



The Stages of Meditation

A Chart with Notes by Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, Tutor to His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, and Root Lama of Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin

It has been spoken that each and every high spiritual quality of all three ways is a result of meditation, either in the form of quietude (*shamata*), or some state which is close to it. The benefits of meditation are many, beginning with the fact that—once you have attained quietude—then any virtuous practice you undertake becomes extremely powerful. It is an absolute necessity, and so attaining the state of quietude is extremely important for any deep practitioner who really hopes to reach freedom.

And here is how to do it. A meditator must first seek out all six of the conditions that support the attempt to reach quietude. Then they should acquaint themselves with the five obstacles to one-pointed concentration; these are explained, in Lord Maitreya's work entitled *Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes*, as not feeling like meditating, losing the object, dullness and agitation, failing to take action, and taking action when there is no need to do so.

The corrections for the first of these obstacles are a deep belief in the benefits of meditation, a strong desire to master it, the physical and mental pleasure of a person who gets good at meditation, and the hard work needed to get good at it.

The correction for the second obstacle is to bring the mind back to the object. The correction for the third problem is watchfulness, and the correction for the fourth is taking the necessary action. The correction for the fifth problem is to leave well enough alone. Thus one must attain quietude through undertaking eight different corrective actions.

It is further stated that—if you come to understand how these can be divided into nine mental states, and how these in turn are achieved through six different powers and grouped into four modes of focus—then you can quite easily attain a state of single-pointed concentration which is perfect.

The text called *The Essence of the Middle Way* includes a verse that says,

Master the elephant of the mind
Step by step, as follows:
He wants to go the wrong way,
So be sure to tie him to the stake
Of the object of your meditation
With a strong rope made of bringing
The mind back to your object;
Then finally use the iron hook
Of your wisdom to take control.

Here the process of learning to meditate is being compared to the way in which you tame a wild elephant, and this is the point of the illustration above. Here I will give you just a rough explanation of each of the steps you see here.

The nine mental states are as follows: setting the mind on the object; keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity; keeping the mind on the object with patches where you lose the object; maintaining the mind tightly on the object; controlling the mind; quieting the mind; completely quieting the mind; attaining single-pointedness; and reaching deep meditation.

Here is how you use the six powers to attain these nine states. The first of the states is attained through the power of learning the instructions for meditation from your Lama. The second is reached through the power of contemplating these instructions. You achieve the third and fourth mental states through the power of bringing your mind back to the object. The fifth and sixth are attained by the power of watchfulness. The seventh and eighth you bring about through the power of effort, and the ninth with the power of complete habituation.

Here is how these nine are grouped into four different modes of focus. During the first and second mental states, you focus by forcefully concentrating the mind. Over the course of the middle five states, you focus in a stream, but with interruptions. In the eighth mental state you focus in an uninterrupted stream, and during the ninth you focus on the object completely effortlessly.

The final result of attaining these nine states, one by one, is that you reach an unshakable state of physical and mental meditative pleasure. Simultaneous to achieving this pleasure, you attain a state of quietude which is taken in by the preparatory stage of the first concentration level, [which is the meditative platform needed to see emptiness directly].

Suppose that, after achieving quietude in the way described above, you go on to meditate one-pointedly upon the profound worldview of the middle way, reaching a balance in your practice between the ability to analyze reality and the ability to hold your mind fixed in meditation on the conclusions gained from your analysis. This analysis will automatically enable you to reach an extraordinary level of physical and mental meditative pleasure—and it is at this point that we can say you have attained the special insight into reality (*vipashyana*), in its authentic form.

If you practice these instructions correctly, then you will gain the razor-sharp sword of wisdom, a form of one-pointed concentration where quietude and special insight (*shamata* and *vipashyana*) are married together. You can then carry this mighty sword onto the field of battle, and as time goes by smash the two great obstacles [those to achieving nirvana, and those to achieving total enlightenment]; that is, you can eliminate within you every undesirable quality. With this you will win the great victory of the four bodies of a Buddha, and find yourself able to perform enlightened deeds, constantly and spontaneously, without any conscious thought—fulfilling the hopes of every living creature, for as long as space itself endures.

May every monk who's taken their vows
Also attain those quiet places;
May they give up all distraction,
And master the art of meditation.

This has been written by the one
They gave the name of Trijang Trulku,
In response to a request by the artist
Called Udrung Sunam Rinchen,
Who said to me, "You know,
We see a lot of different versions
Of that chart, but would you mind
To write for us a new one,
With captions clear to read?"

By the virtue of this deed,
Undertaken as it was
With the material wealth of the dead,
May every being who ever died,
With Asong at their head,
Come to see the wrong they've done,
Collected over every life
They ever lived, cleaned forever from them.

And may they then perfect,
One by one, the paths and levels,
Quickly reaching that excellent road,
The matchless state of enlightenment.

The cost of printing this chart
Was donated from the estate
Of Asong, now deceased,
By those who served him well,
The House of Gyaltun and also
That monk from Dzung Monastery
Whose name is Lobsang Dorje.

The carving of this blueprint was completed in the Tibetan Fire-Sheep year (1967), in Bene Dremo Jong. The block itself has been stored at the Tarndu Ling Temple of Baksa Monastery.

- [1] 1) Setting the mind on the object
- [2] Bringing the mind back to the object
- [3] Watchfulness
- [4] The six bends in the road represent the six powers. The first represents the power of learning the instructions. Based on this, one achieves the first mental state.
- [5] The elephant represents your mind, and his black color symbolizes dullness.
- [6] The monkey stands for distraction, and his black color represents agitation.

[7] The presence of the flames, and their relative size, from this point up to the seventh mental state represent the relative amount of effort needed to bring your mind back to the object, and the degree of watchfulness needed.

[8] The power of contemplating the instructions. You use this to reach the second mental state.

[9] 2) Keeping the mind on the object with brief continuity

[10] The gradual increase in the white patch from this point on, starting with the elephant's head, represents a gradual increase in the clarity and fixation of the mind.

[11] This symbol stands for the five objects of the senses, which themselves represent the various objects that agitation focuses upon.

[12] The power of bringing the mind back to the object. This allows you to attain the third and fourth mental states.

[13] 3) Keeping the mind on the object, with patches where you lose the object.

[14] Subtle dullness. From this point on, you are able to recognize the distinction between obvious and subtle dullness, and other such details.

[15] The monkey looking back represents the ability both to tell when your mind is wandering, and to re-focus it upon the object of meditation.

[16] 4) Maintaining the mind tightly on the object.

[17] The power of watchfulness. This allows you to reach the fifth and sixth mental states.

[18] Agitation is the first of the two that loses its power to appear in your mind.

[19] When you are trying to develop quietude, even allowing your mind to be distracted to a virtuous object becomes an obstacle, and you must seek to stop it. When you are doing other practices though you do not have to stop it. And so we see the monkey reaching for the fruit of a second activity.

[20] Watchfulness will not let the mind get distracted, and uplifting your heart leads you to a state of one-pointed concentration.

[21] 5) Controlling the mind.

[22] 6) Quieting the mind.

[23] The power of effort. This allows you to reach the seventh and eighth mental states.

[24] 7) Completely quieting the mind. At this point it is difficult for even subtle forms of dullness and agitation to occur. Even if they do come, you are able to eliminate them immediately with a minimum of effort.

[25] Here the fact that the elephant has lost all the black, and left behind the monkey as well, represents your ability to engage in one-pointed concentration in an uninterrupted stream: if you apply just a little effort to bring your mind to the object and maintain watchfulness, then dullness, agitation, and distraction can no longer interrupt your meditation.

[26] 8) Attaining single-pointedness

[27] The power of complete habituation, which enables you to reach the ninth mental state

[28] 9) Reaching deep meditation

[29] Achieving quietude (*shamata*)

[30] Physical meditative pleasure

[31] Mental meditative pleasure

[32] Special insight (*vipashyana*) and quietude (*shamata*) marry together, focussing on emptiness, and allow you to cut the root of this suffering life.

[33] One goes on to seek the correct view of reality, with a great ability to bring the mind to the object, and to maintain watchfulness.