

Introduction to the Nature of the Mind: the Meditation

The pointing out instructions that are given to help actualize the view are the instructions on the twofold practice of shamatha and vipassana—peaceful and penetrative insight. After establishing the dzogchen view, one will then go on to practice the method of shamatha, peaceful abiding. The word “peaceful” refers to the pacification of mental grasping and clinging, the mind of conceptual proliferations, specifically the mind of the five conflicting emotions: lack of awareness, aggression, attachment, pride, and jealousy. This also includes the pacification of thoughts of the past, present, and future—for example, constantly recalling the events of the past, anticipating what will happen in the future, and pursuing the sense fields and their objects in the present. When all of these thought generations are put to rest, the mind becomes still and peaceful. This is the meaning of “peaceful”. “Abiding” means simply remaining in this state of mind without the thoughts of the here times and without any other conceptual distractions. This is the definition of “peaceful abiding”.

According to the method of dzogchen, which is my own practice and tradition, the way to achieve this is to remain, naturally relaxed, in the uncontrived awareness. Now first of all, if you are in a family life situation you need to isolate yourself from your worldly activities when you are going to practice this type of meditation. Whatever activities you have planned should be completed so that when you are ready to practice there will be nothing to distract you. When you sit down to practice you don't get up again to do something else. You sit and you practice; that is what you do and nothing else. You put everything else aside. In the past, practitioners would retreat to isolated mountain retreats in caves or other types of isolated environments to practice so that they wouldn't be distracted by anything. But these days, as you are householders in the world, in family situations, and probably won't be able to go out into the wilderness somewhere, you can practice in a quiet room in your home, a place where you can be isolated right in your own environment. The, as I already said, you must put aside all of your activities. Prepare a comfortable seat, sit down, make yourself comfortable, and allow the mind to relax. You should feel very good about where you are sitting, and the mind should be happy and wanting to perform the practice. Then you should place your body in the seven-point posture of Buddha Vairochana.

The sitting posture is important because the body must be very straight when you are meditating. If the body is straight the channels will be straight. If the channels are straight the movement of the wind, the air, will flow freely. And if the wind, the air, is able to move freely and unobstructedly throughout the body, then the essential fluids will also be able to flow evenly throughout the body. Each is dependent upon the other. The channels, the wind, and the essential fluid are all very much dependent upon one's physical posture; this is one of the reasons why the posture is important. The other reason is that the posture alone has the power to purify negative karma and obscurations. The straight posture causes the central

channel, uma, and the two side channels to its right and left, roma and kyangma, to become very straight and erect. The twenty-one knots that usually are obstructing the movement of air are then untied, and the air is able to proceed evenly, into and through the wisdom channels. With it, the air brings the essential fluids so that the essential fluid, specifically the white bodhichitta essence fluid, is distributed evenly throughout the body, which causes the mind to become peaceful. In this way, the mind is very much dependent on the physical body when one is seated in meditation.

Once you have assumed the proper position, you then allow the mind to simply relax in its natural place. Whatever arises, be it the concepts of the three times or whatever, you needn't do anything about it. Neither obstruct it nor react to it. Just allow it to be as it is, and it will naturally dissolve into its own place. This is the way to practice the shamatha, the peaceful abiding meditation, according to dzogchen. It is the best, the superior practice of peaceful abiding, and if you can perform it in this way, you should certainly do so.

If you cannot practice the peaceful abiding in this way, remaining in the natural place, you may use the mahamudra approach, which is to use a support for the mind. That support for the mind can be an image or the movement of air. For instance, you can put a stone or a stick as a support in front and then focus the mind upon it. Or you can use an image of the Buddha, which is also very good to use, and you can practice by focusing on the different parts of the Buddha's presence—like the crown bump, or the navel, or the endless knot in the heart, or the dharma wheels on the Buddha's body, or the entire body at once. You should focus on one specific part of the body until you have achieved the ability to remain with single-pointed awareness on that part. Then you should move to another part of the Buddha's body and focus on that part, and then move on to the next, and so on. Finally, you should focus on the entire body at once. And while you are focusing, you shouldn't have any distracted thoughts. This technique of using an image of the Buddha as a support is called the nirmanakaya peaceful abiding technique.

You may also visualize an image of Buddha Vajrasattva as a mental support, visualizing it to be about the size of your thumb joint. Or you may visualize the dharmakaya buddha Kuntuzangpo. Another method is to draw the Tibetan syllable AH and use that as a mental support by placing it in the space in front. In the beginning you can use a medium-sized syllable AH. In eastern Tibet, many of the lamas who performed this meditation would first draw it quite large, and as they become more adept in the meditation they would draw it smaller and smaller. It is said that at first, as the mind is not in control, it is easier to captivate the attention of the mind with a large mental support. After one has made some progress and has more mental control, then a smaller support can be used. Gradually the AH would be drawn smaller and smaller until only a small one would be necessary. Some lamas would practice for seven successive days, or twenty-one successive days, or even for an entire month, doing nothing but simply gazing at the syllable AH in the space in front.

Another method is to hold a mala in your hand and observe the exhalations and inhalations that occur in a natural breathing state. You are not counting each breath with the mala, but you are using it to help maintain awareness of the breath as it goes out and comes back in, one bead for each cycle of inhalation and exhalation. Just being barely aware of moving the beads, without any mental wandering you simply observe the motion of the breath.

All of these methods are called peaceful abiding methods with characteristics. The peaceful abiding method without characteristic is simply to remain in the equipoise of the nature of emptiness free from elaborations, limitations, or the conceptualizing intellect. Of these various methods, you can choose whichever method you have an affinity for.

In the practice of peaceful abiding one will progress through different levels of development. It is kind of like going to school, where you proceed from first grade to second grade to third grade and so on, up to the higher grades. Dharma practice is just like this. Ordinarily this type of mind nature teaching would not be given until one had already passed through the different levels of peaceful abiding practice and accomplished them but, according to your wishes, I am teaching it all now. Therefore, as you have requested the teachings, and as I have introduced you to some of the different techniques for peaceful abiding practice, and as this is a practice that must be accomplished, you should choose the method you want to practice and practice it on your own level.

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