

Always moderate your eating. Arrive at a balanced amount of sleep. Make your efforts steady and constant. Make your mind like a good bowstring, neither too loose nor too tight. It will get you nowhere to practise sporadically, only when you have time.

2.5 TRANSCENDENT CONCENTRATION

It is impossible to develop concentration without first renouncing excitement and distracting preoccupations, and going to stay in a solitary place. So to start with, it is important to give up distractions.

2.5.1 Giving up distractions

Whatever is brought together will fall apart. Parents, brothers and sisters, spouses, friends and relatives—even the flesh and bones of the body that we received at birth—are all destined to separate. Understand the futility of becoming attached to ephemeral loved ones and friends, and always remain in solitude. Repa Shiwa Ö says:

Buddhahood is within ourselves alone.

Although spiritual companions support our practice,

Having more than three or four together brings up hatred and attachment.

So I for one shall stay alone.

Wanting things is what causes all of our troubles. We are never satisfied with what we have, and the wealthier we get the more our avarice grows. As the saying goes, “Being rich means being miserly.” Or again, “Like the rich, the more you get, the more you need,” and, “To lose your enemies, lose your money.” The more resources, money and property you own, the more danger you face from enemies, robbers and so on. You can spend your entire life acquiring, protecting and increasing your wealth. This can only lead to suffering and negative actions. The sublime Nāgārjuna said:

Amassing wealth, guarding it and making it grow will wear you out;
Understand that riches bring unending ruin and destruction.

Even if one man were to own all the wealth and possessions in the whole world, it would not change the fact that he would still only need enough food and clothing for one person. But however rich they may be, people can still hardly bear to eat a mouthful of food themselves, or use enough clothing to cover their own backs. Heedless of wrongdoing or suffering, ignoring all criticism, they risk their present lives and throw future lives

to the winds; for the most trifling material possession, they disregard any sense of shame and honesty, all prudence and wise forethought, and any consideration of Dharma or of their samayas. Spending all their time running after food, profit and social standing, like roving spirits hunting for tormas, they waste their whole lives without ever experiencing even a single day of freedom, well-being or happiness. Finally, having piled up all that wealth, they may well pay for it with their lives and get stabbed or shot just for their money. Then everything they have amassed over a whole lifetime gets spent by their enemies and other people. It is all squandered. But the pile of evil deeds as high as Mount Meru that they built up to get rich remains exclusively theirs, and will cause them to wander in the unbearable depths of the lower realms, never to be free. So while you still have the chance, use the few possessions you may have in this life to provide for future lives. Be content with a meagre amount of food and just enough clothing to keep out the wind.

Those whose ambitions are limited to this present life are known in the texts as “childish friends.” They are not at all grateful for any help you may extend to them, and in return may well do you harm. No matter what you do for them, it is never right. They are very hard to please. If you have more than they do, they are jealous; if you have less, they look down on you. The more time you spend with them, the more your negative actions multiply and your positive ones dwindle. Renounce such friends and keep well away from them.

Occupations such as commerce, agriculture, industry and academia involve you in numerous activities and provide endless sources of distraction. These trivial pursuits keep you constantly busy for inconsequential goals. However much effort you make, none of it has any meaning. There is no end to the process of overcoming rivals and favouring friends.

Abandon all these endless activities and distractions like so much spit in the dust. Leave your homeland behind and head for unknown lands. Dwell at the foot of rocky cliffs with only wild animals for companions. Settle your body and mind down in a state of ease.¹⁵⁹ Stop caring about food, clothing or what people say. Live out your life in deserted places where there are no other human beings. Jetsun Milarepa said:

In a rocky cave in a deserted land
My sorrow is unrelenting.
My teacher, Buddha of the three times,
I yearn for you unceasingly.

If you do as he did, you will find that, as the saying goes, “in places where

you feel lonely, concentration arises.” There, all the good qualities of the path—disenchantment with saṃsāra, determination to free oneself from it, faith, purity of perception, concentration and absorption—arise naturally. Do whatever you can to live like that.

In secluded forests, those places where the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past found tranquillity, there is nothing to make you busy, no distractions, no commerce, no fields to be worked, no childish friends. Birds and wild deer are easy companions; spring water and leaves provide good ascetic fare. Awareness is naturally clear and concentration develops by itself. Without enemies, without friends, you can be free from the chains of attachment and hatred. Such places have every advantage. In *The Moon Lamp Sūtra* and other sūtras, Lord Buddha says that simply having the wish to go to solitary places and taking seven steps in their direction is worth more than making offerings to all the Buddhas in the ten directions for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. How much more so if you actually go to live in such places. It is also said:

In the perfect secluded place, deep in the mountains,
Everything one does is good.

Even without your making any diligent efforts to practice, in such places disillusionment with saṃsāra, determination to be free from it, love, compassion and all the other excellent qualities of the path will arise spontaneously. As a result, your whole way of life can only become wholesome. Attachment, hatred and all the negative emotions that you had tried in vain to control in places bustling with activity will diminish by themselves, simply because you are now in solitude. It will be easy to develop all the qualities of the path.

These points are the preliminaries for concentration, and are of vital importance. They cannot be dispensed with.

Actual concentration

Concentration is of three kinds: the concentration practised by ordinary beings, concentration which clearly discerns and the excellent concentration of the Tathāgatas.

The concentration practised by ordinary beings. When you are attached to the experiences of bliss, clarity and absence of thought in meditation and intentionally seek them, or your practice is coloured by any affinity for experiences, that is called the concentration practised by ordinary beings.¹⁶⁰

Clearly discerning concentration. When you are free from any attach-

ment to meditative experiences and are no longer fascinated by concentration, but still cling to emptiness as an antidote, that is called clearly discerning concentration.

The excellent concentration of the Tathāgatas. When you no longer have any concept of emptiness as an antidote, but remain in a concept-free concentration on the nature of reality, that is called the excellent concentration of the Tathāgatas.

Whenever you practise concentration, it is important to sit in the “seven point posture of Vairocana”¹⁶¹ with your eyes maintaining the appropriate gaze. It is said:

When the body is straight, the channels are straight;
When the channels are straight the energies are straight;
When the energies are straight the mind is straight.¹⁶²

Do not lie down or lean against anything, but sit straight upright, your mind free from any thought, and rest in equanimity in a state where there is no grasping to anything. That is the essence of transcendent concentration.

2.6 TRANSCENDENT WISDOM

Transcendent wisdom has three aspects: wisdom that comes through hearing, wisdom that comes through reflection and wisdom that comes through meditation.

2.6.1 Wisdom through hearing

This means listening to all the words and meaning of the Dharma spoken by a spiritual teacher, and understanding the meaning of those words as they are spoken.

2.6.2 Wisdom through reflection

This means not only listening to what the teacher has taught and understanding it, but subsequently reviewing it in your mind and clearly establishing the meaning through reflection, examination and analysis, and asking questions about what you do not understand. It is not enough just to suppose that you know or understand some particular subject. You should make absolutely sure that when the time comes to practise in solitude you will be able to manage on your own, without needing to ask anyone to clarify certain points.