

CHAPTER 16

The Perfection of Meditative Concentration

The summary:

Reflection on the faults and virtues,
Definition, classification,
Characteristics of each classification,
Increase, perfection, and
Result—

These seven comprise the perfection of meditative concentration.

I. Reflection on the Faults and Virtues. Even though you may have the practices of generosity and so forth, it is called scattered if you are without meditative concentration. Under the influence of scattering, your mind is wounded by the fangs of the afflicting emotions. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

For the man whose mind is distracted
Dwells between the fangs of afflicting emotions.

Furthermore, without meditative concentration you cannot achieve clairvoyance, and without clairvoyance you cannot benefit others. *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says:

Without the accomplishment of calm abiding,
One cannot achieve clairvoyance.
Likewise, without the power of clairvoyance,
One cannot benefit sentient beings.

Again, without meditative concentration you cannot achieve wisdom awareness, and without wisdom awareness you cannot achieve enlightenment. The *Letter to a Friend* says:

Without meditative concentration,
One cannot achieve wisdom awareness.

On the other hand, when you have meditative concentration you will give up attachment to inferior objects, you will achieve clairvoyance, and the many doors of meditative concentration will open for your mind. The *Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* says:

Through meditative concentration, inferior sensual objects are abandoned. Validity, clairvoyance, and meditative concentration will be accomplished.

Again, when you have meditative concentration, wisdom awareness will arise and your afflicting emotions will be abolished. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

Having understood that afflicting emotions are completely overcome
By superior insight endowed with calm abiding....

When you have perfect meditative concentration, you will have special, perfect insight and will develop compassion for all sentient beings. The *Accomplishment of Dharmadhatu Sutra* says:

Through mental absorption, one will see all of reality perfectly, as it is. By seeing all reality perfectly, as it is, a bodhisattva will develop great compassion toward all sentient beings.

Again, when you have meditative concentration you can establish all trainees in enlightenment. The *Ornament of Mahayana Sutra* says:

Through meditative concentration all the sentient beings will be established in the three types of enlightenment.

II. Definition. The definition of meditative concentration is that it has the nature of calm abiding, the mind abides inside one-pointedly on virtue. Also, from the chapter on concentration from the *Bodhisattva Bhumis*:

The mind abides one-pointedly on virtue.

This kind of meditative concentration is further achieved through complete avoidance of the distractions which are the opposite of concentration.

A. First, One Should Avoid Distraction. The avoidance of distraction is called solitude, where one is isolated from physical agitation and the mind is isolated from discursive thoughts. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

But through solitude of body and mind
No discursive thoughts will occur.

One should understand that isolation from physical agitation is discussed in six topics:

1. the primary characteristic of agitation,
2. the cause of agitation,
3. the faults of agitation,
4. the primary characteristic of solitude,
5. the cause of solitude, and
6. the good qualities of solitude.

1. The Primary Characteristic of Agitation is to be scattered because of being in the midst of your children, spouse, retinue, and wealth.

2. The Cause of Agitation is attachment to such sentient beings as children, spouse, retinue, and so forth; attachment to wealth such as food, material things, and so forth; and attachment to fame, praise, and so forth. These things will not bring avoidance of agitation. It is said:

Worldly life is not forsaken because of attachment [to people]
And due to craving for material gain and the like.

3. The Faults of Agitation should be understood generally and particularly. Concerning general agitation, the *Sutra Requested with Extreme Sincerity* says:

Maitreya, there are twenty different types of defects. What are these twenty? Body is unrestrained, speech is unrestrained, and mind is unrestrained. Gross afflicting emotions are rampant. Even worldly speech is affected. The maras have a chance to triumph. Mindfulness is lacking. Calm abiding and special insight cannot be achieved. And so forth.¹

In particular, you will not achieve enlightenment with the fault of attachment to sentient beings. The *Moon Lamp Sutra* says:

One who fully attends sensual objects,
Craves children or spouse, and
Clings to the home that should be rejected
Will not achieve enlightenment at all.

Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas says:

Through being attached to living beings
I am completely obscured from the perfect reality.

Therefore, you should avoid these attachments. As is said:

It also cannot benefit me
And I cannot benefit it.
Therefore, stay a long distance from this childishness.

The beneficial effects of avoiding this. The *Moon Lamp Sutra* mentions:

Having renounced attachment to child and spouse,
Being afraid of the home and renouncing it,
The achievement of enlightenment will not be so difficult.

There are also the two defects of attachment to wealth and fame. Wealth and fame cannot be held forever and they will create a predicament. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

Whatever fame and renown I have amassed
Have no power to accompany me.

Second, it is said:

By the piling up of whatever objects
You are attached to,
Misery a thousandfold will ensue.

4. The Primary Characteristic of Solitude is to be free from these agitations.

5. The Cause of Solitude is to abide in a monastery by yourself. What is a "monastery?"² Being in a cemetery, by the forest, cave, or plain. 500 armspans is an earshot. A place which is the distance of an ear-shot from a town is called a monastery. The *Treasury of Abhidharma* says:

500 armspans is an earshot; that place is called a monastery.

6. The Good Qualities of Solitude. Escaping from agitation and staying in monasteries for the sake of enlightenment and of sentient beings has many good qualities:

- a) it is an excellent offering to all the Buddhas,
- b) one will renounce samsara, will be free from the eight worldly concerns,³ and will not encourage the afflicting emotions, and
- c) meditative concentration will arise.

a) **The First One.** Taking seven steps toward a monastery with the motivation to stay there with bodhicitta for the benefit of sentient beings pleases all the Buddhas more than making offerings with the diversity of food, drink, flowers, and so forth. The *Moon Lamp Sutra* says:

The Victorious One is not honored
By offerings of food and drink,
Or, likewise, of clothes, flowers, incense, and garlands.
One will make greater merit by
Taking seven steps toward a monastery
In order to benefit sentient beings
By renouncing evil, composite phenomena.

b) **The Second One.** Concerning renunciation of samsara, freedom from the eight worldly concerns, and the discouragement of afflicting emotions, that same sutra says:

Likewise, one will renounce all composite phenomena,
One will have no desire for all the worlds,
And afflicting emotions will not increase.

c) **The Third One.** The principle objective is to increase meditative concentration quickly. The same sutra says:

Be detached from village and city,
Always attend the forest and isolation,
Always be alone like a rhinoceros.
Before long, you will achieve supreme meditative
concentration.

This explains how to remain isolated from physical agitation.

B. Isolating the Mind from Discursive Thoughts. While staying in the monastery, contemplate why you went there. Think that you came here to this monastery because of fear of the disturbing influence of the village and town. Recall why you feared the influence of agitation. The *Householder Drakshulchen-Requested Sutra* says:

Fearful and frightened by agitation, fearful and frightened by wealth and honor, fearful and frightened by evil friends, fearful and frightened by nonvirtuous masters, fearful and frightened by desire, hatred, and ignorance, fearful and frightened by the maras of skandas, afflicting emotions, the Lord of Death, and the Devaputra, fearful and frightened by the hell realms, hungry ghost and animal realms—with this fear and fright, I escaped to this monastery.

Now, investigate actions of body, speech and mind: If I kill, steal, and so forth while my body is in the monastery, then I am no different from wild beasts, hunters, thieves, and robbers. I should avoid these actions by contemplating that they cannot accomplish my desires.

Investigate speech: If I engage in idle or divisive talk, or use harsh words, and so forth while in the monastery, then I am no different from peacocks and parrots, blackbirds, larks, and so forth. I should avoid this speech by contemplating that it cannot accomplish my desires.

Then investigate mind: If I have attachment, hatred, jealousy, and so forth while in the monastery, then I am no different from wild animals, apes, monkeys, bears, grizzly bears, and so forth. I should avoid them because they will not accomplish my desires. This finishes the explanation of how to isolate the mind from discursive thoughts.

C. Through the Isolation of Body and Mind, Distraction Will Not Arise. Without distraction, you can enter into meditative concentration. You should train your own mind. You should meditate and apply the remedy for whichever afflicting emotion is strongest.

1. To remedy attachment, contemplate ugliness.
2. To remedy hatred, contemplate loving-kindness.
3. To remedy ignorance, contemplate interdependent origination.
4. To remedy jealousy, practice equalizing yourself and others.
5. To remedy pride, practice exchanging yourself and others.
6. If you have equal afflicting emotions or discursive thoughts, then practice watching your breath.

1. Attachment. If attachment is strongest, contemplate ugliness in this way. First, look at your own body as a composite of flesh, blood, skin, bone, marrow, lymph, bile, phlegm, mucus, excrement, and so forth. Contemplate the thirty-six impure materials.⁴ After that, go to the cemetery and observe a body which has been dead for one day, likewise two days after death, three days, four days, and five days. It changes to a darker color, becomes swollen and putrid, and then is destroyed by worms. When you see this, just contemplate that your body is of this same nature, this subject, and is not beyond this state. Observe a body being taken to the cemetery and the bones being scattered and divided, some with flesh attached and some with ligaments.

In a body which has been dead for many years, the bones turn white as a conch shell. Then after more years, they turn to a dusty grey color. So contemplate that your body is also of this nature, this subject, and is not beyond this state.

2. Hatred. If hatred is strongest, then contemplate loving-kindness as a remedy. Loving-kindness was explained earlier as being of three types. Here, concentrate on the loving-kindness toward sentient beings. First cultivate the mind which establishes happiness and benefit for the sentient being who is closest to you. Then practice loving-kindness similarly for relatives, and after that practice for both [relatives and common people], then even more for common people. Then practice for those who surround you and, after that, those in your town or village. After that, practice for sentient beings in the East, and so forth—all the ten directions.

3. Ignorance. Those who have more ignorance should contemplate the law of interdependent origination as a remedy. The *Rice Seedling Sutra* says:

Monks, he who understands this rice stalk can understand the meaning of interdependent origination. Those who know interdependent origination know the Dharma. Those who know the Dharma know the Buddha.

Furthermore,

- a) the interdependence of samsara is explained in order and
- b) the interdependence of nirvana is explained in reverse order.

a) The first has two topics: interdependence of the exterior and interdependence of the interior. Interdependence of the interior has two topics:

- (1) interdependence with cause and
- (2) interdependence supported by conditions.

(1) The first one, interior interdependence with cause. As is said:

Monks, because of this, that is produced. Because this is produced, that is born. This way, by the condition of ignorance, mental formation arise. By the condition of birth, there occur old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, unhappiness, and distress. Therefore, in this way, this vast aggregate of suffering appears.

This is explained according to the desire realm and according to birth from a mother's womb.

(a) At the very first, there is ignorance, which is the confusion that misunderstands all knowledge.

(b) Under the influence of ignorance is created the mental formation of the karma of afflicted virtues and nonvirtues. This is called "mental formation conditioned by ignorance."

(c) The seed of that karma is carried by the mind so that is called "consciousness conditioned by mental formation."

(d) By the power of that karma, the mind is fully confused, enters into a mother's womb, and an embryo and so forth arise. This is called "name and form conditioned by consciousness."

(e) By developing the name and form, all the senses of the eye, ear, and so forth are completed. That is called the "six increasing fields conditioned by name and form."

(f) The interaction of the eye organ and so forth, the corresponding object, and the consciousness is called "contact conditioned by the six increasing fields."

(g) Through contact, one experiences the feelings of joy, suffering, or indifference. That is called "feeling conditioned by contact."

(h) When there is feeling, there is joy, attachment, and stronger attachment. That is called "craving conditioned by feeling."

(i) From that attachment, one craves more and more, and wishes to not be separated from the object of attachment. That is called "grasping conditioned by craving."

(j) Through that grasping, karma and existence by body, speech, and mind are again created. That is called "existence conditioned by grasping."

(k) That karma creates the five aggregates (Skt. *skandas*). That is called "birth conditioned by existence"

(l) After birth, the aggregates which actually exist increase, ripen, and cease. "Ripen" means aging; "cease" means death. That is called "aging and death conditioned by birth." Due to ignorance, complete attachment, and craving, death causes the inner pain called sorrow. That sorrow causes expression in words, called lamentation. When the five consciousnesses experience unhappiness it is called suffering. Bringing that in the mind, that suffering is called "mental unhappiness." Furthermore, in this way and so forth, the entire afflicted sub-consciousness is called "disturbed mind."

These twelve should be understood in three groups. Ignorance, craving, and grasping comprise the afflicting emotions group. Mental formation and existence are the karma group. Consciousness and so forth, all the remaining seven, are grouped as suffering. The *Treatise on the Essence of Interdependence* says:

The twelve interdependent elements
Should be understood in three groups.
The Sage described interdependence as
Afflicting emotions, karma, and suffering.
The first, eighth, and ninth comprise the afflicting emotions.
The second and tenth comprise karma.
The remaining seven comprise suffering.

The examples of these are: ignorance is like one who plants the seed, karma is like the field, consciousness is like the seed, craving is like moisture, name and form are like shoots, the others are like branches, leaves and so forth. If there were no ignorance, then mental formation could not appear. Likewise, without birth, aging and death would not happen. But because there is ignorance, mental formations are fully created. And so forth, when there is birth, aging and death occur.

Ignorance does not think, "I will create mental formation," and mental formation does not think, "I was created by ignorance." Likewise birth does not think, "I will create aging and death," and aging and death do not think, "We were made by birth." But when there is ignorance, then mental formations appear and manifest. Likewise when there is birth, aging and death appear and manifest. Thus, this is inner interdependence with cause.

(2) Inner Interdependence Supported by Conditions. Earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness are called the six elements. The earth element causes the solidity of the body. The water element causes the body to cohere. The fire element digests whatever you eat, drink, and so forth. The wind element moves the breath out and in. The space element creates the spaces within the body. The consciousness element creates the five consciousnesses and the afflicted mental consciousness. Without these conditions, a body cannot be born, and through the combination of these six elements, a body functions fully. These six elements do not think, "I establish solidity" and so forth. The body also does not think, "I was created by these six conditions." But by these conditions, the body arises.

Furthermore, how many lifetimes does it take to complete these twelve elements of interdependence? The *Ten Noble Bhumis Sutra* says:

Ignorance and mental formation are related to the past. Consciousness through feeling occur in the present. Craving and so forth through existence are related to the future. Then the cycle continues.

b) The interdependence of nirvana is in reverse order. When one realizes all phenomena as the nature of pervading emptiness, then ignorance ceases. When that ceases, everything respectively ceases until aging and death. As is said:

When ignorance ceases, then mental formation ceases, and so forth. When birth ceases, then aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, mental unhappiness, and distress all cease. Thus, the vast aggregate of suffering ceases.

4. Jealousy. The practice of equalizing yourself and others is a remedy for those who have stronger jealousy. As you want happiness, other sentient beings also want happiness. As you dislike suffering, other sentient beings also dislike suffering. Therefore, practice the meditation of cherishing yourself and other sentient beings equally. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

First of all I should make an effort
To meditate upon the equality between self and others.
I should protect all beings as I do myself
Because we are all equal in [wanting] pleasure and [not wanting] pain.

5. Pride. If you have a greater problem with pride, you should practice by making an effort to exchange yourself and others. Childish sentient beings always cherish themselves and work for their own benefit, so they suffer. The Buddhas cherished others and worked for their benefit, so they attained Buddhahood. It is said:

The childish work for their own benefit,
The Buddhas work for the benefit of others.
Just look at the difference between them!

Therefore, understand that self-cherishing is a fault and give up self-grasping. Understand that cherishing others is a good quality and hold others as yourself. *Engaging in the Conduct of Bodhisattvas* says:

Having seen the mistakes in [cherishing] myself
And the ocean of good in [cherishing] others
I shall completely reject all selfishness
And accustom myself to accepting others.

6. Afflicting Emotions of Equal Strength. If the afflicting emotions are of equal strength or if you have discursive thoughts, you should train in the breath. Practice the meditation of watching the breath—counting, following, and so forth—six in all. The *Treasury of Abhidharma* says:

There are six types:

Counting, following, abiding,
Analyzing, transforming, and
Fully purifying.

In the tradition of the secret mantra system, one trains without avoiding, practicing, or transforming the afflicting emotions. Or there is the system of Marpa's lineage, which should be understood through oral instructions. One can understand all this through the co-emergent, pervading primordial wisdom and the Six Dharmas of the glorious Naropa.

These are the gradual processes to train the mind in order to enter into the path of meditative concentration.

III. Classification. Actual meditative concentration has three classifications:

- A. meditative concentration of abiding in bliss at the present,
- B. meditative concentration of accumulating good qualities, and
- C. meditative concentration of benefitting sentient beings.

The first one is the method to make a proper vessel of one's own mind. The second one is establishing all of the Buddha's qualities on the basis of the proper vessel. The third one is benefitting sentient beings.

IV. Characteristics of Each Classification.

A. Abiding in Bliss. The meditative concentration of abiding in bliss at the present is explained in the *Bodhisattva Bhumis*:

The meditative concentration of all the bodhisattvas is free from discursive thoughts, perfectly eases the body and mind, is supremely pacified, is free from arrogance, does not experience the "taste," and is free from perceptions—which describes the mind abiding in a blissful state during this life.

"Free of discursive thoughts" means maintaining the mind one-pointedly, free from discursive thoughts such as existence, nonexistence and so forth. "Perfectly eases the body and mind" means eliminating all negative actions of the body and mind. "Supremely pacified" means flowing effortlessly. "Free from arrogance" means free of the afflicting emotions of view. "Not experiencing the 'taste'" means not having the afflicting emotions of existence. "Free from perceptions" means free of the enjoyment of form and so forth.

The doors to all these different ways are the four meditative concentrations: the first, second, third, and fourth. The first meditative concentration has the subtle analytic and discursive mental factor. The second has joy, and the third has very subtle bliss. The fourth has equanimity.

B. Accumulating Good Qualities. The meditative concentration of accumulating good qualities is either uncommon or common. The first is a limitless, inconceivable variety of meditative concentrations related to the ten strengths, even the names of which the Hearers and Solitary Realizers do not know, so how could they enter them? The common ones—liberation,⁵ surpassing,⁶ increasing exhaustion,⁷ discriminating awarenesses,⁸ and so forth—are held in common with the Hearers and Solitary Realizers. While the names are common, their natures are dissimilar.

C. Benefitting Sentient Beings. One can manifest limitless bodies depending on any of the meditative concentrations and then benefit sentient beings in the eleven ways, such as providing whatever support is needed and so forth, as explained earlier [in chapter 13].

In that case, there are states called “calm abiding” and “special insight.”⁹ What is calm abiding and what is special insight? Calm abiding is the perfect absorption of mind with mind. Special insight means clearly discriminating what is right and what is wrong on that basis. The *Ornament of Mahayana Sutra* says:

Because the mind perfectly abides
In absorption with mind,
And because of fully discriminating all phenomena,
They are called calm abiding and special insight.

Calm abiding is the actual meditative concentration. Special insight is wisdom awareness.

V. Increase. Meditative concentration will increase through primordial wisdom, wisdom awareness, and dedication, as explained before [in chapter 12].

VI. Perfection. The perfection of meditative concentration is supported by pervading emptiness and compassion, as explained before [in chapter 12].

VII. Result. One should understand the results of meditative concentration in the ultimate and conventional states. In the ultimate state, one attains unsurpassable enlightenment. The *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* says:

Bodhisattvas, by fully perfecting meditative concentration, attained the unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment; will achieve the complete enlightenment; and are attaining the complete, perfect enlightenment.

In the conventional state, one will attain the body of gods free from the desire realm. Acharya Nagarjuna says:

By fully abandoning the joy, happiness, and suffering of the
desire world,
One will achieve states equal to the gods
Of the Brahma, Clear Light, Increasing Virtue, and Great Fruit
god levels.
Of the four meditative concentrations.

This is the sixteenth chapter,
dealing with meditative concentration, from
The Jewel Ornament of Liberation,
the Wish-fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings.