



Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

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Lorig-Mind training

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Redefine your motivation to achieve the highest Buddhahood so that in time you are able to help all sentient beings whose number is as vast as space and who have been your mothers in the past. Think that to this end I will participate in this discourse.

Tonight I am going to talk about how to achieve calm abiding by way of overcoming obstructions and applying antidotes.

However first we need to talk about yogic direct perception.

How many direct perceptions are there?

Four; namely sense direct perception, mental direct perception, yogic direct perception, self awareness direct perception.

Definition of direct cognition/perception (doesn't have to be *valid* direct perception): non-conceptual and non-mistaken. The definition has these two features.

There is a difference between non mistaken and non perception. Direct cognitions are not mistaken as to their object. Invalid could include a lot of awarenesses.

Yogic direct perception has four criteria:

1. It has calm abiding and special insight as its main conditions. A main condition is almost like the cause. For example, visual consciousness has the main condition of the eye organ/eye sense base.
 2. It directly understands either subtle impermanence or selflessness of person.
 3. It is only in the mental continuum of Arya beings.
 4. It is other-knowing as opposed to self-knowing.
- Yogic direct perception must fulfil these four criteria.

Currently we have a 'presumption' of selflessness of person. We don't have direct understanding of selflessness. It is a nascent idea of selflessness. As we get Buddhist teaching on selflessness of all phenomena and of person, and as we meditate on the reasonings explaining why we as a person do not have intrinsic or true existence, new light is shed on the hazy idea of selflessness we have had. As we reflect on the reasonings clarity will intensify and our understanding becomes inferential valid cognition.

Such cognition is valid because it is inferential and thus conceptual.

That inferential valid cognition is mistaken about selflessness of person. If we further familiarise ourselves with inferential valid cognition of selflessness of person without removing yourself from supportive or conducive conditions such as keeping pure ethics, developing a warm relationship with the spiritual mentor, gathering necessary merits, clearing away delusive obstructions, then the clarity of that inferential valid cognition will enhance so much that it will become 'direct' valid cognition of selflessness of person.

Inferential valid cognition can achieve the ultimate degree of clarity with regard to its object, selflessness of person, because it has two things: a stable base and the feature of not needing a fresh effort (through meditation) to attain the same degree of understanding through meditation.

Ultimate clarity is synonymous with yogic direct perception. Your inferential cognition or understanding of selflessness of person keeps getting clearer and clearer until it becomes yogic direct perception once it has removed the final and thinnest veil of conceptuality. When you have achieved this ultimate clarity

/realization of selflessness of person then you have achieved yogic direct cognition/awareness. This is the antidote only to our artificially formed conception of self of a person.

Conception of self of a person means the belief that I as a person have an intrinsic nature. This is so deeply entrenched into our thinking that unless we have a very potent annihilating antidote it won't be overcome. With the development of fresh yogic direct perception, the coarser level of conception of self of person which is artificially acquired is eradicated. As effort is maintained this keeps nipping at the layers of conception of self as a person and gradually it will nip away at innately formed concept of self of person.

Yogic direct perception is crucial for our emancipation from suffering because all our suffering of body and mind emanates from desire and hatred due to which we do various actions which are invariably negative. Desire and hate arise from the fundamental misconception about one's person, about who one exactly is. When one does not understand, this confusion will keep arising. While it is a very powerful antidote to the conception of self of a person, unless yogic direct perception has got a reliable, dependable, stable base, it won't be effective in its task of eradicating that misconception. It is for this reason yogic direct perception as of necessity must have calm abiding and special insight as its main condition. Calm abiding is a vital component.

Calm Abiding

Calm abiding has the function of serene single-pointed presence on the object. Special insight has the function of analysing the nature and attributes of the object.

How to achieve calm abiding? First we need to realise that it comes from its own causes and factors

6 Causes:

1. To live in an agreeable environment. This means a physical environment that does not have a threat to one's life in terms of wild beasts, gangs of thugs, and of being free from people who have broken their moral ethics.
2. Be a person of few needs and wants. This means being somebody who can make do with limited resources.
3. Contentment. It is quite plain: to be happy with what one has got and not seeking more.
4. Being ethical. This means that if one is ordained, then one is a person who keeps the vows of ordination purely. If one is not ordained one can still be ethical by refraining from the 10 negative actions.
5. To be free from many concerns and appointments.
6. To be free from discursive thoughts of desire and so on.

These are the 6 prerequisites needed to develop calm abiding enumerated by Maitreya. But Vasubandhu mentions two causes in Abidharmakosha, the Treasury of Knowledge:

1. Being physically free from hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan lifestyle.
2. Being mentally free from discursive thoughts.

You need to meet these prerequisites, conditions and causes before you achieve calm abiding.

Posture

The 7 or 8 point posture that I described last time is quite crucial as it helps avert fatigue if you were doing the practice of meditation for any length of time. Secondly, it is by maintaining these postures that in the past the great Aryas and Arahats achieved calm abiding. Speaking from a physiological point of view, tantra says, if you maintain a correct posture it will help straighten the nervous system and channels. If they are straight the energy will flow smoothly which promotes efficiency of mind.

The above are the behaviours required to achieve calm abiding.

The above are the behavioural aspects and requirements of effort to achieve calm abiding. What follows are the mental requirements.

Mental action to develop calm abiding

What do we focus our mind on to develop calm abiding?

Whilst you can choose any object to focus the mind on, teachings suggest the image of the Buddha, or syllables or the red and white drops. Of these the tradition of lam rim is to choose the image of the Buddha as the object of one's calm abiding for it has many side benefits.

When you choose this there are 3 ways to go about it:

1. Visualise an image of the Buddha not too high, not too low, not too far, not too close, but at the right distance, at the level of one's forehead.
2. Recall the field of merit that contains the Buddha. Buddha is the central figure of a cluster of sublime beings that form the field of merit. Imagine that he projects a replica of himself that enters you from your crown aperture and takes a seat in the central channel at the heart level of your chest or at the naval point.
3. Generate yourself into an image of the Buddha. Dissolve your human form into the pure state of emptiness. From there your mind that understands emptiness, emerges or arises as Buddha and you choose that as your object of meditation.

When we say visualise it means not look at the object and then practice meditation. It means to bring the chosen object before your mind's eye and focus the mind sharply on it to the point where the mind becomes dissolved into the object itself. Imagine that your mind has fused with the Buddha. This creates a positive dependent arising.

In the beginning when you focus your mind on the image, obviously despite your best efforts the image will not appear clearly to the mind. It will be an opaque yellow presence, maybe the limbs of the Buddha and the main body appears but without much clarity. Don't get too anxious and worried about it but be happy that you have something before you. In subsequent sessions you need to focus on the same object and not shift. Shifting will undermine anything that has been achieved already. This is similar to the need to stay put and focus when starting fire with friction. When you want to make a fire you have to keep rubbing on the same place and not try here and there. If you do this the friction will cause ignition.

Obstacles

This is crucial for three reasons. If you are not free of these hindrances you have a reluctance to get started. Even if you do start, not being free of these obstacles means that you will not be on the right track. Finally if you are not free of these you may achieve a half-hearted calm abiding, not a complete one. The need to overcome the obstacles is therefore important.

The five obstacles are:

1. Apathy.

If someone is given to this the person will not apply themselves to do anything, never mind calm abiding. In this context it means having a lack of drive and enthusiasm for attempting calm abiding. It is a difficult one and it has 8 antidotes that Maitreya Buddha has spelt out in his Distinction of the Middle from the Extreme

Antidotes:

1. Faith. It means strong interest in calm abiding in the knowledge that all higher spiritual realisations are necessarily grounded in the stable foundation of calm abiding. Once that knowledge is gained, then you develop a drive for it.
2. Aspiration. Driven by interest you begin to seek and aspire to develop calm abiding.
3. Joyous effort or enthusiastic perseverance.

It is a strong enthusiasm and delight in developing calm abiding.

4. Pliancy or suppleness, physical and mental. There comes a time when the more you practice the better you feel physically and mentally rather than feeling fatigued by prolonged meditation. Something happens to the body and mind whereby they are in a perfect state of well-being. What happened to us that we have not managed to achieve calm abiding? It could be that we have not overcome the first obstacle, apathy, for which you need the above four antidotes.

2. Forgetting instructions.

This does not mean the usual instructions from the guru. Here it means losing the object of calm abiding. You spend time selecting the best object and you focus your mind initially on it; but when you go back to it in subsequent sessions you change the object to something else, doing away with the first one, then that amounts to forgetting the instructions.

Antidote to forgetting instructions:

5. Mindfulness. What is it in this context? An analogy would be useful: you have a horse that you tie to a pillar. The pillar is like the object of concentration and the horse is your mind and the rope is mindfulness. It ties the mind to the object.

3. Mental dullness and excitement or mental laxity and excitement

Together they form one obstacle. There are two of each, coarse and subtle. Laxity means inefficient presence of the mind on the object. When the mind has been on the object for a considerable length of time efficiency decreases and the mind is there but it is very dull in its function in terms of engaging with the object. It is almost like something between sleeping and waking awareness. Excitement has a connotation of intrusion of objects from the outside. The mind's attention has been drawn by an object of attachment or desire out there and the mind wanders off to it.

6. Introspection. This is a mental factor that keeps an eye on whether the concentration is being affected by either dullness or excitement.

4. Non-application of antidote

That means not applying the respective antidotes to dullness and excitement when they have cropped up in your meditation. When one remains apathetic and negligent and fails to evict them it becomes a non-application and this then becomes an obstacle in itself.

7. Awareness to apply the antidote.

5. Over-application of antidote when not needed.

When your concentration experiences plain sailing with regard to its object then becoming too worried, thinking, 'Am I all right and is my mind well on the object'. It is better to leave it.

8. Equanimity: leave the mind performing efficiently by itself and do not apply any other antidote. If you are at this stage of obstacle then you have achieved a very high level of concentration.

With this I have explained briefly the causes, objects, body posture, obstacles, and antidotes with regard to calm abiding. Whilst apathy is the worst at the beginning, in the middle the worst obstacles are laxity and excitement. They need a great deal of attention and care and so I will spend some time on how to address these two problems. What does it mean that you achieve calm abiding? It will lend so much strength to and boost the power of your practice exponentially. Even if you reach the fourth of nine mental placements that alone would make a huge difference to the quality and power of your practice.