Chapter 9 Bodhisattva Outlook and Action

9.1 Taking the Bodhisattva Vows

Lamp for the Path: Verse 18

Having developed the aspiration for enlightenment,
Constantly enhance it through concerted effort.
To remember it in this and also in other lives,
Keep the precepts properly as explained.

If you have taken a formal pledge of bodhicitta, you have to abstain from the four negative factors and cultivate the four positive ones to ensure that your practice does not degenerate in this and future lifetimes.

The four negative factors are:

1. Deceiving your teacher and beings worthy of veneration by telling lies.
2. Causing others to feel remorse for their virtuous deeds.
3. Out of anger, speaking harshly to bodhisattvas.
4. With negative motivation, deceiving other sentient beings.

The four positive factors are:

1. Never telling lies for selfish reasons, even at the cost of your life.
2. Leading other beings to the path of virtue.
3. Cultivating recognition of bodhisattvas who have generated bodhicitta as teachers and proclaiming their virtues.
4. Continuously maintaining your compassion and sense of responsibility for all sentient beings.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 19

Without the vow of the engaged intention,
Perfect aspiration will not grow.
Make effort definitely to take it,
Since you want the wish for enlightenment to grow.

Here, the text is stating that although generating the aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings has tremendous merit, greater benefit lies in actually taking the bodhisattva vows to live the ideals of bodhicitta. The text suggests the following sequence:

1. Generate the altruistic intention.
2. Participate in a ceremony and take a pledge to continue to sustain it.
3. Cultivate the desire to engage in the bodhisattva deeds.
4. Take the bodhisattva vows.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 20

Those who maintain any of the seven kinds
Of individual liberation vow
Have the ideal [prerequisite] for
The bodhisattva vow, not others.

Here, the text points out that practitioners who take the bodhisattva vows ideally should have laid the foundation of ethical discipline by observing any of the seven classes of the vows for individual liberation:

1. Layman vows.
2. Laywoman vows.
3. Novice monk vows.
4. Novice nun vows.
5. Probationary nun vows.
6. Fully ordained monk vows.
7. Fully ordained nun vows.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 21

The Tathagata spoke of seven kinds
Of individual liberation vow.
The best of these is glorious pure conduct,
Said to be the vow of a fully ordained person.

This verse states that of these seven categories of pratimoksha vows, the highest is that of full ordination. The Buddha stated very clearly that we can determine the viability of his doctrine on the basis of the practice of vinaya, the codes of ethical discipline. Wherever the practice of vinaya is established, particularly its three main activities—the periodical confessional ceremonies [Tib: so-jong], the summer retreat [Tib: yar-nä], and the ending of the summer retreat Tib: gak-ye]—the teachings of the Buddha also exist. It is said that wherever the practice of vinaya flourishes, the Buddha himself feels a sense of humility. Wherever the practice of these activities is absent, the teachings of the Buddha cannot be said to truly exist at that place.

This praise of vinaya practice is not only found in the vinaya literature but also in Mahayana texts, such as the bodhisattva sutras and the texts of Highest Yoga Tantra. In the Kalachakra tantra, for example, there is an explicit statement that of all the vajra masters of Kalachakra, the vajra master who has full ordination vows is supreme.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 22

According to the ritual described in
The chapter on discipline in the Bodhisattva Stages,
Take the vow from a good
And well-qualified spiritual teacher.

Unlike the pratimoksha and tantric vows, you can take the bodhisattva vow in front of a representation of a buddha without the presence of a teacher. However, Verse 22 states that ideally, you should still take it from a qualified spiritual teacher. Verse 23 describes the qualities that such a teacher should possess:

Lamp for the Path: Verse 23

Understand that a good spiritual teacher
Is one skilled in the vow ceremony,
Who lives by the vow and has

The confidence and compassion to bestow it.

The text then goes on to state that if you do not find such a spiritual teacher, you can still take the vow in the following way:

Lamp for the Path: Verse 24

However, in the case you try but cannot
Find such a spiritual teacher,
I shall explain another
Correct procedure for taking the vow.

From Verse 25 onwards, the text presents the procedure for taking the bodhisattva vow if a teacher is not available. This is taken from Shantideva's *Compendium of Deeds*.

Lamp for the Path: Verses 25 through 31

25. I shall write here very clearly, as explained
In the *Ornament of Manjushri's Buddha Land Sutra,*
How, long ago, when Manjushri was Ambaraja,
He aroused the intention to become enlightened.

(Verse 26 onwards is taken directly from Shantideva's text.)

26. "In the presence of the protectors,
I arouse the intention to gain full enlightenment.
I invite all beings as my guests
And shall free them from cyclic existence.
27. "From this moment onwards
Until I attain enlightenment,
I shall not harbour harmful thoughts,
Anger, avarice or envy.
28. "I shall cultivate pure conduct,
Give up wrong-doing and desire
And with joy in the vow of discipline
Train myself to follow the buddhas.
29. "I shall not be eager to reach
Enlightenment in the quickest way,
But shall stay behind till the very end,
For the sake of a single being.
30. "I shall purify limitless
Inconceivable lands
And remain in the ten directions
For all those who call my name.
31. "I shall purify all my bodily
And verbal forms of activity.
My mental activities, too, I shall purify
And do nothing that is non-virtuous."

In Verse 32, the text presents the practices or precepts in which practitioners must engage once they have taken the bodhisattva vow. These are primarily the practices of the **six perfections—generosity, ethical disci-**

pline, patience, joyous effort, meditative concentration and wisdom. All the perfections of the bodhisattva practice can be understood in terms of the three ethical disciplines of the bodhisattva:

1. Refraining from negative actions.
2. Accumulating virtue.
3. Working for the welfare of other sentient beings.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 32

When those observing the vow
Of the active altruistic intention have trained well
In the three forms of discipline,[34] their respect
For these three forms of discipline grows,
Which causes purity of body, speech and mind.

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[34] In Buddhism, the "**three forms of discipline**" (also known as the "threefold training" or **tri-śikṣā**) are fundamental practices that form the basis of the path to enlightenment. These three disciplines are:

1. **Ethical Conduct (Śīla)**
2. **Meditative Concentration (Samādhi)**
3. **Wisdom (Prajñā)**

1. Ethical Conduct (Śīla)

Description: Ethical conduct involves maintaining moral discipline and engaging in virtuous behaviour. It is the foundation for mental and spiritual development, ensuring that one's actions do not cause harm to oneself or others.

Practices:

- Observing precepts or vows, such as the Five Precepts for lay Buddhists or the monastic precepts for monks and nuns.
- Practicing right speech, right action, and right livelihood, as outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path.

Key Points:

- Ethical conduct helps to purify the mind by reducing negative karma and fostering positive, wholesome actions.
- It creates a stable and harmonious environment conducive to meditation and wisdom.

2. Meditative Concentration (Samādhi)

Description: Meditative concentration refers to the practice of developing deep mental focus and tranquility through meditation. It involves training the mind to achieve higher states of consciousness and stable, sustained attention.

Practices:

- Practicing various forms of meditation, such as mindfulness (sati) and concentration (samatha) practices.
- Developing the four jhānas (meditative absorptions) and other advanced meditative states.

Key Points:

- Concentration helps to calm the mind and prepare it for the development of insight.
- It leads to the ability to maintain clear and unwavering focus on the nature of reality.

3. Wisdom (Prajñā)

Description: Wisdom involves the deep understanding and realisation of the true nature of reality, particularly the concepts of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anatta).

Practices:

- Studying and reflecting on the teachings of the Buddha, particularly those concerning emptiness (śūnyatā) and dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda).
- Practicing insight meditation (vipassanā) to directly perceive the nature of reality.

Key Points:

- Wisdom is the culmination of ethical conduct and meditative concentration, providing the insight needed to achieve liberation.
- It involves the direct experiential realisation of the true nature of all phenomena, leading to the end of ignorance and the cessation of suffering.

9.2 The Practice of the First Five Perfections

Now we refer to Lama Tsong Khapa's text to read the explanations of the six perfections. First is the perfection of generosity.

9.2.1 The Perfection of generosity

Lines of Experience: Verse 15

> Generosity is the wish-granting jewel with which you can fulfil the hopes of sentient beings. It is the best weapon for cutting the knot of miserliness. It is the (altruistic) conduct that enhances your self-confidence and undaunted courage. It is the basis for your good reputation to be proclaimed in the ten directions. Knowing this, the wise have devoted themselves to the excellent path of completely giving away their body, belongings and merit. I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

We have to understand that the main purpose of generosity is to fulfil the wishes of the object of generosity, that is other sentient beings. Its purpose for practitioners is to help them overcome feelings of possessiveness and miserly attachment. The texts contain detailed explanations of how to engage in giving: the appropriateness of timing, motivation, state of mind and so forth. Also, when performing an act of generosity, bodhisattva practitioners must ensure that all six perfections are complete within that single act.

9.2.2 The Perfection of Ethical Discipline

Lines of Experience: Verse 16

> Ethical discipline is the water that washes away the stains of faulty actions. It is the ray of moonlight that cools the scorching heat of the defilements. (It makes you) radiant like a Mount Meru in the midst of the nine kinds of being. By its power, you are able to bend all beings (to your good influence) without (recourse to) mesmerising glares. Knowing this, the holy ones have safeguarded, as they would their eyes, the precepts that they have accepted (to keep) purely. I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

This verse refers principally to the practice of ethical discipline in the form of restraint, ie, refraining from negative actions, particularly in the context of the vows of individual liberation. For a bodhisattva, the main ethical practice of restraint is to refrain from self-centredness and self-cherishing thoughts.

9.2.3 The Perfection of Forbearance

Lines of Experience: Verse 17

> Patience is the best adornment for those with power and the perfect ascetic practice for those tormented by delusions. It is the high-soaring eagle as the enemy of the snake of anger, and the thickest armour against the weapons of abusive language. Knowing this, (the wise) have accustomed themselves in various

ways and forms to the armour of supreme patience. I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

The **practice of patience** here refers mainly to developing the forbearance to endure any harm that may befall you, such that you cultivate a sense of indifference towards it. You learn to voluntarily accept hardships for a higher cause. There is also a third dimension to the practice of patience, which is cultivated as a result of constantly reflecting upon the teachings of the Dharma. The most detailed explanations of these practices can be found in the sixth chapter of Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.*

9.2.4 The Perfection of Joyous Effort

Lines of Experience: Verse 18

> Once you wear the armour of resolute and irreversible joyous effort, your expertise in the scriptures and insights will increase like the waxing moon. You will make all your actions meaningful (for attaining enlightenment) and will bring whatever you undertake to its intended conclusion. Knowing this, the bodhisattvas have exerted great waves of joyous effort, washing away all laziness. I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

The practice of cultivating this perfection of joyous effort is detailed in the seventh chapter of Shantideva's *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.

9.2.5 The Perfection of Concentration

Lamp for the Path: Verses 33 through 38

From Verse 33 onwards, the *Lamp* gives a detailed explanation of the practices for cultivating calm abiding[34] and penetrative insight.

> 33. Therefore, through effort in the vow made by
> Bodhisattvas for pure, full enlightenment,
> The collections for complete enlightenment
> Will be thoroughly accomplished.
> 34. All buddhas say the cause for the completion
> Of the collections, whose nature is
> Merit and exalted wisdom,
> Is the development of higher perception.

The merit and exalted wisdom mentioned here refer to the two accumulations of merit and wisdom and relate to the two enlightened holy bodies of rupakaya and dharmakaya respectively. The text states that the basis of the completion of these two accumulations is the cultivation of higher perception [Tib: *ngön-she*]. This refers to a heightened awareness where one has the ability to intuit the mental disposition and inclinations of other sentient beings and can act to help them in the most effective way.

35. Just as a bird with undeveloped
Wings cannot fly in the sky,
Those without the power of higher perception
Cannot work for the good of living beings.

That is, if you lack this awareness of the minds of other sentient beings, while your intentions may be very noble, you might perform activities of body, speech or mind that finish up harming those on the receiving end.

36. The merit gained in a single day
By one who possesses higher perception
Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes
By one without such higher perception.

37. Those who want swiftly to complete
The collections for full enlightenment
Will accomplish higher perception
Through effort, not through laziness.

38. Without the attainment of calm abiding,[35]
Higher perception will not occur.
Therefore make repeated effort
To accomplish calm abiding.

Atisha presents the practice of calm abiding[35] as a condition for the cultivation of this higher perception, or heightened awareness. More importantly, the attainment of calm abiding is a prerequisite for the attainment of

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[35] "**Calm abiding**" (Sanskrit: **śamatha**, Pali: **samatha**) refers to a state of meditative concentration where the mind is focused, serene, and free from distraction. This practice is foundational for developing deeper states of meditation and is often pursued alongside insight meditation (vipassanā). The primary goal of śamatha is to cultivate a stable, tranquil mind that can remain undisturbed by external or internal stimuli.

Key Aspects of Calm Abiding

1. **Concentration**: Central to śamatha is the development of single-pointed concentration (ekaggatā), where the mind remains focused on a single object without wavering. Common objects of focus include the breath, a visual object, a mantra, or a concept like loving-kindness.
2. **Tranquility**: As the practitioner becomes more adept, the mind settles into a state of calm and tranquility, reducing mental agitation and promoting inner peace.
3. **Stages of Development**: There are nine stages or levels of mental stabilisation leading to perfect concentration. These stages involve progressively deeper levels of focus and fewer distractions.

The Nine Stages of Calm Abiding

1. **Placement of the Mind (Fixing the Mind)**: Initial focus on the chosen object.
2. **Continuous Placement**: Sustaining attention on the object more consistently.
3. **Repeated Placement**: Regaining focus quickly after distraction.
4. **Close Placement**: Deepening concentration with fewer interruptions.
5. **Disciplining**: Overcoming subtle distractions and maintaining strong focus.
6. **Pacifying**: Further reducing subtle distractions.
7. **Complete Pacification**: Achieving a high level of uninterrupted focus.
8. **One-Pointed Attention**: Attaining unwavering concentration.
9. **Equanimity**: Reaching a state of effortless concentration and deep tranquility.

Benefits of Calm Abiding

- **Mental Stability**: A stable, calm mind is less prone to stress, anxiety, and emotional disturbances.
- **Foundation for Insight**: A tranquil mind can more effectively engage in vipassanā, leading to deeper insights into the nature of reality.
- **Enhanced Daily Life**: Improved focus and emotional regulation benefit daily activities and interpersonal relationships.

Practices to Develop Calm Abiding

- **Mindfulness of Breathing**: Observing the breath as it naturally flows in and out.
- **Visualisation**: Focusing on a mental image, such as a Buddha figure or a serene landscape.
- **Mantra Recitation**: Repeating a word or phrase to aid concentration.
- **Loving-Kindness Meditation**: Generating feelings of love and compassion toward oneself and others.

vipashyana—penetrative insight[9] into the nature of emptiness. Although it is possible to develop the wisdom realising emptiness[36] without calm abiding, it is obviously not possible to develop the wisdom that is a union of calm abiding and penetrative insight. True penetrative insight focused on emptiness comes about only when we experience the physical and mental pliancy derived from a process of analytic inquiry. In order to attain the pliancy derived through analysis, we must have the physical and mental pliancy that is generated through single-pointedness of mind. Lama Tsong Khapa's text goes on to describe the distinctive qualities of mind once one has attained calm abiding.

Lines of Experience: Verse 19

> Meditative concentration is the king wielding power over the mind. If you fix it (on one point), it remains there, immovable like a mighty Mount Meru. If you apply it, it can engage fully with any virtuous object. It leads to the great exhilarating bliss of your body and mind being made serviceable. Knowing this, yogis who are proficient have devoted themselves continuously to single-pointed concentration, which overcomes the enemy of mental wandering. I, the yogi, have practiced just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

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[36] "**The wisdom realising emptiness**" (Sanskrit: **prajñā**; Tibetan: **shes rab**) refers to the profound understanding of the true nature of reality, particularly the insight into the emptiness (śūnyatā) of all phenomena. This wisdom is considered crucial for achieving liberation (nirvāṇa) and enlightenment (bodhi).

Understanding Emptiness

Emptiness in this context does not mean nothingness or a void. Instead, it refers to **the absence of inherent existence in all phenomena**. According to Buddhist teachings, everything arises dependently through causes and conditions (pratītyasamutpāda) and lacks an independent, permanent essence. Realising this emptiness is a central goal of Buddhist meditation and study.

Key Points About the Wisdom Realising Emptiness

1. **Dependent Origination**: Understanding that all phenomena arise due to specific causes and conditions and are interdependent. Nothing exists independently.
2. **Non-Self (Anattā)**: Recognising that what we consider the self is merely a collection of changing physical and mental aggregates and lacks an intrinsic, unchanging identity.
3. **Middle Way**: Emptiness avoids the extremes of externalism (the belief in a permanent, unchanging essence) and nihilism (the belief that nothing exists at all). It is a middle path that acknowledges the dependent existence of phenomena.

Development of the Wisdom Realising Emptiness

1. **Study and Contemplation**: Engaging with the teachings of the Buddha, particularly texts like the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras (*Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*), which expound on the nature of emptiness. Key texts include:
    - **"The Heart Sutra" (Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya)**: A concise text that encapsulates the essence of the wisdom realising emptiness.
    - **"The Diamond Sutra" (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra)**: Explores the concept of emptiness and the illusion of a self.
2. **Analytical Meditation**: Using reasoning to deconstruct the apparent solidity and inherent existence of phenomena.
    - **The Fourfold Analysis**: Examining whether the self is identical to or separate from the aggregates.
    - **The Fivefold Analysis**: Investigating the nature of phenomena in terms of their causes, effects, substances, characteristics, and nature.
3. **Meditative Absorption**: Stabilising the mind through practices like śamatha (calm abiding) to prepare it for deep insight meditation (vipassanā) into emptiness.

Impact of Realising Emptiness

- **Overcoming Ignorance**: Ignorance (avidyā) is the root cause of suffering (dukkha) in Buddhist philosophy. Realising emptiness dispels this ignorance, leading to the cessation of suffering.
- **Compassion**: The insight into emptiness enhances compassion, as it fosters the understanding that all beings are interconnected and share the same nature of impermanence and lack of inherent existence.
- **Enlightenment**: The ultimate goal of realising emptiness is to achieve Buddhahood, the state of complete awakening and liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsāra).

In the first two lines, the author is saying that when you have gained calm abiding,[35] you have also gained a certain mastery over your own mind, because you have the ability to determine whether or not to engage with an object. If you want to place it single-pointedly upon a chosen object, it can remain there completely immovable, like Mount Meru. The kind of meditative concentration described in this verse is attained after the ninth level of mental stability,[34] where you experience an exhilarating sense of bliss. This bliss should not be confused with the great bliss in the tantric context; rather, it is a bliss derived from the physical and mental pliancy generated as a result of fusing your mind single-pointedly with an object of meditation.

Lamp for the Path: Verses 39 & 40

> 39. While the conditions for calm abiding
> Are incomplete, meditative stabilisation
> Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates
> Strenuously for thousands of years.
> 40. Thus maintaining well the conditions mentioned
> In the *Collection for Meditative Stabilisation Chapter*,
> Place the mind on any one
> Virtuous focal object.

The text states, if the conditions for cultivating single-pointedness of mind and calm abiding are not complete, all your efforts to attain it will be wasted. Therefore, if you want to engage in a concerted practice of cultivating calm abiding, you must ensure that the following five conditions are present:

1. The sound basis of an ethically disciplined way of life.
2. Few personal needs or mundane chores to be done.
3. A good understanding of all the key elements and stages of the practice.
4. An appropriate diet and avoidance of excessive eating.
5. As few distractions as possible, with restriction of interactions with strangers or other people.

In this way, you can create the conditions necessary for the single-pointed practice of calm abiding. Buddhist practitioners making a concerted effort to cultivate this single-pointedness of mind must engage in this practice in two ways. You should know the techniques for both uplifting your mind and generating sobering thoughts. You might think that sitting up straight will uplift your mind and hunching over will bring it down, but neither is really the case. You have to learn the thought processes and reflections that bring about these effects.

Here, we are talking about lam-rim practitioners who have engaged in the practices up to this point—those of the initial and middling scopes, including the Three Higher Trainings[12]—and gained a certain degree of experience as a result of the combined application of analytic meditation and single-pointed placement.

As to the actual steps involved in engaging in the cultivation of calm abiding,[35] there are various methods explained in texts, such as Maitreya/Asanga's *Madhyantavibhaga*, where we find discussions of the five primary obstacles to successful meditation and the eight antidotes to these obstacles.[37] Regarding the object that you use for single-pointed meditation, the text presents many different categories of object. There are objects that are suited to the purification of negativity or elimination of afflictions[27], objects that are more suited to analytic temperaments and so forth. Three principal kinds of object are mentioned:

1. A pervasive object, which is one common to both calm abiding[35] and penetrative insight[9].
2. Objects associated with your own past habits.
3. Objects that are more relevant to overcoming afflictions[27].

Whether you take an external physical object as the object of your meditation or an instance of your own personal experience, it is important to choose only one object and not keep changing it. The more new objects

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[37] Successful meditation practice can be hindered by five primary obstacles, often referred to as the "**five hindrances**." Overcoming these hindrances is essential for developing deep concentration and insight. Alongside the hindrances, there are **eight antidotes** prescribed to counteract these obstacles and support effective meditation.

The Five Hindrances

1. **Sensual Desire (Kāmacchanda)**
   - **Description**: Craving for sensory pleasures such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations.
   - **Impact**: Distracts the mind from focusing on the meditation object.
2. **Ill-Will (Vyāpāda)**
   - **Description**: Feelings of anger, hatred, or aversion toward others or oneself.
   - **Impact**: Creates mental turbulence and prevents the development of a calm, loving mind.
3. **Sloth and Torpor (Thīna-Middha)**
   - **Description**: Lethargy, drowsiness, and lack of mental and physical energy.
   - **Impact**: Leads to a dull and sleepy state of mind, making it difficult to maintain alertness and focus.
4. **Restlessness and Worry (Uddhacca-Kukkucca)**
   - **Description**: Agitation, unease, and anxiety about past or future events.
   - **Impact**: Causes a scattered and unsettled mind, hindering concentration.
5. **Doubt (Vicikicchā)**
   - **Description**: Lack of confidence in the meditation practice, the teachings, or one's own abilities.
   - **Impact**: Erodes motivation and commitment, making it hard to continue the practice.

The Eight Antidotes

1. **For Sensual Desire**:
   - **Mindfulness of the Body (Kāyagatā-sati)**: Focusing on the physical sensations and the nature of the body to reduce attachment to sensory pleasures.
   - **Contemplation of Impurities (Asubha-bhāvanā)**: Reflecting on the unattractive aspects of the body to counteract attachment.
2. **For Ill-Will**:
   - **Loving-Kindness Meditation (Mettā-bhāvanā)**: Cultivating feelings of goodwill, compassion, and forgiveness toward oneself and others.
3. **For Sloth and Torpor**:
   - **Reflection on Light (Āloka-saññā)**: Visualising or contemplating light to energise and awaken the mind.
   - **Investigation and Analysis (Dhammavicaya)**: Actively engaging in analysing and understanding the teachings to stimulate mental clarity.
4. **For Restlessness and Worry**:
   - **Mindfulness of Breathing (Ānāpānasati)**: Focusing on the breath to calm and stabilise the mind.
   - **Cultivating Contentment (Santuṭṭhi)**: Developing satisfaction with the present moment and reducing the tendency to worry.
5. **For Doubt**:
   - **Study and Reflection (Pariyatti and Paṭipatti)**: Studying the teachings and reflecting on their truth to build confidence in the practice.
   - **Faith in the Triple Gem (Saddhā)**: Developing faith in the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (community) to strengthen resolve and trust.

that you bring in as a focus of your meditation, the less progress you will make. **Select a single object and give it your full attention**. Buddhist practitioners, for example, can focus on an image of the Buddha. If you do this, however, it is better not to imagine a Buddha that is too big or too small—one about three or four finger-widths in height is quite useful. Whatever the case, your visualisation should be clear and luminous, like a hologram made of light.

When you cultivate single-pointed meditation on the Buddha, although you may use a physical representation, such as a statue or a painting, when you first begin, this is not what you use in your actual meditation. There, you **focus on an image that you create in your mind** and cultivate your single-pointed concentration on that. There are also methods for cultivating calm abiding on the basis of deity yoga, where you visualise yourself as the deity, or your physiological energies, where you concentrate on your subtle channels, for example. The latter are Vajrayana practices.

The *key to the development of calm abiding is mindfulness*, which combines introspection and diligence.[38] It is the continuous application of mind-

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[38] **Mindfulness** is a fundamental practice that involves maintaining a continuous awareness of one's body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. When mindfulness combines **introspection** and **diligence**, it becomes a powerful tool for cultivating insight and progressing on the spiritual path.

Mindfulness (Sati)

Mindfulness is the practice of maintaining a present-centred awareness. It involves:

- **Attention**: Paying close attention to the present moment.
- **Observation**: Observing experiences without attachment or aversion.
- **Non-judgment**: Maintaining an open and non-judgmental stance toward all experiences.

Introspection (Sampajañña)

Introspection refers to clear comprehension or self-awareness. It involves:

- **Understanding Context**: Being aware of the purpose and context of actions.
- **Self-Reflection**: Continuously monitoring one's own mind to recognise states of distraction, agitation, or clarity.
- **Adjustment**: Adjusting one's focus and behaviour based on this awareness to maintain a balanced state.

Diligence (Atappa/Viriya)

Diligence refers to persistent effort and energy in maintaining mindfulness and introspection. It involves:

- **Consistency**: Regular and sustained practice of mindfulness.
- **Perseverance**: Continuing the practice despite difficulties or obstacles.
- **Enthusiasm**: Cultivating a positive and energetic attitude towards practice.

Combining Mindfulness, Introspection, and Diligence

When mindfulness is combined with introspection and diligence, it becomes a comprehensive practice that supports the development of deeper insight and wisdom. This combination helps practitioners to:

- **Detect Subtle Distractions**: Introspection allows for the recognition of subtle mental states that may lead to distraction, enabling timely corrections.
- **Maintain Focus**: Diligence ensures that the practitioner remains committed and focused, preventing the mind from becoming lazy or complacent.
- **Deepen Awareness**: The synergy of these qualities leads to a deeper and more continuous awareness, which is essential for understanding the true nature of reality.

Practical Application in Meditation

1. **Mindfulness of Breathing (Ānāpānasati)**
   - **Practice**: Focus on the breath while maintaining awareness of the body's sensations, feelings, and mental states.
   - **Introspection**: Regularly check the quality of attention and make adjustments as needed.
   - **Diligence**: Persistently return to the breath whenever the mind wanders.
2. **Body Scan Meditation**
   - **Practice**: Systematically bring attention to different parts of the body.
   - **Introspection**: Notice any areas of tension or relaxation and adjust posture or focus.
   - **Diligence**: Maintain steady progress through the body, resisting the urge to rush or skip parts.
3. **Loving-Kindness Meditation (Mettā Bhāvanā)**
   - **Practice**: Generate feelings of loving-kindness towards oneself and others.
   - **Introspection**: Monitor emotional responses and deepen the feeling of loving-kindness.
   - **Diligence**: Persist in extending loving-kindness even to difficult individuals or situations.

fulness that sustains your attention on your chosen object. This is the heart of placement meditation.[39] Previously we saw how, on the basis of the application of mindfulness, we ensure restraint from negative activity. Therefore, even ethical discipline involves the practice of mindfulness.

Also, the first of the thirty-seven aspects of the path to enlightenment[11] are the four foundations of mindfulness: mindfulness of body, feeling, mind and phenomena. In the context of single-pointed concentration, the key is to develop mindfulness to such a degree that we can sustain it without an instant's distraction. When we engage in single-pointed concentration through the cultivation of calm abiding, we have to be aware of the various faults that can interfere with our practice. For example, even if we are capable of sustaining single-pointed mindfulness, our meditation may lack clarity, or there may be clarity without loss of focus on the object, but our mind lacks vitality.

In general, the faults of meditation are distraction and mental dullness. There are two types of distraction. One is total loss of attention, with no continuity of mindfulness of the object. The other is more subtle, and occurs

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[39] **Placement meditation** refers to a specific type of meditation practice where the mind is "placed" or fixed on a particular object to develop deep concentration and mental stability. This form of meditation is often associated with **samatha** (calm abiding) practices, where the goal is to cultivate a focused, tranquil, and stable mind.

Key Aspects of Placement Meditation

1. **Focus on a Single Object**
   - The object of meditation can be anything that helps to stabilise the mind, such as the breath, a visual object (like a candle flame or a statue of the Buddha), a mantra, or even an abstract concept like loving-kindness.
   - The meditator continually brings the mind back to this object whenever it wanders.
2. **Stages of Development**
   - **Initial Placement**: The meditator initially directs their attention to the chosen object.
   - **Continuous Placement**: Sustaining attention on the object for longer periods without distraction.
   - **Repeated Placement**: When the mind wanders, the meditator brings it back to the object repeatedly.
   - **Close Placement**: Maintaining a more stable and continuous focus on the object.
   - **Taming**: Overcoming gross distractions and achieving a more settled mind.
   - **Pacifying**: Dealing with subtle distractions and deepening concentration.
   - **Complete Pacification**: Maintaining focus with minimal effort, leading to a deeply tranquil state.
   - **One-Pointed Attention**: Achieving full concentration with the mind deeply absorbed in the object.
   - **Balanced Equanimity**: Attaining a state where focus is effortless, and the mind remains in perfect balance and tranquility.
3. **Purpose**
   - The primary aim of placement meditation is to develop **samadhi** (deep meditative concentration) and prepare the mind for more advanced practices such as vipassanā (insight meditation).
   - It helps to calm the mind, reduce mental distractions, and cultivate inner peace and clarity.

Practical Steps in Placement Meditation

1. **Choosing an Object**
   - Select an appropriate object for meditation. Beginners often start with the breath due to its simplicity and accessibility.
2. **Setting the Posture**
   - Adopt a stable and comfortable posture. Traditional positions include sitting cross-legged, but any position that maintains alertness without discomfort can be used.
3. **Focusing the Mind**
   - Direct your attention to the chosen object. If it's the breath, observe the sensations of breathing in and out.
   - Keep your focus steady and gently bring your mind back whenever it wanders.
4. **Developing Stability**
   - Gradually increase the duration of meditation sessions as your concentration improves.
   - Use introspection to monitor the quality of your focus and make adjustments as needed.
5. **Using Antidotes for Hindrances**
   - Employ specific techniques to counteract common obstacles, such as using mindfulness of the body to overcome sensual desire or generating loving-kindness to counteract ill-will.

when, even though there is no loss of focus on the object, another thought arises somewhere in the corner of our mind. Distractions are a sign that our mind is too excited and that we need to engage in thought processes to bring it down to a calmer level.

Another way in which we lose mindfulness of the object is when our mind suffers from mental dullness, or laxity. This simply means that we are unable to focus on the object of meditation. At other times, even though we might be focused on the object, there's a lack of clarity, or vitality. This is subtle dullness, or laxity, and is an indication that our mind is too downcast. We need to engage in reflections that uplift our mind by creating a feeling of joy.

If you find that your mind is too excited and distractions occur as soon as you engage in single-pointed meditation, you should reflect upon the fact that you are still under the control of negative thoughts and emotions; that these afflictions are still active within you. Contemplate the fact that you are still caught in the bondage of cyclic existence and reflect upon impermanence and death. This will have an immediate sobering effect and lessen mental excitement and distractions.

If, on the other hand, you find that your mind is downcast and lacks vitality, you need to uplift it. Here, you can reflect upon the fact that you possess buddha nature—the nucleus of buddhahood—or upon the great value and preciousness of your human existence and the opportunities it affords you. You can also reflect upon the qualities of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, particularly the enlightened qualities of the Buddha, or the fact that you can attain the cessation of suffering. Positive thoughts such as these will inspire joy and confidence within you and reinforce your courage.

When you begin to cultivate calm abiding and single-pointed concentration, you have to learn how these complex processes unfold. In particular, it is essential that you discover sobering and uplifting techniques that work in your own meditation practice and the level of equilibrium that is right for you, but only through continued personal practice and experience, can you discover what these are. Your age and physical constitution can also make a difference, particularly your state of health.

However, as you continue to practice over a prolonged period of time, you will progress through the nine stages of mental stability.[35] By the time you reach the ninth, you will have attained a high degree of single-pointed concentration, which then leads to the attainment of the bliss that comes from physical and mental pliancy. At that point, you have attained calm abiding and the first of the four levels of concentration.[24]

If on the basis of this calm abiding you continue to progress along the path by reflecting upon the imperfections of the desire realm, you will eventually cultivate higher states of awareness, ie, the other three levels of concentration. Eventually, you will attain the formless absorptions.[25] At such heightened states of concentration, your mind will be so subtle that you will temporarily be free of many of the manifest aspects of the afflictions.