

Dharma Essentials Course III: Applied Meditation
Readings Three and Four

Readings Three and Four:
The Five Problems of Meditation, the Eight Corrections, and the
Nine States of Meditation

The following is a translation of a special chart on the stages of meditation designed by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche (1901-1981), tutor to His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, and Root Lama of Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin. (For the chart, see *Appendix Two*.)

It has been spoken that each and every high spiritual quality of all three ways is a result of meditation, either in the form of quietude (*shamatha*), or some state which is close to it. The benefits of meditation are many, beginning with the fact that—once you have attained quietude—then any virtuous practice you undertake becomes extremely powerful. It is an absolute necessity, and so attaining the state of quietude is extremely important for any deep practitioner who really hopes to reach freedom.

And here is how to do it. A meditator must first seek out all six of the conditions that support the attempt to reach quietude. Then they should acquaint themselves with the five obstacles to one-pointed concentration; these are explained, in Lord Maitreya's work entitled *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes*, as not feeling like meditating, losing the object, dullness and agitation, failing to take action, and taking action when there is no need to do so.

The corrections for the first of these obstacles are a deep belief in the benefits of meditation, a strong desire to master it, the physical and mental pleasure of a person who gets good at meditation, and the hard work needed to get good at it.

The correction for the second obstacle is to bring the mind back to the object. The correction for the third problem is watchfulness, and the correction for the fourth is taking the necessary action. The correction for the fifth problem is to leave well enough alone. Thus one must attain quietude through undertaking eight different corrective actions.

It is further stated that—if you come to understand how these can be divided into nine mental states, and how these in turn are achieved through six different powers and grouped into four modes of focus—then you can quite easily attain a state of single-pointed concentration which is perfect.

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The text called *The Essence of the Middle Way* includes a verse that says,

Master the elephant of the mind
Step by step, as follows:
He wants to go the wrong way,
So be sure to tie him to the stake
Of the object of your meditation
With a strong rope made of bringing
The mind back to your object;
Then finally use the iron hook
Of your wisdom to take control.

Here the process of learning to meditate is being compared to the way in which you tame a wild elephant, and this is the point of the illustration above. Here I will give you just a rough explanation of each of the steps you see here.

The nine mental states are as follows: setting the mind on the object; keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity; keeping the mind on the object with patches where you lose the object; maintaining the mind tightly on the object; controlling the mind; quieting the mind; completely quieting the mind; attaining single-pointedness; and reaching deep meditation.

Here is how you use the six powers to attain these nine states. The first of the states is attained through the power of learning the instructions for meditation from your Lama. The second is reached through the power of contemplating these instructions. You achieve the third and fourth mental states through the power of bringing your mind back to the object. The fifth and sixth are attained by the power of watchfulness. The seventh and eighth you bring about through the power of effort, and the ninth with the power of complete habituation.

Here is how these nine are grouped into four different modes of focus. During the first and second mental states, you focus by forcefully concentrating the mind. Over the course of the middle five states, you focus in a stream, but with interruptions. In the eighth mental state you focus in an uninterrupted stream, and during the ninth you focus on the object completely effortlessly.

The final result of attaining these nine states, one by one, is that you reach an unshakeable state of physical and mental meditative pleasure. Simultaneous to achieving this pleasure, you attain a state of quietude which is taken in by the

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preparatory stage of the first concentration level, [which is the meditative platform needed to see emptiness directly.]

Suppose that, after achieving quietude in the way described above, you go on to meditate one-pointedly upon the profound worldview of the middle way, reaching a balance in your practice between the ability to analyze reality and the ability to hold your mind fixed in meditation on the conclusions gained from your analysis. This analysis will automatically enable you to reach an extraordinary level of physical and mental meditative pleasure—and it is at this point that we can say you have attained the special insight into reality (*vipashyana*), in its authentic form.

If you practice these instructions correctly, then you will gain the razor-sharp sword of wisdom, a form of one-pointed concentration where quietude and special insight (*shamatha* and *vipashyana*) are married together. You can then carry this mighty sword onto the field of battle, and as time goes by smash the two great obstacles [those to achieving nirvana, and those to achieving total enlightenment]; that is, you can eliminate within you every undesirable quality. With this you will win the great victory of the four bodies of a Buddha, and find yourself able to perform enlightened deeds, constantly and spontaneously, without any conscious thought—fulfilling the hopes of every living creature, for as long as space itself endures....

The following is a list of the scenes found in the middle of the block print chart just described. [For the chart, see Appendix Two.]

[1] 1) Setting the mind on the object

[2] Bringing the mind back to the object

[3] Watchfulness

[4] The six bends in the road represent the six powers. The first represents the power of learning the instructions. Based on this, one achieves the first mental state.

[5] The elephant represents your mind, and his black color symbolizes dullness.

[6] The monkey stands for distraction, and his black color represents agitation.

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[7] The presence of the flames, and their relative size, from this point up to the seventh mental state represent the relative amount of effort needed to bring your mind back to the object, and the degree of watchfulness needed.

[8] The power of contemplating the instructions. You use this to reach the second mental state.

[9] 2) Keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity

[10] The gradual increase in the white patch from this point on, starting with the elephant's head, represents a gradual increase in the clarity and fixation of the mind.

[11] This symbol stands for the five objects of the senses, which themselves represent the various objects that agitation focuses upon.

[12] The power of bringing the mind back to the object. This allows you to attain the third and fourth mental states.

[13] 3) Keeping the mind on the object, with patches where you lose the object.

[14] Subtle dullness. From this point on, you are able to recognize the distinction between obvious and subtle dullness, and other such details.

[15] The monkey looking back represents the ability both to tell when your mind is wandering, and to re-focus it upon the object of meditation.

[16] 4) Maintaining the mind tightly on the object.

[17] The power of watchfulness. This allows you to reach the fifth and sixth mental states.

[18] Agitation is the first of the two that loses its power to appear in your mind. When you are trying to develop quietude, even allowing your mind to be distracted to a virtuous object becomes an obstacle, and you must seek to stop it. When you are doing other practices though you do not have to stop it. And so we see the monkey reaching for the fruit of a second activity.

[20] Watchfulness will not let the mind get distracted; and uplifting your heart leads you to a state of one-pointed concentration.

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[21] 5) Controlling the mind.

[22] 6) Quieting the mind.

[23] The power of effort. This allows you to reach the seventh and eighth mental states.

[24] 7) Completely quieting the mind. At this point it is difficult for even subtle forms of dullness and agitation to occur. Even if they do come, you are able to eliminate them immediately with a minimum of effort.

[25] Here the fact that the elephant has lost all the black, and left behind the monkey as well, represents your ability to engage in one-pointed concentration in an uninterrupted stream: if you apply just a little effort to bring your mind to the object and maintain watchfulness, then dullness, agitation, and distraction can no longer interrupt your meditation.

[26] 8) Attaining single-pointedness

[27] The power of complete habituation, which enables you to reach the ninth mental state

[28] 9) Reaching deep meditation

[29] Achieving quietude [*shamatha*]

[30] Physical meditative pleasure

[31] Mental meditative pleasure

[32] Special insight [*vipashyana*] and quietude [*shamatha*] marry together, focusing on emptiness, and allow you to cut the root of this suffering life.

[33] One goes on to seek the correct view of reality, with a great ability to bring the mind to the object, and to maintain watchfulness.

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The following selection is taken from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)* written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419)

The Nine States of Meditation

Here is the third division, which is a description of how one achieves the nine states of meditation using the steps explained above. Anyone who hopes to practice meditation must become proficient in these nine states; and to become proficient in them, one must know what they are. So here is an explanation of the nine states, which are called (1) placing the mind on the object; (2) placing the mind on the object with some continuity; (3) placing the mind on the object and patching the gaps; (4) placing the mind on the object closely; (5) controlling the mind; (6) pacifying the mind; (7) pacifying the mind totally; (8) making the mind single-pointed; and (9) achieving equilibrium.

Here is the first state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object." You achieve this state by means of receiving instructions from your lama about the object you should use for your meditation. The mind at this point stays on the object only from time to time, and for the most part is not fixed on the object at all: you are unable to keep your mind on the object for any continuous length of time. The two mental functions of noting and examining are present, and due to this you often lose yourself to scattering and agitation. You become aware of this condition and so you get the impression that you have even a greater problem of too many thoughts coming up to your mind than you ever had before. What's really happening though is not that you have more of these thoughts than before; it's just that you have now become aware of the problem.

Here is the second state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object with some continuity." This state is reached when you practice placing the mind on the object enough that you can now keep your mind on it for some continuous, although brief, period of time. You could say it would be like being able to keep your mind from wandering for as long as it would take to do one round of the *mani* mantra on your rosary. At this point your problem of having too many thoughts goes away for a while, and then comes back for a while, so the impression you have is that these thoughts are making a periodic resurgence. This particular state of meditation is achieved through contemplating.

During these first two states of meditation, you have an abundance of dullness and agitation, and only occasionally fix your mind on the object. Therefore at this point we say that your mind is in the first of the four mental modes, the one described as having to "concentrate to focus." During these stages, said our

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Lama, the periods of distraction last longer than the periods in which the mind is fixed on the object.

Here is the third state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object and patching the gaps." The place where you put a normal patch is a piece of cloth; here the place you put the patch is the continuation of your focus. What this means is that you catch your mind quickly after it wanders away from the object, and so "patch" the hole in the continuation. The difference between this state of meditation and the two that come before it is in the length of time you are distracted. Our Lama also noted that this is the time when you are able to develop your recollection to a high degree.

Here is the fourth state of meditation, called "placing the mind on the object closely." Since by now your recollection is highly developed, you are able to place your mind on the object of meditation in such a way that it is no longer possible to lose it completely; this then is what differentiates this state from the three before it. Even though you are succeeding in keeping the object from being lost, nonetheless dullness and agitation are present in your mind, and they are very strong. Therefore you must at this point apply the correction for dullness and agitation. These two levels, the third and fourth, are achieved by means of recollection. Our Lama noted that from this point on the power of our meditation was complete, or full-grown, like a person who has reached maturity.

Here is the fifth state of meditation, called "controlling the mind." There is a tendency during the fourth state to draw your mind too far inside, and there is a great danger that this can lead to subtle dullness. Therefore we must now develop our watchfulness to a high degree. It goes and spies on the mind, and finds something wrong; in response then we must uplift the mind by thinking over the many benefits that single-mindedness can bring to us. The difference between this state and those before it is whether or not obvious dullness can occur.

Here is the sixth state of meditation, called "pacifying the mind." The great danger at this point is that subtle agitation occurs, as a result of uplifting the mind too far while in the fifth state. Whenever this subtle agitation comes, you must raise up a powerful kind of watchfulness to detect it; realize that even very subtle agitation is a serious fault in your meditation, and stop it. What distinguishes this stage from the one before it is whether or not there is a great danger of having subtle dullness. These last two states, the fifth and the sixth, are

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achieved by means of watchfulness. From this point on, said our Lama, the power of our watchfulness is complete.

By the time you reach the seventh state of meditation, which we call "pacifying the mind totally," your recollection and watchfulness are total, and so it is unlikely that dullness and agitation are going to occur. At this point you must bring your effort up to a powerful level; see how destructive even subtle forms of dullness and agitation are, and do whatever you can to eliminate them altogether. The difference between this state and the ones before it is whether or not you should worry much about slipping into subtle dullness or agitation. Although there is no great danger at this point that subtle dullness and agitation will occur, you must still make great effort to implement the various methods for eliminating them. While you are in the fifth and sixth states of meditation, you still have to be concerned whether or not dullness and agitation are going to attack you. Here in the seventh state though you have the ability to initiate the effort necessary to block them; and so, said our Lama, dullness and agitation are unable to attack and create an obstacle. During these last five states of meditation—that is, from the third through to the seventh—the mind is for the most part in single-pointed meditation. Nonetheless, conditions such as dullness and agitation are interrupting ones concentration, and so we describe the mental mode during these periods as "engaging but interrupted."

Here is what happens when you reach the eighth state of meditation, called "making the mind single-pointed." When you begin a meditation session, you must still make a slight effort to bring up the various corrections. After that though you are able to go for an entire session without even the subtle forms of dullness and agitation coming up in the mind. These last few stages are like having an enemy who is at full strength, one who has lost part of his strength, and one whose strength is completely lost. Since these examples describe how dullness and agitation gradually lose their power, we can say that from the eighth state of meditation you no longer need to make any conscious effort to apply watchfulness. Because in this eighth state you can make a little effort at the opening of a meditation session and then pass the entire period without being interrupted by problems such as dullness and agitation, the mental mode at this point is described as "engaging without interruption." The seventh and eighth states of meditation are achieved through applying effort.

Here is the ninth state of meditation, called "achieving equilibrium." Here your mind is engaging in the object without any conscious effort at all. This state comes about as a result of having repeated the eighth state over and over until

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you are completely accustomed to it, and then you can go into meditation spontaneously, effortlessly. This is similar to the point you reach in your recitations when you can read out a text from memory without any effort, since you have practiced reciting it repeatedly. You go into single-minded meditation in a single swoop. This state of mind is for all intents and purposes a desire-realm form of single-pointed quietude. The ninth state is achieved through being totally accustomed.

The impression you have during the first state is one of recognizing that you have too many thoughts. In the second state you have a feeling that they are making a resurgence. By the third state the impression is that the problem of too many thoughts has in a sense tired out. In brief then we can say that in the first two states there is a question of how long the mind can stay fixed on the object. What distinguishes the third and the fourth states is whether or not one can lose the object or not. The fourth and fifth states are differentiated by whether obvious dullness can arise or not. The fifth and sixth states are separated by whether or not you have to be worried about subtle dullness coming up. Moreover, there is the distinction that—although it is possible for subtle agitation to occur during the sixth state—it is much less likely than in the one before it. The sixth and seventh states are distinguished by whether or not you have to be very concerned about slipping into subtle agitation or dullness. States number seven and eight are separated by whether there is any agitation or dullness at all; and eight and nine are differentiated by whether or not you have to rely on any conscious effort. The seventh level is devoted to eliminating dullness and agitation, rather than having to think about any serious danger that you could slip into them. Our Lama said that at this point it was like having a fist-fight with an enemy who was already weakened to the point of exhaustion; it's not like you need to be on your guard especially, it's enough just to be thinking about how to finish him off.



The Stages of Meditation