



Nalandabodhi Connecticut Paramita of the Month Newsletter



"One is one's own protector,
One is one's own refuge.
Therefore one should control oneself,
even as a trader controls a noble steed."
-Dhammapada 380

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In his commentary on *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang provides a substantial discussion of the perfection of meditation, also known as the perfection of concentration. He begins by explaining that in order to practice concentration we first must pursue the two kinds of seclusion: physical seclusion from crowds and bustle, and mental seclusion from thoughts. Physical seclusion specifically refers to abandoning all of the "important" concerns of this life; totally abandoning worldly affairs. Mental seclusion refers to giving up all of our plans and thoughts of achieving things in worldly life. In short, Khenpo advises that to practice the perfection of concentration we should focus all of our thoughts and actions on Dharma. We must become secluded from our self-centeredness. If we do not isolate ourselves from our selfish desires we become as is described in the *Condensed Transcendent Wisdom*:

"Though they stay many millions of years
On lonely snake-infested mountains, five hundred miles around,
Bodhisattvas who know not this seclusion
Remain superior and proud."

Seclusion should thus be viewed as consisting of two practices: abandoning worldly things and abandoning discursive thinking. Khenpo describes abandoning worldly things as having two aspects: cutting through our attachment to material things and cutting through our attachment to sentient beings. The first frees us from the troubles of trying to increase our material property and protect from enemies and thieves. Similarly abandoning attachment to sentient beings frees us of many worldly worries. Khenpo advises us to meditate thusly:

"When you were born you were born alone. Nothing, out of all of your possessions and wealth, came with you from your past life. In your next life, everybody, all your friends and relatives and so on, will be left behind: not a single one of them will follow. So if you arrive alone at the beginning... and depart alone at the end when you die, now too you need to be alone in a solitary place."

Letting go of discursive thinking refers to ridding ourselves of all distracting thoughts. In particular we should abandon desire for the pleasures of the five senses that characterizes the desire realm. These desires drive us to engage in negative actions and ignore our Dharma practice. They distract us from doing what is best for us and

for others. Desire for sense pleasures "brings destruction and ruin, destruction in this life, and destruction in all lives." Familiarizing yourself with this you should isolate your mind from attachment and rely on a lonely retreat, reflecting on the benefits that seclusion brings.

Concentration itself refers to an absence of distraction in everything that you do. "Whether walking, sitting, eating, or sleeping, practice with your mind bound fast by the rope of mindfulness." As Shantideva states in *The Way of the Bodhisattva* :

"This mind I'll tether to that sturdy post, reflection, on the Teaching,
That it might never slip its bonds and flee."

Khenpo advises us to use the rope of mindfulness to bind the mind to the object on which we are concentrating, never forgetting what we should be doing, nor being distracted elsewhere. He advises us to use vigilance as an overseer to check whether the mind stays where it should. This way if the mind is distracted it is brought back and placed again on its original object. Beginners are advised to alternate between analytic and resting meditation, not allowing themselves to be distracted by external objects. Resting meditation is described as being of two types: with and without concepts. Resting meditation with concepts refers to focusing the mind on thoughts of love and compassion for all beings. Do not follow past thoughts, invite future thoughts, or be distracted by present thoughts. Keep the mind bound to its object with the tether of mindfulness. Resting meditation without thoughts is described as resting the mind without altering it at all, simply leaving it as it is, calm, spacious, and at ease without distraction from thoughts of material things.

Khenpo closes his discussion by explaining that as the mind settles in this way three types of concentration are to be distinguished: The concentration practiced by ordinary beings, clearly discerning concentration, and the excellent concentration of the Tathagatas. The concentration practiced by ordinary beings is described as a concentration that leads one to become increasingly attached to meditative experiences such as that of bliss, clarity, or the absence of thoughts. It is only because these states are restricted to our meditation that they are accompanied by clinging. As a result of this clinging such concentration cannot become a source of liberation. Khenpo explains that it is indeed quite the opposite. He explains that in fact the belief in a personal self (*my bliss, my clarity* etc.) and the belief in the substantiality of phenomena (clinging to the actual experiences of bliss etc.) are still present in the mind at this stage.

Clearly discerning concentration uses reasoning to examine the self of the individual and the substantiality of phenomena. This leads to becoming skilled in uniting the view of emptiness and sustained calm in the mind. One's mode of apprehension then shifts and the clinging one had earlier to bliss, clarity, and non-thought no longer occurs. One lets go of clinging to emptiness as an antidote. Khenpo identifies the concentration practiced by ordinary beings as belonging to the path of accumulating and clearly discerning concentration as the principle meditation on the path of joining.

The excellent concentration of the Tathagatas is the concentration attained on the path of seeing. Here sustained calm and profound insight have become indistinguishable. One is freed from clinging to substantiality and clinging to emptiness. One arrives at a natural state where one simply sees just how things are. One has no conceptual

position whatsoever.

May all reading this achieve such concentration, and on this auspicious occasion of Lhabab Duchen may all aspire that every sentient being achieve the excellent concentration that frees from suffering and brings great bliss.

May all beings benefit!

The information presented in this newsletter is based upon teachings presented by Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang presented in the text" [A Guide to The Words of My Perfect Teacher](#)." This text is available through [Namse Bangdzo Bookstore](#).



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