sustaining mindfulness, then vigilance will keep monitoring it. It says here on page 61:

This will be perfectly evident if you examine in terms of your own experience how long it takes to recognize laxity and excitement when mindfulness is impaired and how quickly you recognize them when it is not impaired.

If mindfulness has declined, it becomes very difficult to recognise that laxity or excitement has occurred. Whereas if mindfulness is sustained, and does not decline, it’s much easier to become aware of laxity and excitement. If mindfulness declines a great deal of time is likely to go by before you become aware of laxity or excitement, whereas so long as mindfulness does not decline you will be more likely to recognise or become aware of laxity and excitement in a short amount of time.

The text continues saying:

With this in mind, Santideva's Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds states:

*When mindfulness dwells
At the gate of your mind for its protection,
Then vigilance will appear.*

And Sthiramati's Explanation of the "Separation of the Middle from the Extremes" states:

The statement, "There is recognition of laxity and excitement by vigilance if mindfulness does not lapse," indicates that mindfulness, when fully present, is accompanied by vigilance. That is why it says, "if mindfulness does not lapse...."

This is not easy, of course.

In short then, vigilance must be monitoring before mindfulness declines. The job of vigilance is carried out before mindfulness declines.

One of the main causes for vigilance is maintaining mindfulness. This was said earlier, wasn't it? Another cause for vigilance is mentioned below. It reads:

The following cause of vigilance is distinctive to the way to maintain vigilance. Focus your mind on a visualized image of the body of a deity, etc., or focus on a subjective aspect such as the quality of experience being simply luminous and aware. Then, while you stay mindful as explained above, hold your attention on the object while continuously monitoring whether it is scattering elsewhere. Know that this is critical for the maintenance of vigilance.

Here we have a piece on the maintenance of vigilance. Lama Tsong Khapa is illustrating the importance of using vigilance to monitor while mindfulness has not declined. It becomes very difficult to monitor with vigilance once mindfulness has declined,

So you need both mindfulness and vigilance. That's what this section is getting at. In fact, it says '*while you stay mindful as explained above...*'. Or, this could also be translated as; '*from within that mindfulness, hold your attention on the object while continuously monitoring whether it is scattering elsewhere. Know that this is critical for the maintenance of vigilance*'.

As Santideva's Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

*Examining again and again
The states of the body and the mind—
Just that, in brief,
Is what it means to preserve vigilance.*

Thus, with this method you develop vigilance that notices laxity and excitement when they are on the verge of arising, while with the method for maintaining mindfulness you prevent forgetfulness in Which attention is distracted and slips away.

Vigilance must be monitoring before laxity and excitement arise. In other words, we must have a type of vigilance that is capable of recognizing laxity and excitement when they are on the verge of arising, or, as said earlier, 'in their incipient stages'.

Vigilance must know when laxity and excitement are about to occur. If vigilance is monitoring, you can tell by the state of your mindfulness whether they are on the verge of arising. You draw upon your own experience and develop a type of vigilance that knows on the basis of the state of your mindfulness, when these are about to occur.

Here, we're talking of the way to develop one-pointedness, aren't we? Lama Tsong Khapa mentions that the way to maintain mindfulness is crucial in developing this one-pointedness. He explains the way to maintain mindfulness in terms of developing the awareness that "I am focusing on this", and making sure that this recognition is continuous. This type of approach, however, is also required in analytical meditation. You might choose to engage in analytical meditation focusing on the recognition that all sentient beings have been one's mother. At that time you must be mindful of the fact that "I am meditating on the recognition that all sentient beings have been my mother". "I am meditating on the fact that there is not a single sentient being who has not been my mother". As you do so, you must remain continually aware that 'this is the support for my focus'. 'This is what my mind is focused upon'. With the aid of that mindfulness, you utilize a number of different reasons to support that

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conclusion. That's part of analytical meditation, isn't it? If we lose sight of the fact that we're focused on the recognition that all sentient beings have been our mother, all sorts of different thoughts are liable to occur. We start to think about all sorts of other things and this becomes an obstacle to our developing that recognition that all sentient beings have one's mother. Together with the mindfulness that you are meditating on the recognition that all sentient beings have been your mother, should be a vigilance that monitors to detect whether mindfulness forgets that or not. If you lose that, then your meditation will not be a proper meditation.

Therefore these pieces of advice on mindfulness and vigilance are important in relation to analytical meditation as well as one-pointed meditation. As beginners, our emphasis probably should be on analytical meditation. After all, as beginners we need to cultivate such things as loving kindness, compassion, and the mind of enlightenment. We need to develop our familiarity with these things also, and for us this familiarization occurs in the context of analytical meditation.

So here we are, we are faced with a number of subjects that require analytical meditation and which we need to focus on. So let us not think that these instructions apply only to calm abiding. We might well have the idea that "Oh, when Lama Tsong Khapa gives these instructions, he's really just talking of the things you need when trying to achieve calm abiding, not for analytical meditation". Let's not think this way. These are important in both cases.

Hence, you have to properly distinguish these two. Otherwise, if you practice as is done nowadays - combining all these awarenesses with no understanding of their distinctions—I am afraid that the concentration resulting from a muddled cause will itself be muddled. Therefore, it is very important to make a very precise analysis of this in accordance with each of the major authoritative texts, and then to determine it in your practice. Do not place your hopes on sheer determination,

This point is made by Aryasura below in his *Compendium of the Perfections*. Actually this is a quote we should memorize. It is something we should have available to us at any time:

For Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections says:

Using only joyous perseverance, you will end up exhausted. If you practice with the aid of wisdom, you will achieve the great goal.

So you see, study is important! If you don't study but simply try to meditate and you're really determined on meditating, then what results will come of that? Exhaustion! You can expect to achieve the result of exhaustion.

I'm just joking! This is your choice [laughter]

When we have the support of wisdom - a clear understanding, then meditation is relatively easy. It's not all that difficult and it goes well. But if we don't have that but really apply ourselves to meditation, it's perhaps not so clear and it becomes very difficult for us to achieve the results we want. So this is Lama Tsong Khapa's as well as Aryasura's advice for us

Then we go on to the next section:

(b') Using the remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized

Where does this section come from?

In the section on '*what to do once you've directed your attention to an object of meditation*', there are two parts:

1. *What to do when laxity and excitement occur*

2. *What to do when laxity and excitement are absent.*

In the first of these we have:

1. *Using the remedy for failing to recognize laxity and excitement, and*
2. *Using the remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized.*

We are now on the second of these.

To clarify this; this section talks about applying the antidote to your not making effort to abandon laxity and excitement, even though they have been recognized.

As explained above, you develop very powerful mindfulness and vigilance through proper use of the methods for maintaining mindfulness and vigilance. Vigilance is then able to notice even very subtle laxity and excitement, so there is no problem recognizing the occurrence of laxity and excitement. However, when you make no effort to stop those two as soon as they arise, your complacency or failure to apply yourself constitutes an extremely serious problem for your concentration. For, if you practice in this way, your mind will form bad habits and then it will be extremely difficult to develop a concentration free of laxity and excitement.

This relates to one of the five faults; The fault of ‘non-application’, doesn’t it.

Therefore, to remedy a failure to apply yourself to the elimination of laxity and excitement, cultivate the intention called application, or effort.

This section has two parts: (1) intention and the way that it stops laxity and excitement, and (2) the underlying causes of laxity and excitement.

(1) Intention and the way it stops laxity and excitement

Where is ‘intention’ mentioned? It is one of the five omnipresent mental factors, isn’t it. It’s also linked to karmic formation, or composition, mentioned both in the context of the five aggregates, as well in the twelve links of dependent arising.

We’ll leave it there for this morning. What have we covered today?

Well, we’ve identified laxity and excitement, haven’t we. That’s been the emphasis. We looked at how excitement is found in the twenty secondary afflictions but laxity is not. Lama Tsong Khapa then gives us an explanation of laxity where he talks about lacking clarity about the object, or not having the aspect of ‘limpidity’, which is later translated as ‘transparency’.

Furthermore Lama Tsong Khapa clearly states that the position that holds laxity to be lethargy is unacceptable. Laxity is not lethargy. Lethargy is one of the twenty secondary afflictions, isn’t it? It would seem then, that laxity is necessarily either ethically neutral or virtuous. But we’ll look into this.

Do you have any doubts? Questions? What doubts do you have?

Student: Kamalasila’s Second Stages of Meditation says that: ‘*If, being oppressed by lethargy and sleepiness, you see your mind become lax, or in danger of laxity....*’. I had always thought that lethargy was more coarse than laxity whereas here it is presented as a cause for laxity. Does that mean that you can have lethargy without laxity? Or lethargy where the mind is still clear and sharp?

Geshela: Lethargy can act as a cause for laxity. Indeed that’s the case. You can’t have clarity within lethargy as lethargy is a derivative of delusion, or *ti-mug* (*gti mug*). Sleepiness also involves a lack of clarity with respect to one’s object. So the object can become unclear through the force of lethargy or

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sleepiness. That's why the *Sutra For Unravelling the Intended Meaning* speaks about lethargy and sleepiness as a cause of laxity.

If something is a cause for laxity, it's not necessarily the cause for subtle laxity. You're probably thinking of subtle laxity where there's still an aspect of clarity, right? There is coarse laxity and subtle laxity, here they're not talking about the cause of subtle laxity. If you want to talk about subtle laxity, then the debate you're raising works quite well because once you have lethargy and sleepiness, you're unclear about the object.

However, it doesn't say that it's a cause for subtle laxity, does it! So what you say does not hold here. This statement is not harmed. Is that clear?

Does everyone understand Tsewang's doubt? Tsewang has this doubt, and there's something to that. If you have an aspect of clarity but which lacks the aspect of sharpness or intensity, this can be considered subtle laxity, can't it?

Buddhist Studies Programme

Subject : Lam Rim Chen Mo Module 3

Teacher : Geshe Tashi Tsering

Interpreter : Ven Lozang Zopa

Number of the teaching: 24

Date of the teaching: Friday 26 November

We've been discussing the section of the text that falls under the heading, "the meditative process", in other words, the stages in which you meditate in order to develop calm abiding. It's a good idea if we try to become quite familiar with the outline of this part, because this will help us to develop some understanding of calm abiding and the way in which it develops.

The section on the meditative process has two sections,

How to develop flawless concentration and

The stages in which the mental states develop.

Then in the section on how to develop flawless concentration, you have

- *What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation*
- *What to do while focusing your attention on the object of meditation and*
- *What to do once you have directed your attention to the object of meditation*

We've covered the earlier two and we're in the midst of discussing the third one. Now in this third one, there's a section on

- *What to do when laxity and excitement occur and*
- *What to do when laxity and excitement are absent.*

In the section on what to do when laxity and excitement occur, there are two parts:

- *Using the remedy for failing to recognize laxity and excitement and*
- *Using the remedy for failing to eliminate them even when they have been recognized*

We covered the earlier one yesterday, didn't we. It's very important that we recognise laxity and excitement, and for this there are two important factors - mindfulness and vigilance. It's vigilance that recognises laxity and excitement.

What is the job of vigilance? It is to look to see whether or not laxity and excitement have occurred. We must have this vigilance to detect them. Given that's the case, then we could say that vigilance is a consciousness that knows laxity and excitement. If vigilance doesn't know laxity and excitement, then it won't be able to recognise when they are present. It could be in the mind at the same time as laxity and excitement and not recognise them at all.

That's the job of vigilance, then what is the job of mindfulness? It is to not let go of the object but just to retain it, to keep it there.

Simply having vigilance is not enough. It must be able to detect when the strength of mindfulness is on the decline or when laxity and excitement are on the verge of occurring. It must know when the strength of mindfulness is on the wane or when these other two factors are about to occur.

And thus mindfulness and vigilance are the two most important things in sustaining flawless concentration. We will pick up today from where we left off yesterday

Using the remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized

We read through a bit of this section yesterday but we'll go over it again ... today.

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As explained above, you develop very powerful mindfulness and vigilance through proper use of the methods for maintaining mindfulness and vigilance. Vigilance is then able to notice even very subtle laxity and excitement, so there is no problem recognizing the occurrence of laxity and excitement. However, when you make no effort to stop those two as soon as they arise, your complacency or your failure to apply yourself constitutes an extremely serious problem for your concentration.

Earlier, the text mentioned that there is a special way to sustain mindfulness and a special way to sustain vigilance. These are things that we need to be certain about, and to retain.

Continuing on in the text, it reads:

For, if you practice in this way, your mind will form bad habits and then it will be extremely difficult to develop a concentration free of laxity and excitement. Therefore, to remedy a failure to apply yourself to the elimination of laxity and excitement, cultivate the intention called application, or effort.

There's a bit of advice from Geshe Langri Tangpa that refers exactly to this situation right here. In all of our actions and behaviour we should investigate and look inwardly, so that as soon as an affliction which endangers both self and others arises, we can oppose and overcome it.

As soon as any affliction, be it anger, attachment, pride or envy, arises then we must apply the antidote to it so that we may overcome it. We must not allow it to remain for any length of time but address it and overcome it immediately.

If we do not apply the antidote to it, then we are accepting it. Failing to apply the antidote when it occurs is, in effect, embracing it which then endangers both self and others.

Whether we're working to achieve calm abiding or not, it's important that we are continually analysing our mental continuum, trying to detect whether or not afflictions have arisen. So at all times, in whatever we do, we must always check to see whether these are happening.

The text says, *if you practice in this way, your mind will form bad habits and then it will be extremely difficult to develop a concentration free of laxity and excitement.*

This is certainly the case. If you accept disturbing emotions when they arise, without applying the antidote to them, you become habituated to them and through this habituation, it's as if they become uncontrived. Isn't that the case? This is basically what happens to us as we get so accustomed to the disturbing emotions that they are almost as if uncontrived. In that case, whatever you do, anger or envy etc will readily arise. We don't want to develop that type of habit.

Really it's laughable. We don't want to suffer and other sentient beings don't want to suffer. We even make prayers, "may all beings, including myself and others, be free of suffering - to bring this about, I must attain buddhahood". We think like this, don't we? But then when anger or attachment or pride or envy arises, we welcome them.

It's really laughable when you think about it. What is the cause for suffering? It's these afflictions. And when these afflictions occur, we embrace them, we welcome them? Another person comes along and says something offensive to us and we get angry, and yet, at the same time, we're saying, "May suffering not occur".

It's good to think about these things, because you realise that you must actually laugh at the way we behave sometimes. It's also quite helpful for understanding our basic situation. It's very important that we try to develop a wish not to have the causes of suffering that is as strong as our wish not to suffer. Just as we have this strong desire not to suffer, we need to have a strong desire not to have the causes of suffering. Rather than allow ourselves to actually adopt the causes of suffering and work to accomplish them, we need to overcome them, in the same way that we try to avoid suffering. Our accepting of the

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causes of suffering and the wish not to suffer are completely contrary to one another. We need to know this.

The title of this section is:

Using the remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized.

We're talking about one of the five faults here, the fault of non-application, the remedy for which is application or as is stated here, intention. That's what we're talking about, this remedy, intention.

Intention and the way it stops laxity and excitement

Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge:

What is intention? It is the mental activity of applying your mind, having the function of drawing your mind to virtue, nonvirtue, or the ethically neutral.

[Interpreter: Just a note on translation. It says "mental activity". That's yi kyi le (*yid kyi las*) or mental karma.]

This is how you should understand it. For example, iron filings are compelled to move under the influence of a magnet. Similarly, the mental process of intention moves and stimulates your mind toward virtue, nonvirtue, or the ethically neutral. So it here refers to an intention that applies your mind to the elimination of laxity or excitement when one of them occurs.

Of the five faults, two are non-application and application. When laxity or excitement occurs and you do not apply the remedy to them, this is a fault of non-application, which is what we're talking about here. Generally speaking, the mental factor of intention is what moves your mind towards something virtuous, non-virtuous or ethically neutral. Here however, intention has a specific connotation. It refers to an intention that applies your mind to the elimination of laxity or excitement when one of them occurs.

Question: After you have thus aroused your mind to eliminate laxity and excitement, how do you stop laxity and excitement?

Reply: Mental laxity involves a very excessive inward withdrawal, leading to a slippage in the way you apprehend the object of meditation; so you should direct your mind to delightful things that cause it to expand outward. This should be something like a very beautiful image of the Buddha, not something delightful that gives rise to afflictions. Or bring to mind an image of light, such as sunlight. When this clears away laxity, immediately tighten the way you apprehend the object and sustain that in meditation. As Kamalasila's first Stages of Meditation explains:

How? When you are overcome with lethargy and sleepiness, when there is a lack of clarity in your apprehension of the object of meditation and your mind has become lax, then meditate on the idea of light or bring to mind the most delightful things, such as the qualities of the Buddha. Dispel laxity in this way and firmly hold on to the object of meditation.

This is quite clear. *In this situation, do not meditate on a disenchanting object because disenchantment causes your mind to withdraw inward.* We can be quite certain that when laxity occurs we shouldn't meditate on a disenchanting object because that's only going to cause our mind to withdraw inward further.

There's another way to dispel laxity.

*When you expand your mind by using discerning wisdom to analyze an object of your choice, this also stops laxity. Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections says:*¹³¹

When slack, your mind is stimulated and inspired

*Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections says:*¹³¹

*When slack, your mind is stimulated and inspired
By virtue of the energy of striving for insight.*

It mentions 'slack'. As Lama Tsong Khapa explains in the following paragraph, 'slack' here is taken to be a type of laxity. So when the word slack appears in this quote from the *Compendium of the Perfections*, you understand that to refer to laxity.

Thus laxity, or slackness, is as follows. The state of mind the two terms describe is called "laxity" because there is a decline in the way you apprehend the object of meditation. It is called "slackness" because there is an excessive withdrawal inward. You counteract it by stimulating the way you apprehend the object and by making the object of meditation extensive, so as to expand your mind.

Bhavaviveka's Heart of the Middle Way states:

*In the case of slackness, expand your mind
By meditating on an extensive object.*

And:

*Further, in the case of slackness, inspire yourself
By observing the benefits of joyous perseverance.*

Also, Santideva's Compendium of Trainings states: "If your mind becomes slack, inspire yourself by cultivating delight." The great scholars and adepts are in agreement on this matter.

So here is the most important remedy for stopping laxity: When you reflect on the good qualities of such things as the three jewels, the benefits of the mind of enlightenment, and the great significance of attaining leisure, it should have a bracing effect on your mind, just as cold water is thrown in the face of a sleeping person. This depends on your having had experience with discerning analytical meditation on these beneficial topics.

The text mentions going for refuge to the three jewels with an awareness of the qualities that they possess; or by recollecting the benefits of something like the mind of enlightenment, something that you regard as being very important and very precious. Alternatively, you could think about the difficulty of finding the leisure and opportunities and the great significance they hold. When you recollect these things, through the force of your familiarity with them, that can awaken or enliven the mind. The point here is that you must think about something that moves your mind, and once the mind is moved, then it is once again enlivened.

You must do so without forgetting the object of meditation. If you forget the object of meditation then you're distracted.

It says that *this depends on your having had experience with discerning analytical meditation on these beneficial topics*. So it's not easy. Or it wouldn't appear to be.

If you cultivate a remedy for being accustomed to the underlying causes of laxity—namely, lethargy, sleepiness, and something that induces these two wherein your mind takes on a gloomy aspect—then laxity resulting from these causes will not arise or, if it has arisen, will stop.

What type of things should you do if you're having problems with laxity? *In this regard, Asanga's Sravaka Levels suggests such activities as going for a walk; holding an image of brightness in your mind and familiarizing yourself with it repeatedly; pursuing any of the six recollections—the Buddha,*

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the teaching, the community, ethical discipline, generosity, or deities; or stimulating your mind by means of other inspiring objects of meditation;

The list continues: *orally reciting teachings that discuss the faults of lethargy and sleepiness; gazing in different directions and at the moon and stars; and also washing your face with water.* All of these methods are recommended or taught in Asanga's Sravaka Levels.

Also, if laxity is very slight and occurs only infrequently, tighten up your apprehension of the object and continue meditating; but if laxity is dense and seems to occur repeatedly, suspend your cultivation of concentration, clear away your laxity using any of those remedies, and then resume your meditation.

Whether your object of meditation entails directing your mind inward or outward, if the object is unclear and you have the sense of darkness—be it slight or dense—descending on your mind, then it will be hard to cut through laxity if you continue to meditate without eliminating it. Therefore, as a remedy for that, repeatedly meditate on the appearance of light.

Asanga's Sravaka Levels states:

Cultivate calm abiding and insight correctly, with a mind that is bright and radiant, a mind of clear light, free of gloom.

Earlier we saw that laxity isn't well defined in earlier texts; rather we just have a general description of it, talking about things like a lack of clarity, a slackness or a sense of darkness descending upon the mind or a decline in the way that you apprehend the object. Those are the types of descriptions that are associated with laxity.

It would be difficult to develop calm abiding and insight, if we do not dispel these types of symptoms when they occur, so we must make effort to do so.

As Asanga's Sravaka Levels states:

Cultivate calm abiding and insight correctly, with a mind that is bright and radiant, a mind of clear light, free of gloom. On the way to serenity and insight, meditate on a sense of brightness in this way. [522] If you do, then even if at the outset your interest in an object of meditation is dull and brightness is fading, the cause and condition of having accustomed yourself to that meditation will clarify your interest in the object of meditation and lead to great brightness. If there is clarity and great brightness at the outset, clarity and brightness will later become still more vast.

So since he says you should cultivate brightness even when the object of meditation is clear from the beginning, this is all the more true when it is unclear.

We have just looked at certain techniques to eliminate a lack of clarity, like meditating on brightness etc. It might be that from the very outset of your meditation, your object of meditation and your mind are clear, in which case there wouldn't appear to be much need to meditate on brightness. And yet there must be a sense of brightness or illumination in the meditation. This is what Asanga's Sravaka Levels is advising.

It then goes without saying that if this brightness and illumination is important even when there's clarity, of course it needs to be applied when there's a lack of clarity.

Asanga's Sravaka Levels also describes how to hold the sign of brightness in meditation:

Hold in meditation the sign of brightness from the light of an oil-lamp, the light of a bonfire, or the orb of the sun.

How should we take this? The object of meditation ought to be clear, bright in the way that the rays of the sun are bright, or that an oil lamp would be bright. One aspect of the meditation should be illumination or brightness. Having this aspect of brightness helps us to stay with the object of meditation, so it can be quite helpful.

Meditate on the sign of brightness not only while cultivating concentration, but on other occasions as well.

In the case of excitement, out of attachment your attention pursues objects such as forms and sounds; so in response to that, bring to mind disillusioning things that cause your attention to be drawn inward. As soon as this calms the excitement, settle your mind on the earlier object of meditation. Kamalasila's first Stages of Meditation states:

When you see that your mind is occasionally becoming excited as you recall previous excitement, play, and so forth, calm the excitement by bringing to mind disillusioning things, such as impermanence. Then strive to engage the object of meditation without your mind becoming involved in activity.

The mention of impermanence here is probably a reference to death and impermanence. If the mind strays and becomes distracted towards some external object then you should reflect on death and impermanence to calm the excitement.

And Bhavaviveka's Heart of the Middle Way states:

*Calm excitement by bringing to mind
Impermanence and so forth.*

And:

*Pull your mind back from distraction by noting
The faults of the distracting objects.*

Also, Santideva's Compendium of Trainings states: "If excitement occurs, calm it by bringing impermanence to mind."

So, if very strong or prolonged excitement arises, it is crucial that you relax the meditation for a while and cultivate a sense of disenchantment, rather than attempting to pull in your mind and direct it back to the object of meditation every time it becomes scattered. For excitement that is not so dominant, draw in the scattered attention, and fix your attention upon the object of meditation.

If strong or prolonged excitement occurs, then take a break. That's what it says: if strong or prolonged excitement occurs, take a break and reflect on disenchanting things, eg death and impermanence and the sufferings of the miserable realms. Then, once you have calmed that excitement, you can return to the meditation. This is quite an important point. Do this, *rather than attempting to pull in your mind and direct it back to the object of meditation every time it becomes scattered.*

It's not that you just continually try to bring the mind back to the object when it scatters over and over again. When the scattering is prolonged or strong, take a break and follow this advice. As we said earlier with laxity then, *when excitement is not so dominant, draw in the scattered attention, and fix your attention upon the object of meditation.*

This is because Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections states:¹⁴²

When your mind becomes excited stop this disturbance

By calming it and stabilizing your attention.

And Asanga's texts on the levels say that the sutra passage, "you focus your mind," refers to a remedy for excitement.

It is generally said that if your mind is excited, you should focus on the object of meditation, while if it is lax, you should think about a delightful object. Asanga's Sravaka Levels states:

Thus, once your mind has become withdrawn inward and you note that there is slackness or the threat of slackness, maintain and gladden your mind by thinking of any inspiring things. This is maintaining your mind. How do you settle your mind? While maintaining your mind, when you note that your mind is excited or that there is the threat of excitement, withdraw your mind inward and settle it in a calming stabilization.

This is exactly the same as what was said above.

When your mind is excited, do not bring to mind inspiring and delightful objects because this will cause your mind to be distracted outward.

What did the author say in the similar section on laxity? He said, don't meditate on disillusioning or disenchanting things because that will only to serve to draw the mind inward even further. When laxity occurs, don't meditate on disenchanting things because you don't want to make your mind withdraw any further. When excitement occurs, you shouldn't meditate on delightful things, because that will cause the mind to scatter outward even further. This is quite special advice here. What to do for laxity? Don't think about disenchanting things. For excitement? Don't think about delightful things.

We can apply this to our other practices of virtue, like reciting prayers. If you feel a bit dull when you're saying your prayers, you shouldn't think about disenchanting or disillusioning things at that time. Try to be a little lighter - more 'happy-go-lucky'.

The next section contains an identification of what some of the causes for laxity and excitement are.

The underlying causes of laxity and excitement

Asanga's Levels of Yogic Deeds states:

What are the signs of laxity? Not restraining the sensory faculties; not eating in moderation; not making an effort to practice rather than sleeping during the early and later parts of the night; ongoing lack of vigilance; deluded behavior; over-sleeping that is, sleeping too much; being unskillful; being lazy in one's aspirations, joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis; giving only partial attention to calm abiding without accustoming yourself to it and fully refining it; letting your mind stay as though in darkness; and not delighting in focusing on the object of meditation. [524]

When you consider what's involved in accomplishing calm abiding, you conclude that the time to do it really is when you're young. The older you get, the more intractable the mind becomes, more set in its ways. And there are also these health issues to consider - your health becoming more difficult as you get older. When you look at what's actually required in achieving calm abiding, then it would seem that, if you're really quite intent on achieving it, it's important that you make effort while you are young, because the older you get, the more difficult it would seem to be.

Here, "signs of laxity" should be understood as the causes of laxity. The word "lazy" applies to joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis, as well as to aspirations.

What are the signs of excitement? The four points listed above for the signs of laxity—not restraining the sensory faculties, etc.; behaving with attachment; having a disquieted manner; lacking a sense of disenchantment; being unskillful; having a great sense of grasping in your aspiration, etc.; failing to accustom yourself to joyous perseverance; meditating in an unbalanced way without refining your apprehension of the object of meditation; and being distracted by any sort of exciting topic, such as thoughts about relatives.

The "signs of excitement" are the causes of excitement.

So just as the signs of laxity are the causes of laxity, the signs of excitement are the causes of excitement.

"Great grasping" is an excessive mental hold on a delightful object. "Aspiration, etc." refers to the four points explained earlier.

In Tsong Khapa's explanation from the quote from Asanga's Level of Yogic Deeds, he mentions that the *"signs of laxity"* should be understood as the causes of laxity. And then he says that the word *"lazy"* applies to joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis, as well as to aspirations. So these words in quotation marks comes from the Level of Yogic Deeds itself and Lama Tsong Khapa is explaining what they mean. So here, 'lazy' is probably a reference to the laziness in which you adhere to ignoble activities, in other words, a laziness which is incompatible with the cultivation of concentration.

When it mentions laziness *in one's aspirations, joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis*, this could be indicating that one is adhering to aspirations that are incompatible with concentration, making effort in things that are incompatible with concentration, having an intention with respect to things that are incompatible with concentration and analysis that is incompatible with concentration.

Similarly, in the explanation on excitement, it mentions that *"Aspiration, etc." refers to the four points explained earlier* so it could be understood in a similar way.

There's a phrase "great grasping" in the quote from the Level of Yogic Deeds, in the explanation on excitement. Here *"great grasping" is an excessive mental hold on a delightful object*. And then that leads into for instance, aspiration towards that, or joyous effort, attention, analysis and so forth towards that.

So you could have aspiration with great grasping, joyous effort with great grasping, attention with great grasping, etc.

Thus the four practices of which restraint of the sensory faculties is the first which were discussed earlier in the section on practice between meditations sessions, are important for stopping both laxity and excitement.

These are mentioned above, or the opposite of them anyway, in the quote from Asanga's Level of Yogic Deeds, where it says:

Not restraining the sensory faculties; not eating in moderation; not making an effort to practice rather than sleeping during the early and later parts of the night; ongoing lack of vigilance;

These refer to the opposite of those four. Any time we are cultivating concentration, it's important that we restrain the sensory faculties, eat in moderation, make an effort to practice rather than sleep during the early and later parts of the night and make sure we have ongoing vigilance. These four are important for stopping both laxity and excitement.

Moreover, if you recognise those causes and try to stop them, this is obviously very helpful for interrupting laxity and excitement. Therefore, use vigilance to notice even subtle laxity and excitement. You should stop laxity and excitement in every possible way, not tolerating them in any form. Maitreya's Separation of the Middle from the Extremes says that failing to do this is a fault of concentration called "non-application."

Some may gradually give up, thinking, "Slight excitement and distraction persist even though I cut them off at the outset, so I shall not cut them off." Or if laxity and excitement are not strong and do not persist for long periods, they may think, "Since they are weak and of brief duration, I do not accumulate karma. So I do not need to cut them off." Those who think this way and fail to apply themselves to the elimination of these hindrances do not know the right way to achieve concentration, yet pretend that they do. They deceive those who aspire to concentration,

Lama Tsong Khapa says that their ideas are not correct. They might think that they are, but they're not. Their ideas are not accurate ... *for their approach places them outside the tradition of methods for attaining concentration laid down by teachers such as the venerable Maitreya.*

Moreover, in terms of counteracting laxity and excitement, at the outset you will most often be interrupted by excitement and distraction, so strive to eliminate them. If, by working on this, you stop gross excitement and distraction, then you will get a little bit of stability; at this point, make an effort to guard against laxity. If you are on guard against laxity with a heightened awareness, then excitement—more subtle than before—may again interrupt your stability. So strive to eliminate this; if you do stop it, then stability will increase. Then laxity will again arise, so try to eliminate laxity.

In summary, withdraw your mind from scattering and excitement, inwardly fixing it upon the object of meditation, and seek stability. Each time stability occurs, take great precautions against laxity and bring forth a vivid intensity. You will achieve flawless concentration by alternating between these two. Do not expect to attain stability by means of mere limpidity, which lacks the vividness that goes along with an intense way of apprehending the object.

The next section is entitled:

What to do when laxity and excitement are absent

By continuing to meditate after eliminating even subtle laxity and excitement, as explained above, your mind will enter a state of equipoise that is free from the imbalances of either laxity or excitement. [526] At this point, it is a fault of concentration to apply or exert yourself, so cultivate equanimity as a remedy for this.

This occurs on the eighth and ninth stages of mental abiding, doesn't it.

Kamalasila's second Stages of Meditation says:

When laxity and excitement have gone and you see that your attention is calmly remaining on the object of meditation, relax effort and abide in equanimity; then remain this way for as long as you please.

Question: How can it be that applying yourself, or making an effort, turns into a problem?

Reply: Through meditation, turning your attention inward when your mind is excited and stimulating your mind when it is lax, you gain confidence that laxity and excitement will not occur during each suitable meditation session. At this point you are still extremely wary of laxity and excitement, just as at the outset. Sustaining this is the problem. Your mind will become distracted, so at that time you must know to relax, as stated in Kamalasila's second and third Stages of Meditation: "If you exert yourself

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when your mind has entered a state of equipoise, then your mind will be distracted." This entails relaxing the effort, but not sacrificing the intensity of the way you apprehend your object.

You must know how to relax once you reach that state. But you do not, at that time, sacrifice the intensity of the way that you apprehend the object. By the time you reach the eighth and ninth stages of mental abiding, laxity and excitement are no longer a danger, they're no longer a risk. Since you've reached a point at which laxity and excitement are no longer a danger, there's no need to exert yourself in trying to prevent them, and actually to make effort to prevent them at a time when there's no danger of them occurring, is a fault. Thus, at that time you must know how to relax that exertion, that effort.

But although you don't need that effort at this stage, that's not to say that you should sacrifice the way you apprehend the object. You must retain the way of apprehending the object. The point is this: do not mistake relaxing effort or exertion for sacrificing the way that you apprehend the object.

Therefore, this cultivation of equanimity is not to be done every time laxity and excitement are absent, but once you have reduced the force of laxity and excitement; for when you have not done so, there is no equanimity.

This uses some antiquated words, but it means that when you develop that self-assurance that laxity and excitement are no longer a danger, that is the time to cultivate equanimity, not before. As we'll see later, and as is depicted in the chart, the remedy for non-application is application and the remedy for over-application is non-application. Here though, the remedy of non-application does refer to cultivating equanimity.

We're referring to a very specific time period though. The cultivation of this type of equanimity is not done every time you try to achieve calm abiding. It occurs in a time at which there is no laxity or excitement, but during the fourth, fifth, sixth etc mental stages, although the meditation may be going well and laxity and excitement may not be present, that is still not the time to cultivate equanimity.

The reason for this is that you have not yet achieved the self-assurance that laxity and excitement are no longer a danger. Or you have not attained, as they say, this confidence or bravery that occurs once you know these two are no longer a danger.

Question: What sort of equanimity is this?

This is the way that westerners, talk isn't it? "OK, OK, you've been talking about equanimity. What is this equanimity anyway?" Perhaps Lama Tsong Khapa taught this text for westerners? [laughter].

[Reply:] Generally, three types of equanimity are taught: (1) the feeling of impartiality, (2) the impartiality that is one among the four immeasurables, and (3) equanimity with respect to application. This is equanimity with respect to application.

We know this feeling of equanimity - neutrality, a feeling that is neither pleasure nor suffering.

There are four immeasurables, aren't there? What is equanimity?

Student: May all sentient beings be without attachment and aversion, closeness and distance, amongst one another.

Geshela: Between attachment and aversion is equanimity. Why might that be? Attachment and aversion act as two causes, leading to closeness and distance. You have this balance or equality in terms of closeness and distance and hence equanimity. This is what we need to equalise, the feeling of closeness and distance, so that one is equal and balanced with respect to lacking closeness and distance towards all sentient beings.

Attachment and anger will arise from time to time but then they dissipate and go away, don't they. But at a time when you don't have anger or attachment, that doesn't mean that you have equanimity. For equanimity there must also be no difference in the closeness and distance that you feel towards all sentient beings.

Then you have the equanimity with respect to application. That's what we're talking about here. Three types of equanimity. In this content we're talking of the third, equanimity with respect to application.

Its nature is to be understood in accordance with this passage from Asanga's Sravaka Levels'.

What is equanimity? As your mind attends to objects of meditation associated with calm abiding and insight, it is focusing with calm settling, spontaneous mental engagement, a sense of mental well-being, effortless mental functioning after becoming serviceable, and a mental balance free from the afflictions.

[Interpreter: when it says “calm settling”, it's probably more accurate ... “natural settling”]

There are a few different features mentioned here. It settles naturally. It's spontaneous. It is accompanied by a sense of mental wellbeing. There's effortless mental functioning once the mind has become serviceable and a mental balance that is free from the afflictions.

When you achieve such equanimity—on those occasions when laxity and excitement are absent as you cultivate concentration— stay with this equanimity and let your mind rest without exerting strong effort. The signs of this sort of attention are described in the same text:

What are the signs of equanimity? The object of meditation places your mind in equanimity; your mind is not overflowing with excessive joyous perseverance with respect to the object of meditation.

The time for cultivating equanimity is also set forth in that text:

When is the time for equanimity? In terms of calm abiding and insight, when your mind is free of laxity and excitement.

The above explanations of the method for developing flawless concentration are in accord with the venerable Maitreya's teachings in the Separation of the Middle from the Extremes:

*Staying with that joyous perseverance,
Your mind becomes serviceable, and you attain all goals.
This occurs as a result of eliminating the five faults
And relying on the eight antidotes.
The five faults are laziness,
Forgetting the instructions,
Laxity and excitement,
Non-application, and application.
The eight antidotes are the basis, that based on it,
The cause, the effect,
Not forgetting the object of meditation,
Recognizing laxity and excitement,
Application to eliminate them,
And calmly stabilizing your mind when they have been quelled.*

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Here we have a list but we've already discussed the meaning of the things referred to in this quote, haven't we?

In those verses, "Staying with that" refers to keeping up the output of joyous effort for the sake of dispelling unfavorable conditions. With this, a concentration in which your mind is serviceable arises. Moreover, since this is the foundation, or basis, of supernormal powers which achieve all goals—superknowledge and so forth—you attain all goals.

What do you do to develop such concentration? It develops as a result of using the eight antidotes in order to eliminate the five faults, which are mentioned above.

Well, we all know what the five faults and eight applications are now. The chart was handed out, so everyone should be clear about what these five faults and eight applications are.

These are the five faults: at the time of preparation, laziness is a fault because you do not apply yourself at concentration. When you are working at concentration, forgetting the instructions is a fault because when you forget the object upon which you were instructed to meditate, your mind is not set in equipoise upon the object of meditation. When it is set in meditative equipoise, laxity and excitement are faults because they make your mind unserviceable. When laxity and excitement occur, lack of effort [that is non-application] is a fault because it does not quell those two. When laxity and excitement are absent, the fault is the intention of application. Kamalasila's three Stages of Meditation point out that there are five faults if laxity and excitement are treated as one, six if they are listed separately.

Geshela is thinking to leave his commentary there. If there are any questions, Geshela is happy to address them.

Student: When Lama Tsong Khapa was talking about the objects of meditation for purifying behaviour, he mentioned that if a person is dominated by discursive thought, then that person should meditate on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. How do you actually apply these instructions? Do you continue to meditate on the breath until you're not dominated by discursive thoughts, so it's no longer a problem – no matter how long that takes, be it six months or 10 years? Or does he mean that we should begin each meditation session by meditating on the inhalation and exhalation of breath until the mind is stabilised and then go on to, for instance, focus on the image of a buddha?

Geshela: The text doesn't actually address this clearly. If Geshela were to express his understanding of it, then he would guess that it's probably not encouraging you to meditate until discursive thought is no longer a problem whatsoever. Rather it is instructing you to do this (meditate on the breath) in order to temporarily quell discursive thought so that it's manageable, and then proceed. What you'd need to do is to prepare the object upon which you're going to meditate in your efforts to achieve calm abiding as well as to deal with the particular behaviour that troubles you. Perhaps the emphasis would be on applying the antidote to the behaviour (or affliction) that gives you the most trouble and then, once the mind is relatively clear, you could go on to focus on the object for achieving calm abiding that you have prepared.

As you meditate, to try to achieve calm abiding, it may be that discursive thought or another affliction begins to trouble you in that meditation. In that case you could shift to apply the antidote to that and perhaps you would alternate between the two approaches. Thus in the beginning your emphasis would be on quelling the affliction or behaviour that creates the problem for you so that you're then in a position to go on to try and cultivate calm abiding. Then even while you're cultivating calm abiding and you encounter problems, you would apply the antidote to that and then come back.

It's probably more about an alternation between the two rather than waiting to cultivate calm abiding until the problem or discursive thought is no longer an issue whatsoever. You don't wait until you've completely gotten rid of it.

Generally these instructions on purifying behaviour and purifying the afflictions etc are preliminaries. But you would also incorporate them and apply the antidotes to them as you're cultivating concentration.

These techniques are analytical meditations. If you are troubled by attachment for instance, you meditate on what they call ugliness, ie unpleasant aspects of the human body etc, and to do that you have to analyse a great deal. Even the breathing meditation for someone who is troubled by discursive thought, involves analytical meditation: the breath is going out, the breath is coming in. These techniques really don't amount to stabilising the mind on a single focus. Once the problems subside somewhat, it's at that time that you would turn your attention to the focal support that you had prepared.

As you go along, the difficulties associated with discursive thought or other afflictions would decrease, while your ability to direct the mind towards the object increases. This is what is likely to happen.

Geshela: I hope! [laughs]

Student: Here vigilance is explained as that which recognises laxity and excitement. But also in our own experience, when we recognise anger or attachment, is it vigilance that is doing that?

Yes you could say that vigilance recognises those things and watches to see if they occur. Here, we only talked about laxity and excitement; there's no mention of something like anger. That might be because at this point, it's difficult for anger to occur; the occurrence of anger would be rather rare. You're talking about a person who has gone off to a secluded place, and who is trying to seclude themselves from discursive thought and all sorts of different ideas. It's less likely, more rare, for anger to occur, but easier for attachment to occur. Hence they talk about excitement (a derivative of attachment) and laxity and there is no discussion of anger. But in general, vigilance can be considered the thing that recognises any source of distraction.

Vigilance must know when you have either lost the focus of mindfulness or are drawing near to losing the focus of mindfulness. It's vigilance that must know this. Our vigilance must be capable of knowing the strength of our mindfulness and whether it's on the verge of declining and so forth.