

Mastering the mind



This is an extract of teachings given by Shamar Rinpoche. This section of the teaching was preceded by Rinpoche's explanation of the reasons for Buddhist practice and the required conditions that we need to get together in order to accomplish various types of meditation.

The following teachings define the two stages of meditation practice: shamatha and vipassana [*sanskrit: vipasyana*]. Rinpoche then goes on to elucidate some of the obstacles that we may encounter on the path of meditation.

The fruit of Dharma practice is known as "cessation", a state in which all the emotions are completely overcome [*sanskrit: nirodha*]. This state of cessation is not only something coming to an end, but also something which takes place. On the one hand one experiences a state of wellbeing, joy, and happiness and on the other peace and a calm clarity.

Stabilising and Pacifying the Mind

In order to realise the nature of mind and to stabilise meditative absorption there are two stages that we must go through. The first is the ability to stabilise the mind in a state of calm which is known as the samadhi of shi'nay, in tibetan, or shamatha in sanskrit. This is sometimes translated as mental pacification. The second stage is to increase this meditative concentration, to expand and develop it. This second aspect, lhagthong or vipassana is often translated as penetrating insight or profound insight.

Samadhi, a sanskrit word, is translated in Tibetan as *tignédzin*. In English, we can translate it as meditative absorption or contemplation. When we are accustomed to and have mastered this type of meditation, we will be able to

achieve all kinds of miracles and we will have the faculty of clairvoyance. In the Buddha's time, his disciples practised these meditations a great deal and the resulting accomplishments were widespread amongst them.

Since all phenomena is the projection and play of mind, this means that if we control our minds, we gain mastery over phenomena. By mastering the mind we are able to work with outer phenomena. This is why there are types of meditative absorption relating to water, fire, air and earth – the basic elements which constitute phenomena. The accomplishment and mastery of these samadhis render us capable of controlling the elements. For example, we can transform water into fire. In the Vajrayana, the practice of the Tantras, we meditate on syllables or on mandalas while reciting mantras. We meditate on ourselves as deities and on the world as being the deity's mandala. Using these meditations we can derive the same capacity to transform and control phenomena. This has nothing to do with magic, because magic is artificial and fabricated. These special abilities are the natural results of meditation when samadhi is stabilised. Since everything is the mind, if we can gain mastery over it, we can then have control over external phenomena.

We can take an example of this from the life stories of Milarepa. Once Milarepa entered into a yak's horn to illustrate a point to his disciple Rechungpa. Milarepa was able to do this without shrinking his body and without the horn growing any bigger. This was possible because Milarepa had dissolved all dualistic grasping. Smallness and largeness, or any size for that matter, are all produced by duality, i.e. the result of grasping to phenomena as if they were really existing. Once this dualistic grasping is dissolved, "large" and "small" no longer have the same meaning and are no longer so fixed. As long as there is duality, large remains large and small remains small: everything is solidified, and we cannot change anything. But once we have dissolved this grasping or fixation, there are no longer any limits. The relative reality is no longer solidified and anything becomes possible. That is how Rechungpa was able to see Milarepa entering into the horn of the yak. Milarepa did this in order to help Rechungpa understand the mastery of phenomena. This example is used by numerous masters to illustrate this aspect of teaching and notably by Gendun Chöpel. It demonstrates that when the grasping of reality as truly existing ceases, phenomena can then easily be manipulated.

Samadhi and shi'nay

How do we attain these meditative absorptions? In fact, the path consists of two stages: the stages of shamatha and vipassana as described earlier. Tignédzin or samadhi, are respectively Tibetan and Sanskrit words which express the state of meditative absorption. These terms exist to point out actual meditative experience. As humans in the state of confusion, we do not know what it means when we talk of meditative absorption. Meditators do know because they have experienced it.

They have therefore created a terminology pointing towards these experiences allowing us in turn to have an experience of them. Thus, when we say tignédzin or samadhi, this also means everything that occurs in meditation. When the mind is settled in meditation, it is completely absorbed. This state of samadhi is characterised by clarity, a dimension of clear awareness which recognises the mind. Meditative absorption has nothing to do with a state of unconsciousness, as could be the case in deep sleep or in a coma.

There is no obscurity in samadhi. On the contrary, when we are in the meditative absorption of shi'nay, mental pacification, there is no longer anything that can be an obstacle or a hindrance. Thoughts no longer bother the mind so there is no distraction in it.

Penetrating insight

We have just explained what shi'nay or shamatha is. We now come to the explanation for the second stage of lhagthong or vipassana, sometimes known as penetrating insight. We will use the word vipassana. This stage is where the meditation goes deeper. Here we examine and investigate how the mind functions. A way of explaining the mind's progression along the path exists in terms of what are called '*the five paths*'. [Read the list to the right.] There is firstly the path of accumulation which itself is divided into three parts: a part for complete beginners, a middle level part and a part for those who are the most advanced on this level. The end of this path of accumulation leads us into the path of application.

This is a level in which we can reinforce the vipassana meditation, it is at this point that we deepen the meditation, moving from shi'nay to lhagthong. Vipassana is the moment when we develop the capacity which is inherent in the mind to know phenomena and to recognise itself. Due to this wisdom, *sherab* in Tibetan, the mind can recognise the nature of phenomena and of mind itself, whether it is phenomena of samsara or phenomena related to the enlightened mind.

The mind is capable of knowing everything. When it is not in the dimension of wisdom, we identify ourselves as "I" and we hold the view that things are really existing. We ourselves are really existing and we grasp on to phenomena around us as having an independent existence, as real entities. The deeper we go into this meditation, the more wisdom will develop, and the

The 5 Paths of the Dharma

The 5 Paths (Sanskrit: pancha marga - Tibetan: lam nga) are:

- 1) Path of gathering or accumulations (of excellent qualities or merits and wisdom),
- 2) Path of preparation or application (adaptation),
- 3) Path of insight (insight as a consequence of samadhi and the correct application of the analytical vipashyana),
- 4) Path of meditation (not meditation as an exercise or training, but as an accomplished skill and the application of mastery in meditation - sanskrit: dhyana. There are 4 dhyanas or levels of mastery),
- 5) Path of no more learning. This means the fully matured and perfected prajña (wisdom of your own minds clarity) and upaya (skilful means). This accomplishment covers the last 3 of the 10 Bodhisattwa bhumis or levels of recognized and realized Bodhicitta.

more the mind will have the capacity to recognise what 'things' really are. We will come to realise that phenomena do not have this solidity, or independence, or the existence that we give them. The more advanced we are in this meditation, the more our grasping will dissolve and eventually we will not find anything with an independent existence that is an entity in itself. This applies for the ego and for external phenomena. Developing wisdom is therefore linked to vipassana meditation.

Obstacles

Now let us look at the various obstacles that we can encounter in shamatha and vipassana. The obstacles to shamatha are firstly, a mind that is continuously agitated and secondly regret. With regards to vipassana, the three obstacles are mental obscurity, drowsiness, and doubt.

The obstacles to shamatha

An agitated mind can be due to a strong emotion. For example, having a lot of desires can create disturbances in the mind. Having to deal with various difficulties and being attached with regards to these difficulties can also create agitation in the mind.

The second obstacle to shamatha is regret. It arises in meditation when we think about and regret what we have done in the past. We may remember the intent or motivation for certain actions. These thoughts distract and agitate the mind. There is really no benefit in recalling such past deeds. What was done was done and cannot be undone. Reassessing our past actions only leads to further agitation.

In Shamar Rinpoche's paper:
7 on Meditation
Rinpoche lists the following obstacles:

Obstacles for shamatha

1. agitation
2. regret
3. heaviness
4. dullness
5. doubt
6. wishing harm
7. attachment
8. drowsiness

Obstacles for shamatha & vipashyana

1. abandonment of Mahayana
2. outer distractions
3. inner distractions
4. miraculous powers
5. negative states of egocentric mind

Obstacles to vipassana are

Mental obscurity:

The first is mental obscurity. It is a heaviness that arises in the mind and in the body. The effect is a loss of suppleness or flexibility. This heaviness is like a veil that comes and settles in the mind. It covers the mind. This can arise when we meditate after having eaten too much or after having consumed very greasy foods. Mental obscurity can also be the result of a karmic accumulation.

Drowsiness:

This obstacle is falling asleep during meditation. It is obviously related to sleep and to the fact that we like to sleep a lot. If we eat too much or eat very greasy foods, we will fall asleep easily in meditation. It is important to sleep, however the importance of regulating sleep is explained in the Vinaya, on the subject of discipline. While doing intensive meditation, the meditator should go to sleep around 10 o'clock at night and wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning. This constitutes the ideal sleep pattern. Moreover, it is recommended not to eat food after 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Drinking liquids, which are clear enough to see our reflection in them, is nevertheless acceptable.

Doubt:

Another significant obstacle is doubt. The presence of doubt is likely to pose a problem for us in our efforts to meditate. Here, we are talking about doubts relating to the path and the results of the path. We have many doubts about what we are doing which therefore become significant hindrances to vipassana.

Obstacles common to both shamatha and vipassana

Having described the respective obstacles to shamatha and vipassana, we will now examine two types of obstacles common to both these meditations.

Greed for pleasures and malevolence:

The first is a form of greed for the pleasures of the senses. We have a need to experience the different pleasures of the senses and we are attached to these sensations. The mind is then occupied all the time with these desires and is disturbed by them. Malevolence is a form of ill will where the mind is unceasingly preoccupied with an attitude aimed at doing harm to others. The mind is constantly engaged in conjuring and building up plans to achieve this negative end.

Speculation:

When we are committed to a practice, the mind is distracted by other practises and we jump from one practice to another. This is what is meant by speculation. We begin one form of meditation and then for no good reason, it no longer satisfies us and we switch to another practice. In this way, we end up not finishing any practice. When we practise the path of Mahamudra, we need to persevere, to go through with it without giving it up for something else.

External and internal objects and events:

Another distraction is the various external objects, the objects of the senses. The mind is endlessly preoccupied with things that are around us. The mind seizes them and identifies with them. In turn, distractions are created in the mind provoking numerous disturbing emotions.

Internal events can equally cause distractions. There are two inner distractions that are sometimes explained as one. But here, we will distinguish them as two in the following way. Firstly, there is the drowsiness that was described earlier, a form of dull-wit, a heaviness of the body and mind. Secondly, there is a distraction due to mental obscurity, which is a lack of clarity, a lack of consciousness. The mind is agitated by all sorts of events and we are not conscious of them. This type of distraction takes another form for the more advanced meditators in that they become attached to meditative experiences. Indeed, the more advanced we are, the more peaceful and calm the mind is. We arrive at a certain peace, which is pleasant, and there is happiness. When we get attached to this type of pleasant experience, it becomes a distraction, a so-called internal distraction.

If we are not practitioners ourselves, if we have not yet started to meditate we might ask : "what are they talking about ?" Because for us, it is not yet a direct experience, a personal one, we cannot really understand it.

These various types of distractions arise when we practise. Only then will we have direct experience of them. We should also know that if we fabricate or manufacture our own meditation, we are likely to fall into these various types of distractions; the distraction due to outer objects, internal distractions and the distraction that generates pride which is known as the distraction of negative karma.

On the other hand, mental obscurity, dullness and drowsiness can be understood by everyone. You don't have to meditate to experience that. Even if we do not understand now, it is important for us to listen and to know these things from the very beginning. They will make sense to us later as we advance in the practice.

The antidotes for the obstacles

We can encounter five types of obstacles : idleness, forgetfulness, the inability to remember advice and instructions, drowsiness or mental obscurity, and agitation. (The first three are common experiences that we can all relate to. Explanations for them are therefore not provided here.) What follows are some antidotes which are given to counter the obstacles. However it is important to understand that the antidotes have to be applied appropriately. Just as it is wrong not to apply the remedies when they are

necessary, it is equally wrong to continue to use the remedies and antidotes when they are no longer applicable. The latter case then becomes another obstacle to meditation. We list this as the sixth type of obstacle, the misuse of the antidotes.

Remembering the futility of samsara:

The antidote for regret, the second obstacle to shamatha is to understand that samsara is futile. Samsara has no meaning. Understanding this our attachments will dissipate naturally by themselves. Regrets about past actions will no longer hold any meaning and they too will dissipate. It is necessary to start by meditating on samsara's impermanence. Once we have successfully integrated this view, we will realise that there is no reason to be attached to samsara, that it is futile and devoid of meaning. This perspective will loosen the attachment that we have for our past actions, and we will not take them so seriously. If we have not understood the impermanence and the futility of samsara, our past actions will still seem important to us. We will grasp on to them, engage in reflection about them and then regret will set in and short-circuit our meditation. On the other hand, if we have less attachment to samsara, there will be less grasping about what we are doing and what we have done and therefore less regrets will arise. This remedy is thus based on the reflection about the impermanence and futility of samsara.

Stimulating inspiration:

An antidote for both drowsiness and agitation is to call to mind the things that inspire us and make us happy in our practice. What is there that can inspire us in our practice ? Knowing about the qualities and benefits of the various meditative absorptions which we will achieve if we dedicate ourselves to practice will encourage us to really commit ourselves. For example, in the sutra called "the King-like Sutra" all of the samadhis are explained [sanskrit: *Samadhiraja Sutra*]. Calling to mind the description of these qualities gives us the will and energy to practise and in this way these obstacles are dissipated.

Developing an awareness of impermanence:

The remedy for doubt and for attachment to the pleasures of the senses is identical to that for agitation. We have to develop more of an awareness of impermanence, to be increasingly conscious that phenomena are impermanent. We can also reflect on the negative effects of desire-attachment. That is, the more we desire, the more we need things, and the less we are able to satisfy these desires. We will always be dissatisfied as long as our minds continue to function in terms of desire and attachment. It is like having a skin allergy, the more we scratch ourselves, the greater the irritation becomes.

Developing love and compassion:

In order to counteract ill will and hatred it is necessary to think about the negative effects of this type of attitude and we should reflect on the benefits of not having this malevolent mind. We then develop love and compassion in its place. This meditation on love and compassion has two advantages. It allows us to find our own happiness and to make others happy. So here we have one remedy and two benefits.

The remedy for laziness:

To counter laziness, we need to develop confidence in the Three jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha). In particular, we should develop confidence in the second aspect, which is the Dharma or the path and especially in the fruits that the path brings. As explained earlier, the fruit of Dharma practice is known as "cessation", a state in which all the emotions are completely overcome. This state of cessation is not only something coming to an end, but also something which arises. On the one hand one experiences a state of wellbeing, joy, and happiness and on the other peace and a calm clarity.

If we keep in mind that the fruit of the path, the fruit of the practice, is this cessation that brings about peace and happiness, this knowledge will give us the courage to continue with practice and to overcome our laziness. We will have the conviction to commit ourselves to practice.

Investing one's mind in practice:

It is equally important to dedicate our minds progressively to practice. Once we understand the result we can reap, we will want to attain it. We will have the desire to put effort into our meditation, and to progress along the path. Once the will is there, we can commit ourselves to the practice. If we commit ourselves and put the practice into work we start to gain mastery in our meditation. In the end the meditation will become natural and there will be no room left for laziness.

Remembering the instructions:

Another obstacle is forgetting the instructions. The antidote for this is to remember the instructions. The moment we realise that we have forgotten the instructions, we have to bring them back to mind and apply them.

Mindfulness:

Mindfulness, or conscious attention, is the antidote for the two obstacles of drowsiness and agitation. We need to train the mind to be aware of the state that it's in. Whether we experience drowsiness or agitation we should gradually train the mind to be aware of itself. We have to be vigilant about what arises in the mind. Developing this mindfulness will enable us to dissipate drowsiness and agitation.

Whenever we forget to apply these antidotes, as soon as we become aware that we have forgotten, all we have to do is simply apply them. Likewise, when we misuse the remedies, we do not just overlook the mistake but right away we should correct it. When we realise that an antidote has worked, we should then let go of it and establish the mind in equanimity.

Right now we are like new-born babies. Little by little, we will receive the instructions to grow up until we become fully mature. At the moment we are children. Soon we will pass on to adolescence, closer to the state of a young adult, until finally we will become wise old sages...