



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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We will continue to talk about direct yogic perception or awareness which is one of the four direct perceptions. What are the attributes of direct yogic perception, what do you need for it to be direct yogic perception?

Calm abiding and special insight, non-conceptual, non-mistaken, directly understands emptiness and selflessness of person. To recap, yogic perception arises causally from the union of calm abiding and shamata (special insight). It is something we aspire to as it is the direct antidote to negative emotions. Whenever someone develops it they become an Arya or transcendent being, yet they may remain the same physically in that lifetime. Exterior appearance does not determine who is an Arya or ordinary being.

Q: What is other-knowing?

A: We need to go back to self-awareness. It is mind's own ability to understand itself. We have different minds and whenever a mind is at work its ability to know itself or something out there is self-awareness or self-cognition. According to the second school of thought self-awareness in the mental continuum in a Buddha is not yogic direct perception. Buddhas are Arya beings, and by definition all Arya beings have yogic direct perception, but according to this school self-awareness in the Buddha's mind is not yogic direct perception. Why? Because self-awareness only knows the mind itself and yogic direct perception is other-knowing – mind knowing other things.

The four features or attributes of yogic direct perception:

- Calm abiding and special insight
- Understanding subtle impermanence or selflessness of person
- Mind of the Arya being
- Knowing other things

Let me elaborate further: direct visual perception of Buddhas is not yogic direct perception because it does not arise from the union of calm abiding and special insight. It necessarily arises from the visual sense faculty. Otherwise visual direct perception of Buddhas does need to have the other three of the 4 features. Self-awareness in Buddha's continuum does not meet the criteria of knowing others. Apart from that a Buddha's self-awareness as suggested by this school has the remaining three features.

Let us consider wisdom understanding selflessness of a person that a Bodhisattva on the Path of Preparation (2nd path) has. It also meets three of the four features of yogic direct perception. The fourth feature of being in the continuum of an Arya being is the exception because such a bodhisattva on the Path of Preparation is not an Arya although he/she has this knowledge which meets the other three features of yogic direct perception.

Q: What are the four extremes of nihilism and eternalism?

A: They are the extreme of being truly existent; the extreme of being not truly existent; the extreme of existing truly and not truly at the same time; the extreme of neither existing truly and nor not truly at the same time. If you believe that things exist truly or intrinsically it becomes the extreme of reification/eternalism. If you believe that things have true existence then you are on the extreme of eternalism. If you believe that things do not exist even nominally then you fall into the extreme of nihilism or annihilation. If you believe that things exist truly and that they do not exist nominally that is the extreme of both eternalism and nihilism. The extreme of neither of the two is if you believe that the absence of true existence and the absence of nominal existence themselves (i.e.: the absences) do not exist truly which becomes the fourth extreme. When you understand

emptiness of intrinsic nature/existence of a pot then you have an understanding of emptiness – the middle path that is free from these four extremes.

Are there any questions about calm abiding? Let me ask you.

What are the 5 obstacles that you need to remove for you to develop calm abiding?

Apathy

Excitement and laxity

Forgetting instructions

Non application of antidote and over application of antidote

With regard to non-application and over application of antidotes: Non application is something you apply when you are on the 8th of the nine mental placements. When you are on the 9th one you have spontaneous placement. When you are on the 8th one, your meditation/concentration will not be affected by laxity or excitement. Then you need to leave it alone (don't apply any antidote).

The Five Obstacles to Calm Abiding in Relation to Development of Bodhicitta

These 5 obstacles occur not only with regard to calm abiding but in all other practices of virtue.

For example, bodhicitta could also be compromised by these five obstacles. Initial apathy, not wanting to try and develop bodhicitta, would be the first obstacle. Forgetting instruction does not mean forgetting advice from your guru but has a specific reference to forgetting the object of meditation. In the context of bodhicitta it would mean not holding the two goals of bodhicitta – firstly, attaining Buddhahood and secondly, doing so for the sake of other beings. In your meditation if these two aspirations, to attain Buddhahood and to be of service to other beings, are missing it would constitute forgetting the instructions.

If when meditating on bodhicitta your mind does not have an efficient hold on the object; if the mind is present on the object but it has a very inefficient presence – that would be meditation on bodhicitta affected by laxity.

While meditating on bodhicitta if all of a sudden your mind is stolen by an object of attachment such as people or material possessions – if the mind is distracted – this is meditation being affected by excitement.

The fourth fault would be not to apply respective antidotes to different obstacles that occur in your meditation and thereby allowing your meditation on bodhicitta to suffer ruin by laxity or excitement.

The 5th obstacle would be over-application of antidotes and it would occur for instance when your mind is resting peacefully on bodhicitta and another virtuous thought crops up which has an object other than bodhicitta. Let alone negative thoughts even virtuous thoughts would amount to undue application of antidotes. In this way these five drawbacks or obstacles can interfere with all manner of virtuous undertakings.

They have 8 antidotes. What are they?

Antidotes to apathy are faith, aspiration, joyous application or effort and pliancy.

Let us relate these to the first obstacle with regard to bodhicitta. If one suffers from lack of drive to want to develop bodhicitta that apathy would be overcome when you develop faith or interest upon seeing the many enlightening virtues or benefits of developing bodhicitta. Once you develop interest naturally aspiration would follow. You would want to seek it and have it in your mind and thus, you would have the aspiration. With aspiration you will be stirred to apply yourself to developing bodhicitta/universal altruism. When you apply yourself there is no sense of duty but rather a sense of joy in developing bodhicitta. As you feel this boundless joy in applying yourself to develop bodhicitta after a while it will lead to physical and mental pliancy.

I wanted to help you identify the many obstacles you may encounter when trying to develop any virtue and in particular bodhicitta, to reiterate the great importance of identifying and overcoming the five obstacles which will invariably occur initially when you want to do any practice. Try to know them well so that they are at your fingertips, but also so that you have the strategies to address these obstacles. As I have pointed out for the practice of any virtue we need to be free of these five obstacles.

Mental dullness and excitement: Laxity in meditation happens as a result of withdrawing the mind too much inwardly on the object of meditation. Excitement is a mental factor which is getting drawn away by an object of attachment. Both are of two types: gross and subtle. For example, you are practicing calm abiding choosing

the Buddha as your object of concentration; that concentration would be said to be disturbed or affected by gross or coarse laxity if it has a feature of stability but lacks clarity/ intensity of apprehension.

That concentration would be said to be disturbed by subtle laxity when it has stability and clarity but lacks total apprehension. There is stability, the mind is set on the object, the object appears quite clearly but something is amiss and that is the total intensity for optimum apprehension of the object by the mind is lacking.

What is meant by tightness of apprehension or optimum apprehension? Let me explain this by way of an example or analogy. If two mates meet and they talk about the usual things, when they do this one is talking and one is listening. The one who is listening hears something but does not pay total attention to what the friend is talking about. But when they share a matter of great urgency for one or both of them, not only does the speaker speak earnestly but the listener also listens intently.

In this context we need to make a distinction between laxity and fogginess of the mind. Prior to Lama Je Tsong Khapa the two were considered the same but foggy-mindedness is now considered to be the coarse form of laxity and not one and the same with both types of laxity. Fogginess refers to some kind of weight on the body and on the mind while the person is applying himself/herself to a practice and physically and mentally they feel fatigued.

What we need to remember is what is meant by subtle laxity and how it is very hard to identify when you are in your concentration meditation. It is mentioned in the past that many people have wasted their life thinking that they have achieved concentration or calm abiding when in fact they had a kind of concentration that was surreptitiously affected by subtle laxity and yet the person was totally unaware. The two are easily confused. A concentration affected by subtle laxity could be mistaken to be the real concentration because when you have that degree of concentration with stability and clarity but not optimum clarity, with a fraction of clarity is missing, you can stay in concentration for many days and at that time even breathing through the nostrils stops. If a meditation affected by subtle laxity is continued then it will lead to forgetfulness, gradual blinding of your sense of discrimination, discerning quality and ultimately it will lead to a rebirth in the animal realm.

Just a caution: before the arrival in Tibet of Lama Je Tsong Khapa many meditators spent their lives thinking they were doing single-pointed concentration when they were in fact engaged in meditation affected by subtle laxity. He came and said that such meditation is wrong and not healthy and he proved them wrong citing the Indian sources of Bodhisattva Bhumi, Mahayanasutraalamkara and The Middle Stages of Meditation by Kamalashila.

There used to be a saying among meditators: the best meditation is relaxed, meaning on the 8th of the 9 stages of mental placement, it is a matter of skilful fine tuning. You need to tighten concentration to such a point that it does not lead to subtle excitement. If you tighten it any more than that it will lead to subtle excitement. If out of anxiety that you have tightened too much, you then start to relax, you need to relax to a point where it won't sink into subtle laxity. It calls for a very skilful fine tuning of the tension needed for it to be the real concentration.

When do you think we need to loosen and tighten concentration? There are nine stages of mental placement. At the beginning one needs to tighten concentration rather than loosen. At the 4th and 5th stage you need to do both. At the 8th and 9th stage one needs to loosen more.

When you are at the 8th stage of mental placement your concentration is free of laxity and excitement and therefore you need to let go of the armour of antidotes.

Let me reiterate again: Of nine mental settings the difference between the first (setting the mind) and second mental settings is the duration of fixation or stability. Between the 2nd (continued setting) and 3rd (resetting or patched setting) the difference lies in the length of distraction that occurs during these two stages. The difference between the 3rd and the 4th (close setting) is loss of object of concentration. You lose it during the 3rd but during the 4th setting you don't lose it, you don't forget instructions. The difference between the 4th and 5th is occurrence of coarse laxity. That means one is susceptible to an attack of coarse laxity during the 4th. During the 5th mental setting there is no coarse laxity, rather it will be subtle laxity. The difference between the 5th and 6th is a sense of wariness of concentration being affected by subtle laxity, that is on the fifth placement you are very conscious and anxious that your concentration may be disturbed by laxity. There is less wariness during the 6th. The difference between the 6th and 7th (extremely pacified setting) is a sense of wariness or anxiety

whether the concentration is disturbed by subtle excitement; a greater degree on the sixth. The difference between the 7th and 8th mental setting is presence or absence of laxity or excitement. The two occur during the 7th setting but not during the eighth. The difference between the eighth and ninth is the need to make effort. On the eighth effort is required and on the ninth no effort is needed.

You need to keep applying antidotes to laxity and excitement. You need a tight hold of the object of concentration and that is maintained by the antidotes.

Since subtle laxity can mislead someone to think that they have developed fully fledged concentration whilst they have not there are five ways of overcoming this.

1. The first method is to simply tighten concentration because laxity occurs when the meditator relaxes their attention on the object. This relaxation leads to subtle laxity. The first approach is to simply tighten and to see if that helps.
2. The second way is to change the object of concentration; to put aside the object of concentration that you have fixed the mind on. Instead you think of uplifting topics like altruism, universal compassion, celebration of human existence, what it means to have this life and how it offers a great opportunity for spiritual growth. When you think about the positive side of life, bodhicitta and so on it will boost the morale of your mind and that helps.
3. You have not left the session and you are in session but you have switched the object of mental engagement. If that does not help, then try the non-duality of space and mind approach. Imagine that your mind is at your heart in the form of white light rays, a small ball of white light. Then say PHEM and imagine your mind ejects from your crown aperture and shoots into space. You imagine that the light which is your mind merges with the expanse of space and they become non-dual.
4. If that does not help then get up from your meditation room or cave. You need to do something that will overcome fogginess of the mind which is the cause of laxity. You can sprinkle cold water on the face or go to the hill tops where there is a gentle breeze and a commanding view of the valley below. Whatever practise you do and whenever you think your practice is marred by laxity, you can take recourse to these antidotes. These approaches are not limited to overcoming laxity in your concentration meditation. You can do them with any obstacles to practice.
5. Excitement and slight agitation is a mental factor where the mind is now on the verge of being captivated or drawn by an object of desire and attachment.

Excitement has coarse and subtle forms. You experience subtle excitement when your mind is focussed on the object of concentration but it is about to be attracted by an object of desire. You don't lose the object of meditation. The mind is focussed and there is some clarity, but the mind is now about to be attracted by an object of desire. The 7th mental setting is called the extremely or highly pacified setting. It is called this because it addresses the problem of subtle excitement.

Coarse excitement takes place when your mind has moved off the object of concentration to the object of desire. A slight modification: It is not that the mind has moved off the object but that the mind has experienced strong desire. You can't say the mind has moved off because when you are on the 4th setting you don't lose the object of concentration.

A distinction has to be made between excitement and distraction. Excitement in this context of calm abiding is considered a mind of desire. It is part of attachment or desire. Distraction could be either negative or positive. Obviously when you are concentrating on the object and something provokes your mind and anger creeps in the anger draws the mind away. On the positive side when concentrating on the image of the Buddha, the chosen object, if a sense of compassion – whilst highly worthwhile – were to become the focus of your mind and it grows, although it is positive it is a distraction.

Since an excited mind is part of desire, and desire is one mind that keeps us all in mundane existence, you need to tame that mind and for that you need to bring the mind down to earth. For that you need to think about the painful realities of mundane existence. That is, think about the vulnerable side to our life which is extremely perishable, coming to an end sooner or later, and also think about the many forms of suffering that underlie mundane life. If you think about the dark side of mundane existence then excitement will be gradually removed.

If such a switch of the object of mental engagement does not help, then you need to take recourse to coercive methods and that is breathing meditation. Rather than focussing on the object of concentration you concentrate

on breathing. When you breathe in you think ‘now I am breathing in’ and when you breathe out you think ‘now I am breathing out’ and that is one cycle. Do up to 7 cycles of breath or even more. If you keep counting up to 21 cycles and if your mind has remained single-pointedly on counting of the breath, it could incidentally be said that you have achieved the second of the nine settings (continued setting).

Six Forces to Develop Calm Abiding

Once coarse and subtle laxities are overcome then we need to talk about how concentration is achieved by 6 forces and four types of attention.

The first mental setting is achieved by *hearing* the information from reliable sources. The second setting is achieved by force of *contemplation*, having had the necessary information it is time to contemplate. The third and the fourth mental settings are achieved by the force of *mindfulness*. The fifth and sixth settings are accomplished and developed by the force of *introspection*. The seventh and eighth are developed by the force of *joyous effort*. The ninth setting is achieved by the power of *familiarity*.

We need to hear, contemplate and have a strong mindfulness, as well as a sense of introspection. In all these you need to make continued effort joyfully. If you keep doing these then you have done nothing but familiarise yourself with the object. Consequently these processes will lead to the ninth setting.

Four Attentions to Achieve Calm Abiding

There are four types of attention used to achieve the nine mental settings. The 1st and 2nd setting are achieved by *intense attention*. The middle five mental settings from 3rd to 7th are achieved through *interrupted attention*. The 8th mental setting is achieved by *continuous attention or uninterrupted attention*. The 9th mental setting is achieved by *spontaneous attention*.

In this way I have presented a synopsis of processes by which you can develop shine/calm abiding. Obviously if you want to study it more in depth a lot of material is available in the Lam Rim Stages of the Path, and other Buddhist resources.