

Study and Practice of Meditation

Tibetan Interpretations of the Concentrations
and Formless Absorptions

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them. This practice is called purification by way of the descent of ambrosia (*bdud rtsi 'bebs shyang*).^a

According to Lati Rinpoche, who discusses this type of breath meditation in the context of the objects of observation for purifying behavior, this practice originated in Tibet and “is not mentioned in the Indian texts”; for that reason, although Lati Rinpoche considers it “helpful,” he does not regard it as mandatory.^b

To explain why observing the breath makes possible the establishment of a pure motivation, Gedün Lodrö, relying on Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on (Dignāga's) "Compilation of [Teachings on] Prime Cognition" (pramāṇavārttikakārikā, tshad ma nam 'grel gyi gshig le'ur byas pa)*, points out that “when strong desire manifests, hatred will not manifest and vice versa because desire and hatred are...different conceptions of a similar type”—similar in that both are mental factors—and therefore, in systems asserting six consciousnesses, cannot operate simultaneously in the continuum (*rgyud, saṃtāna*) of one person.^c Similarly, it is impossible to have discursiveness or manifest afflictive emotions and, simultaneously, to focus on an object of observation. Gedün Lodrö emphasizes the importance of this initial period of observing the breath:

As much as you are able to withdraw the mind during this period of meditative stabilization on the breath, so great will be your ability to do as you wish in meditative stabilization [on your main object of observation].^d

Meditation on the breath pacifies all afflictive emotions somewhat; it especially pacifies discursiveness, or coarse conceptuality, thereby increasing the meditator's ability to focus not only on the breath but also on other objects of observation. Thus, although there are many possible objects of observation, this initial period of observing the breath for the sake of purifying motivation is important to a meditator's progress in observing any of them.

^a *Ibid.*, p. 37.

^b *Meditative States*, pp. 86–87.

^c Gedün Lodrö, pp. 39–40.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 41.

5 OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION: I

Ge-luk presentations of objects of observation are extremely complex. For the most part, they explain the categories of objects of observation set forth in Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* and Kamalashīla's *Stages of Meditation*, which, in turn, systematize, in somewhat different ways, discussions of the topic in chapter 8 of the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*.^a All these presentations include several overlapping categories, terminological divisions (*sgras brjod rigs kyi sgo nas dbye ba*) that are conceptually useful for a complete understanding of the nature and function of objects of observation but that sometimes seem to have little practical significance, especially for the beginning meditator. Moreover, although monastic textbooks discuss objects of observation in their sections on calm abiding, all the objects discussed are not objects of observation for the attainment of calm abiding. Mainly, they are presented as objects for calm abiding and special insight (*lhag mthong, vipaśyanā*), but a few are interpreted as objects of observation for higher levels.

It is also important to remember that the objects of observation discussed in the monastic textbooks and their Indian sources are mainly objects of observation for Buddhist meditators. Ge-luk textbooks and scholars admit that non-Buddhists can attain calm abiding and the concentrations and formless absorptions, that any virtuous (*dge ba, kuśāla*) or ethically neutral object can serve as an object of observation, and that even some of the great Indian Buddhist meditators are said to have used neutral objects to achieve calm abiding; they cite and debate a well-known story about Nāgabodhi, an Indian Buddhist scholar-yogi who could not achieve calm abiding with the usual Buddhist objects of observation and was finally able to achieve it only by visualizing the horns of an ox growing from his head.^b Nevertheless, they tend to disparage the use of neutral objects, usually typified by “a pebble or a stick.”^c Despite these difficulties, however, the Ge-luk presentations illuminate the range of possible objects of observation, the range of possibilities for directing and focusing the mind, and the range of

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 78. This statement is qualified by “for the most part” because Gedün Lodrö mentions briefly (pp. 140, 144–45) objects of observation used in tantra but not in the sūtra system.

^b *Meditative States*, p. 91; *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 69; Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 93.2.

^c Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 89.4–92.3; Tsong-kha-pa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (Dharmasāla: shes rig par khang, no date), 673.2–3.

possible results.

The presupposition underlying Ge-luk discussions of the topic of objects of observation is that the meditator *has* an object of observation; mere withdrawal of the mind from sense objects is not the cultivation of calm abiding. A warning against cultivating a meditative equipoise of non-discrimination occurs during discussion of the physical basis of calm abiding and of the concentrations and formless absorptions. Moreover, with regard to meditation on emptiness (*stong pa nyid*, *sūnyatā*), Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po and Jam-yang-shay-pa emphasize that “meditation on emptiness is not the same as withdrawing from conceptuality.”^a

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION

The object of observation of calm abiding is said to be internal—that is, mental. Ge-luk-pa scholars refute the position that a sense object—especially the object of an eye consciousness—can serve as object of observation for calm abiding. They hold that calm abiding is achieved with the mental consciousness, not with a sense consciousness: To achieve calm abiding, it is necessary to withdraw the mind inside, and, as Gedün Lodrö explains, “it is impossible to withdraw the mind inside unless the sense consciousnesses are stopped,” since “the sense consciousnesses are by their very nature distracted to external objects.”^b Gedün Lodrö qualifies this position by noting, “The only person who can remain in a state of deep meditative equipoise while sense consciousnesses operate is a Buddha.”^c

According to Gedün Lodrö, the erroneous notion that calm abiding can be achieved with the eye consciousness “arises because, when the objects of observation of calm abiding are discussed, there is reference to something that we have seen, such as a picture of a Buddha.”^d The process of learning to visualize a given object of observation involves committing to memory a visual object previously seen (for example, an image of a Buddha); the meditator alternately looks at the object and visualizes it, until he or she is able to visualize without looking.

Gedün Lodrö discusses a qualm concerning meditation on the

^a *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 552; Hopkins’ translation of Jam-yang-shay-pa’s debate, pp. 553–58 (Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 66.4–70.2, abridged in Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 551.4–552.1).

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp.67, 68.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 42.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 68.

breath, which is an internal tangible object (*reg bya*, *spraṣṭavya*); the question arises, therefore, whether meditation on it uses the body consciousness (*lus kyi rnam par shes pa*, *kāyavijñāna*), and if so, whether there is a contradiction with the argument that calm abiding cannot be achieved with a sense consciousness. According to Gedün Lodrö, there is no contradiction because (1) the time of the settling down of the winds is not calm abiding itself, when “the sense consciousnesses will cease,” but “a phase preparatory to calm abiding during which, indeed, you have to use your body consciousness to know whether you are exhaling or inhaling,”^a and (2) in the case of meditation on the breath to pacify discursiveness, the nature of the meditation is deduced both from a long tradition of empirical observation that such meditation is “the best way to pacify all coarse minds” and from the fact that in the visualization of the descent of ambrosia, the breath is not the only object of observation; in the visualization of the descent of ambrosia, meditation on the breath is done in conjunction with a visualization in which the affective emotions are imagined as being expelled with the exhalation and good qualities, as entering with the inhalation; the affective emotions and good qualities “are imagined to be of one entity with” the meditator’s breath.^b

Another piece of evidence cited by Gedün Lodrö to show that calm abiding cannot be achieved with the body consciousness is the feature of the posture in which the tongue is set behind the teeth to prevent the flow of saliva, which the meditator would not notice in deep meditative equipoise “because the coarse sense consciousnesses such as the body consciousness cease during the higher stages of meditative stabilization.”^c

The Ge-luk emphasis on the importance of using an internal object of observation has significant psychological implications. In modern psychological experiments, an external meditation object is useful; for, if the meditators used as subjects in a clinical experiment were asked to visualize an object, the researcher could not be sure that all the meditators were visualizing the same object in the same way. Arthur J. Deikman’s 1963 experiment used a blue vase as the object of observation.^d In all his subjects, Deikman reports a decrease in distraction

^a *Ibid.*, p. 41.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 75.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 76.

^d Arthur J. Deikman, “Experimental Meditation,” in Charles T. Tart, ed., *Altered States of Consciousness* (New York: Wiley, 1969), p. 201.

(“development of stimulus barriers”), and, in a final experiment in which the vase was absent, all expressed regret at its absence; some also stated that they were able to visualize the vase in its absence, although Deikman had not asked them to do so and did not follow up their reports by asking them to meditate on the visualized vase. One subject reported a sense of merging with the vase when she looked at it.^a

It is clear from Deikman's experiment that focusing on sense objects can produce a measurable degree of alteration of consciousness, including increased freedom from distraction, but it probably would not produce calm abiding as understood by the Ge-luk-pas. Hopkins, paraphrasing Pa-bong-ka and Jam-yang-shay-pa, gives the general Ge-luk position that “even when non-Buddhists use a pebble or stick as the object, these are only bases of later imagination by the mental consciousness.”^b

HOW TO CHOOSE AN OBJECT OF OBSERVATION

To choose an object of observation, a meditator may “investigate among various objects such as a Buddha image to see what works well”—that is, the meditator may try them out—or “read texts to see what objects of observation are recommended,” or “seek the advice of a virtuous spiritual friend, or guide (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen, kalyāṇamitra*)—a lama (*bla ma, guru*) who can identify a suitable object of observation”; although meditators of sharp faculties are able to choose an object of observation by studying the texts and trying out the objects of observation set forth in them, most people need to rely on a teacher.^c

Ge-luk-pas, however, refute the position that that any object of observation that seems easy or comfortable will do. Rather, the object of observation has to be one that will pacify the mind. Therefore, an object that arouses desire or hatred is not suitable.^d According to Gedün Lodrö, the erroneous position that any easy or comfortable object of observation is suitable stems from a misinterpretation of a line from Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, which Gedün Lodrö interprets in the context of changing the object of observation as, “One

^a *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 206.

^b *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 69, citing Pa-bong-ka, *Lectures*, 315b.4 and Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 89.4–92.3. Jam-yang-shay-pa follows Tsong-kha-pa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (Dharamsala: shes rig par khang, no date), 673.2–3.

^c Gedün Lodrö, pp. 69, 71.

^d *Ibid.*, pp. 69–71.

should set one's virtuous mind on any *one* object.”^a It can also be understood as an exaggeration of the valid position that for an inexperienced meditator, the cultivation of calm abiding is difficult and that, therefore, the object of observation should not also be difficult.^b

Meditators who have one of the five predominant afflictive emotions—desire, hatred, obscuration, pride, and discursiveness—must pacify the predominant afflictive emotion by using the specific object of observation that is an antidote to it; they are unable to use any other object of observation successfully until they have done so. The objects of observation that pacify the five predominant afflictive emotions are called objects of observation for purifying behavior (see below, page 92). However, someone whose afflictive emotions are of equal strength or who has few afflictive emotions may use any of the objects of observation set forth in the Ge-luk system.^c Since the body of a Buddha is considered the best object of observation in this system, it would be seen as the most suitable object of observation for such a person. (See Chapter 6 and especially pages 130ff.)

CHANGING THE OBJECT OF OBSERVATION

In general, once an object of observation has been chosen, it should not be changed until calm abiding has been attained; as the source for this position, Gedün Lodrö cites the line just discussed, from Atisha's *Lamp for the Path*. He cites Kamalashīla's *Stages of Meditation* to support the position that the meditator *must* change the object of observation *after* the attainment of calm abiding, to consolidate and develop the calm abiding already attained.^d

Before the attainment of calm abiding, the major exception is a meditator who, upon first choosing an object of observation, failed to recognize a predominant afflictive emotion and chose, for instance, the body of a Buddha. Such a meditator will reach a point at which progress

^a Gedün Lodrö, pp. 69, 146. Atisha, *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*bodhipathapradīpa, byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*), stanza 40c-d (P 5343, 21.2.8: *dmigs pa gang rung cig la ang/yid ni dge la gzhaq par bya/*). See also P5344, 337.5.8–38.1.1–2; *A Lamp for the Path and Commentary of Atīśa*, trans. and ann. by Richard Sherburne, S.J. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 9, 121.

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp. 70–71.

^c Gedün Lodrö, pp. 71–75; Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 558.3–5; *Meditative States*, p. 82; Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 135.1–4; Tsong-kha-pa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (Dharamsala: shes rig par khang, no date), 674.5–676.1, citing Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*.

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 146.

becomes impossible: the predominant afflictive emotion arises in the meditator's mind whenever he or she tries to focus on the body of a Buddha. This type of impasse usually occurs at the third mental abiding—that is, at the third of the sequence of nine states of mind through which a meditator progresses in order to achieve calm abiding. At that time, the meditator must change to the object of observation that is the appropriate antidote to the predominant afflictive emotion.^a

THE CLASSIC LAYOUT

Ge-luk presentations of objects of observation classically begin with the four types of object of observation set forth in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and explained, with slight differences in interpretation, in Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* and Kamalashīla's *Stages of Meditation*. The four are:

- 1 Pervasive objects of observation (*khyab pa'i dmigs pa, vyāpyālam-bara*)
- 2 Objects of observation for purifying behavior (*spyad pa mnam sbyong gi dmigs pa, caritaviśodanālabana*)
- 3 Objects of observation for [developing] skill (*mkhas pa'i dmigs pa, mkhas par byed pa'i dmigs pa, kauśalyālabana*)
- 4 Objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs mnam sbyong gi dmigs pa, klesaviśodanālabana*)

That these overlapping categories, though classic, are of little practical importance is suggested by Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po's omission of the complete presentation; he merely refers to "the four, pervasive objects of observation, and so forth."^b

According to Gedūn Lodrō, pervasive objects of observation get their name from their etymology, since "this type pervades all objects of observation"—that is, "all objects are included among them."^c Objects of observation for purifying behavior "are named for their ability to pacify afflictive emotions temporarily" and are used by meditators who are dominated by one of the five predominant afflictive emotions that prevent the attainment of calm abiding.^d Objects of observation for developing skill are objects of observation that increase a meditator's

^a *Ibid.*, p. 147.

^b Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 557.5.

^c Gedūn Lodrō, pp. 78, 89.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 78.

skill. Gedūn Lodrō explains that *mkhas pa'i dmigs pa* (literally, "objects of skill") is "an abbreviated expression meaning 'to make or bring about skill' (*mkhas par byed pa'i dmigs pa*).^a Objects of observation for [developing] skill, such as the twelve-linked dependent-arising, require detailed study; by meditating on them, a meditator becomes skilled in them.^a Objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions cause the meditator to separate from the afflictive emotions pertaining to specific cosmological levels—"either the Desire Realm or the upper two realms, the Form and Formless Realms"—or a specific level within the Form or Formless Realms, such as the First Concentration. Unlike the objects of observation for purifying behavior, which pacify specific afflictive emotions that prevent the attainment of calm abiding, objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions pacify equally all the afflictive emotions of a given level.^b They are generally explained in the context of the preparations for the first concentration.

The English term "objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions" requires some comment, since, clearly, these objects of observation do not purify afflictive emotions in the same sense in which objects of observation for purifying behavior purify behavior—that is, by getting rid of impure behaviors; in the case of objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions, the meditator does not get rid of impure afflictive emotions and end up with pure afflictive emotions. In English, one has to say that both types of object of observation, in different ways, purify the meditator of certain afflictive emotions. The Tibetan and Sanskrit words translated as "purifying" (*mnam sbyong, viśodana*) have both meanings; they can take as their direct object both that which is being made pure and the impurities that are being expelled, but in English, one does not "purify" impurities to get rid of them. However, the word "purify" is being used in that sense here to keep the flavor of the Tibetan and Sanskrit terms.

PERVASIVE OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION

There are four divisions of pervasive objects of observation:

- 1 Analytical image (*mnam par rtog pa dang bcas pa'i gzugs brnyan, savi-kalpikapratibimba*)
- 2 Non-analytical image (*mnam par mi rtog pa'i gzugs brnyan, nirvikalpa-kapratibimba*)

^a *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 79.

- 3 Observing the limits of phenomena (*drigos po'i mtha' la dmigs pa, vastvantiālabana*)
- 4 Thorough achievement of the purpose (*dgos pa yongs su grub pa, krt-yānuṣṭāna*)

It is generally said that the first two are posited from the point of view of the subject and the last two, from that of the object.^a However, Gedün Lodrö gives a presentation of the third, observing the limits of phenomena, from the point of view of both object and subject.^b (See page 90.)

The two images. The terms *mam par rtog pa* (*savikalpaka*) and *mam par mi rtog pa* (*nirvikalpaka*) are usually translated as “conceptual” and “non-conceptual,” respectively. In this context, however, they are translated, respectively, as “analytical” and “non-analytical.” There are two explanations of the meaning of “analytical” and “non-analytical,” to be discussed below (see pages 88–90).

The term *gzugs brnyan* (*pratibimba*) means image or reflection, such as a reflection in a mirror. According to Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, “‘image’...refers to the dawning of the object.”^c The present Dalai Lama explains this dawning of the object as, for instance, the visualized image of the body of a Buddha that has been “found” as a result of previous study of an image seen with the eye consciousness: “This image is called a ‘reflection’, and is the object of observation.”^d Gedün Lodrö explains that these two types of observation are called images “because the varieties of objects of observation are not observed nakedly but are perceived by means of an image.” He points out that this image is what Dharmakīrti’s *Commentary on (Dignāga’s) ‘Compilation of Prime Cognition’* calls a meaning-generality (*don spyi, arthasāmānyā*), or generic image.^e

Hopkins notes that, since all images are conceptual, “conceptual” and “non-conceptual” are interpreted as “analytical” and

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 81. Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, posits “the two images from the point of view of the observing [consciousness, observing] the limits of phenomena from the point of view of the object observed, and thorough achievement of the purpose from the point of view of the fruit” (Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 557.5–6).

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp. 86–87.

^c Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 557.6.

^d *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, p. 185

^e Gedün Lodrö, p. 82.

“non-analytical,” respectively.³ According to the Fifth Dalai Lama:

It is said indeed that on the occasion of calm abiding non-conceptuality is needed and that the intellect should be stopped. These statements mean that the mind should not spread to thought other than the object of [observation], such as the body of a Buddha. If (in calm abiding) it were necessary to stop all conceptuality, then, since the contemplation of an image of a Tathāgata’s body is conceptual, such contemplation would also have to cease, and in that case you would lose your object of [observation].⁴

In the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers*, the two images are listed in the order given here.⁵ They are explained in terms of analytical and stabilizing meditation. According to Gedün Lodrö, these texts “say that because calm abiding is mainly a case of stabilizing meditation, it is non-analytical, and because special insight is mainly a case of analytical meditation, it is analytical.”⁶

Kamalashīla’s *Stages of Meditation*, which Gedün Lodrö appears to prefer, lists the non-analytical image first and explains the two images differently. According to Kamalashīla, meditation in the style of a non-analytical image “is so called because it does not analyze the mode of phenomena (their nature or emptiness) but, rather, is a type of calm abiding that takes as its object the varieties of an analytical image “in-nomina,” whereas meditation in the style of an analytical image “in-nomina”—that is, their emptiness.⁷

Gedün Lodrö, for whom both texts are authoritative, holds that the presentations of Asaṅga and Kamalashīla are not inconsistent. He explains that for Kamalashīla, as for Asaṅga, a non-analytical image is an object of observation for calm abiding and an analytical image is an object of observation for special insight. According to Gedün Lodrö, both presentations are based on the mode of procedure of beginners and the order of achieving calm abiding and special insight, since the former is achieved before the latter. Kamalashīla’s presentation accords with this

³ Oral communication.

⁴ Fifth Dalai Lama, *Practice of Emptiness: The Perfection of Wisdom Chapter of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s ‘Sacred Word of Mañjuśrī’* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1974), p. 18.

⁵ Gedün Lodrö, pp. 81, 84–85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 82.

mode of procedure in that almost all beginners take a conventional phenomenon as their object of observation for achieving calm abiding and then, when calm abiding has been achieved, can take emptiness as their object of observation for achieving special insight. Asaṅga's presentation also accords with this mode of procedure, since "[w]hether one is observing the mode or the varieties, as a beginner one first mainly practices stabilizing meditation and then, once calm abiding has been achieved, cultivates analytical meditation and thereby achieves special insight."⁴

Observing the limits of phenomena. As was mentioned earlier (page 88), observing the limits of phenomena is usually posited in terms of the object.⁵ According to Lati Rinpoche, "limits of phenomena" refers to the two types, the varieties (*ji snyed pa*) and the mode (*ji ta ba*)—that is, to conventional phenomena and their emptinesses; phenomena of both types can serve as objects of observation.⁶ Thus, this category, in itself, includes all objects of observation.

According to Gedün Lodrö, however, the limit of phenomena "can be posited from the viewpoint of either the object or the subject." Giving what he presents as the Prāsaṅgika position, he explains that, in terms of the object, the limit of phenomena is only the mode:

The impermanence of sound is not a limit of phenomena. The limit of phenomena is their not existing from their own side, which is the mode of subsistence (*gnas lugs*) of all phenomena whatsoever.⁷

From the viewpoint of the subject, the limit of phenomena is observed at the time of the direct realization of emptiness—presumably, a Bodhisattva's direct realization of emptiness, since Gedün Lodrö states that "the path of observing the limits of phenomena is simultaneous with attainment of the first Bodhisattva ground" and, therefore, with attainment of the Mahāyāna path of seeing. Thus, an inferential cognition of emptiness does not observe the limit of phenomena.⁸

Thorough achievement of the purpose. Thorough achievement of the purpose is presented in terms of the fruit, that is to say, the result of meditation. According to Lati Rinpoche,

^a *Ibid.*, p. 85.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 81.

^c *Meditative States*, p. 81.

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 86.

^e *Ibid.*, p. 86.

thorough achievement of the purpose refers not to the object of observation but to the purpose for which one is meditating; this class includes all the fruits of meditative stabilization from liberation up to the omniscience of a Buddha.⁹

Thus, it includes both the final purpose, Buddhahood, and temporary purposes beginning with liberation from cyclic existence.

Gedün Lodrö gives a somewhat different explanation, without stating his source. According to him, "thorough achievement of the purpose" refers only to the final purpose, a Buddha's Nature Body (*nyid sku, svabhāvikakāya*). He holds that a Buddha's Nature Body can be taken as an object of observation by non-Buddhas for the sake of attaining calm abiding, special insight, and the Bodhisattva grounds, and that a first-ground Bodhisattva, who has directly realized emptiness and, thereby, "has generated the path observing the limit of phenomena in his or her own continuum...can take a Nature Body as his or her object of observation and thereby achieve Buddhahood."¹⁰

How these four pervade all phenomena. As was mentioned earlier (page 86), pervasive objects of observation are so called because "this type pervades" or includes "all objects of observation": According to Kamalashīla's explanation of the two images, the non-analytical image "includes all varieties of conventional phenomena"; therefore, it includes, for example, the objects of observational purification behavior. Gedün Lodrö points out that the analytical image, as well as the last two types of pervasive object of observation, "involve emptiness," and that "emptiness is also classified as an object of observation for purifying afflictive emotions."¹¹

If one follows Asaṅga's interpretation of the two images, one could probably say that both conventional phenomena and their emptinesses—that is, all phenomena—can be objects of observation of both analytical and stabilizing meditation.

If one understands the limits of phenomena as including both conventional phenomena and their emptinesses (see page 90), one would have to say that it too includes all phenomena. According to the Lo-seling scholar Kensor Yeshey Tupden, it includes the five objects of observation for purifying behavior, the five objects of observation for

^a *Meditative States*, p. 82.

^b Gedün Lodrö, p. 92 (emphasis added).

^c *Ibid.*, p. 78.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 89.

developing skill, and the two objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions.⁴

OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION FOR PURIFYING BEHAVIOR

As was mentioned earlier (page 86), the objects of observation for purifying behavior temporarily pacify the five predominant afflictive emotions that prevent the attainment of calm abiding. The five predominant afflictive emotions are desire, hatred, obscuration, pride, and discursiveness; their antidotes are, respectively, the unpleasant, love, dependent-arising, the divisions of the constituents, and the exhalation and inhalation of the breath.^b

In some cases, a meditator is aware of the predominant afflictive emotion outside meditation and can choose the appropriate object of observation before beginning to cultivate calm abiding.^c In other cases, however, the meditator is unaware of the predominant afflictive emotion or, in Western terms, unconscious. An apparently loving person, for example, may try to meditate on the body of a Buddha and find him- or herself habitually dominated by the thought and image of an enemy instead; such a person has hatred as his or her predominant afflictive emotion. Gedün Lodrö explains that when the meditator withdraws the mind inside in order to cultivate calm abiding, “whatever is strongest in the mind will become manifest,” whereas, outside meditation, the predominant afflictive emotion “does not become manifest because the mind is distracted.”^d

In still other cases, the predominant afflictive emotion will not become manifest at all; the meditator experiences only an inability to progress and will have to consult a teacher, who will diagnose the predominant afflictive emotion and assign the appropriate object of observation. As was noted earlier (page 86), problems related to a predominant afflictive emotion usually arise at the time of the third mental abiding; however, Gedün Lodrö notes that occasionally a meditator with an unconscious predominant afflictive emotion may even attain the

^a Oral commentary.

^b *Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po* merely lists the five, giving no breakdown and mentioning merely “the divisions of the constituents” as the object of observation that counteracts pride, without specifying whether the six or the eighteen constituents are meant (*Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, Condensed Statement*, 558.1).

^c According to Lati Rinpoche, “A meditator knows whether or not a particular affliction is [pre]dominant” (*Meditative States*, p. 82).

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 170.

ninth mental abiding and yet be unable to develop the pliancy necessary for the attainment of calm abiding.^a

To a Western ear, it sounds strange to describe a mental component that is often unconscious as a behavior. Yet the Sanskrit word *carita*, translated into Tibetan as *spyad pa*, includes that meaning, as well as “going, moving, course;...acting, doing, practice,....acts, deeds.”^b It comes from the root *car*, which means “to move oneself, go, walk, move, stir, roam about, wander” and refers not only to humans but also to “animals, water, ships, stars,” and so forth; with regard to humans, it also means “to behave, conduct oneself, act, live.”^c The related word *caritra* includes not only the basic meanings of *carita* but also “habit,”^d and one can, perhaps, think of a predominant afflictive emotion as a mental habit. In Pāli, *carita* occurs in various combinations, with *su-* or *du-*, in relation to body, speech, and mind (for example, *manoduccarita*).^e Thus, it is possible to talk about good or bad physical, verbal, or mental behavior. In the context of objects of observation for purifying behavior, what is meant, clearly, is habitual, though not necessarily conscious, mental behavior that prevents the attainment of calm abiding.

The Unpleasant

Gedün Lodrö explains in detail the two major Indian systems of meditation on the unpleasant used in the presentation of the concentrations and formless absorptions—that of Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers* and that of Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*.

The presentation of Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers*. Asaṅga sets forth five types of meditation on the unpleasant:

- 1 Meditation on the feeling of suffering
- 2 Contemplation of what is unpleasant in relation to something else
- 3 Meditation on the unpleasant which consists of bad activities
- 4 The unpleasantness of the unsteady, or the unpleasantness of change

^a *Ibid.*, p. 151.

^b Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 389, col. 3.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 389, col. 1.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 390, col. 1.

^e T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, p. 521, col. 2. Monier-Williams also gives *sucarita* (p. 1223, col. 1) and *duscarita* (p. 487, col. 1), although not in compounds with *manas*.

5 Contemplation of ugliness^a

The first, meditation on the feeling of suffering, involves meditation first on the pain experienced in one's own continuum and, later, on the pain experienced by others—not only humans but also hell beings and hungry ghosts.^b

The second, contemplation of what is unpleasant in relation to something else, is a meditation on relative unpleasantness; the meditator considers that his or her own body is inferior to that of a Superior, since, unlike common beings, a Superior “no longer takes rebirth by the power of [contaminated (*zag bcas*, *sāsrava*)] actions and afflictive emotions but by the power of uncontaminated (*zag med*, *anāsrava*) actions.” The meditator then goes on to consider the ways in which a Superior's body is inferior to a Buddha's.^c

The third, meditation on the unpleasant, which consists of bad activities, involves consideration of the unpleasantness of apparently pleasant non-virtuous actions in terms of their karmic consequences.^d

The fourth, contemplation of the unpleasantness of the unsteady, or the unpleasantness of change, is actually a meditation on coarse and subtle impermanence; the meditator considers that everyone who is born must die and “that the body is disintegrating and approaching closer to death at every moment.”^e

Of the five, the fifth, the contemplation of ugliness, is the most obvious antidote to sense-desire; it is the only type of meditation on the unpleasant mentioned by Lati Rinpoche, who explains it in graphic detail. Although he gives a clear layout of the other four types of meditation on the unpleasant, Gedün Lodrö gives few specifics of the meditation on ugliness; the only type he mentions, briefly, is meditation on the “putrefaction, rotting, gross dismemberment, and so forth” of the meditator's own body. Lati Rinpoche identifies this type as meditation on internal ugliness—that is, the thirty-six impure substances of which the body is composed “from the soles of the feet to the hair on the head, and inside the skin”—and states that this meditation can be applied either to the meditator's own body or to the body of a person

^a See Gedün Lodrö, pp. 93–98; *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 70; Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 114.2–5.

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp. 93–94.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 95.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 97.

^e *Meditative States*, pp. 98–99. Lati Rinpoche gives a detailed presentation of this meditation in the context of preparations having the aspect of the truths (pp. 135–41).

toward whom the meditator feels sexual desire.^a

Lati Rinpoche also describes graphically the nine divisions of meditation on external ugliness. He gives “the four colors of rotting corpses” as the four objects of observation that serve as antidotes to attachment to color—that is, to the color of the desired person's complexion. The “two antidotes to attachment to shape...the shape of someone's face, for example,” are meditation “on that face as though a dog or cat had chewed part of it,” and, more grossly, “as though a dog or a cat had ripped off pieces, such as the ears and the nose, and scattered them about.” The antidotes to attachment to touch are meditations “on the flesh as eaten by worms but with the bone and skin still intact” and “on the skeleton held together by ligaments.” The antidote to attachment to copulation (*bsnyen bkur*, *upacāra*) is meditation on the desired person as a corpse—“a dead body that does not move.”^b

Although Lati Rinpoche does not discuss the question, Gedün Lodrö finds textual support for an explanation of sense-desire aroused by the mental qualities of the desired person, a common experience not accounted for by either Asaṅga's or Vasubandhu's presentation of meditation on the unpleasant. He describes this as “the desire for another's ‘good nature’” even when the person lacks the physical qualities of color and shape generally considered attractive. Here, too, if the meditator follows Asaṅga's system, the antidote is meditation on an unmoving corpse, “since a corpse has neither good nature nor bad.” Gedün Lodrö notes that in texts on monastic discipline (*dul ba*, *vinaya*) this type of desire is to be understood as desire for copulation, whereas, in the First Dalai Lama's commentary on Chapter 6 of Vasubandhu's *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge”* in the *Path of Liberation*, “it should be understood as good nature.”^c

Reasoning from within his textual tradition, Gedün Lodrö denies the possibility that desire will be replaced by hatred as a result of meditation on ugliness. He asserts that hatred will not arise because the

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 95; *Meditative States*, pp. 82–83.

^b *Meditative States*, pp. 83–84. These four are also mentioned briefly in Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,”* 6.9c (P5591, vol. 115, 244.4.1–5; Shastri, vol. 3, p. 865; La Vallée Poussin, 16:4, pp. 148–49; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 917).

^c Harvey B. Aronson points out that there are two Tibetan translations of the Sanskrit word *upacāra*—*bsnyen bkur* (“copulation”) in Vasubandhu's *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge”* and *myed bkur* (“good nature”) in the First Dalai Lama's *Path of Liberation*. (*Meditative States*, p. 238 n. 25, citing Harvey B. Aronson, trans. and ed., “The Buddhist Path: A Translation of the Sixth Chapter of the First Dalai Lama's *Path of Liberation*,” *Tibet Journal* 5:4 [1980], pp. 35, 47.)

meditator's motivation is not that which would cause hatred: according to him, the meditator "does not cultivate a sense of a certain person as unpleasant within a sense that this person is an enemy but only with the motivation of overcoming attachment."^a

The presentation of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*. The practical instruction on meditation on the skeleton set forth in Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*^b is a general antidote to all forms of desire; according to Gedün Lodrö, it is the best antidote.^c This meditation investigates the nature of the body beneath its superficial attractiveness; in a comment on it, the present Dalai Lama remarked, "If I were wearing X-ray glasses, I would see a room full of skeletons as well as a skeleton that is talking from this podium."^a

It is a three-stage meditation in which considerable dexterity is developed. The three stages are:

- 1 The yoga of a beginner at mental contemplation (*vid la byed pa las dang po pa'i rnal 'byor, manaskārādikarmika[yoga]*)
- 2 The yoga of someone who is practiced (*yongs su sbyangs pa byas pa'i rnal 'byor, kṛtaparicaya[yoga]*)
- 3 The yoga of one whose mental contemplation is perfected (*vid la byed pa yongs su rdzogs pa'i rnal 'byor, atikrāntamanaskāra[yoga]*)

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 100, in answer to a Western student's question. This question has arisen especially among scholars of women in religion because of the misogyny evident in many monastic presentations of the meditations on ugliness. A comprehensive discussion of the treatment of this question, covering a wide range of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist schools, is beyond the scope of this book. However, Karen Christina Lang's examination of the poems of Theravāda monks and nuns, the *Theraḡāthā* and *Therīgāthā*, raises interesting possibilities; she suggests that, within "shared values," the monks and nuns express their repudiation of the profane world differently: The monks' poems are misogynistic; they use "androcentric language"—especially "the stock phrase 'Lord Death's snare'" in reference to women—that makes women "the image of the profane world—their bodies the metaphor for all sensual desire," whereas "in the nuns' verses this same phrase is used to stress that the danger of sensual pleasures and of Māra's control holds for both sexes." (Karen Christina Lang, "Lord Death's Snare: Gender-Related Imagery in the *Theraḡāthā* and the *Therīgāthā*," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2:2 [1986], 78.) It may be worth noting that the meditation on the skeleton set forth in Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, discussed below, can be applied to any desired person and probably could not be considered either sexist or homophobic.

^b Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, 6.9d-11a-b and the *Autocommentary* to those verses (P5591, vol. 115, 244.4.7-244.5.7; Shastri, vol. 3, pp. 865-68; La Vallée Poussin, 16:4, pp. 150-51; Pruden, vol. 3, pp. 918-20).

^c *Meditative States*, p. 238 n. 25, citing Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," p. 34.

^d *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, p. 185.

Gedün Lodrö describes the first, the yoga of a beginner at mental contemplation, in detail; it

consists of meditating that a piece of skin is removed from the areas between one's eyes, exposing the white bone underneath. One is to think that the piece of skin falls off as if causelessly, adventitiously, and one then directs the mind to that white bone. When the meditator is able to set the mind on that, he or she gradually enlarges the area of bone until the entire body is exposed as just bone. After this, one considers that all the lands and oceans of the world are filled with skeletons. Having succeeded in extending one's scope to include the whole world, one withdraws the observation gradually until one is again observing just one's own body. At that point, one is seeing just one's own body as a skeleton, and one remains in contemplation of this as long as possible.^a

In the second stage, the yoga of someone who is practiced, the meditator extends the scope of the meditation and withdraws it, as before, and then "continues to withdraw the observation so that only the top half of the skull remains as skeleton"; the meditator then focuses on the top half of the skull as long as possible.^b

The third stage, the yoga of one whose mental contemplation is perfected, begins by repeating the second. The meditator then withdraws the observation "until only a small area remains between the eyebrows." Gedün Lodrö emphasizes the importance of making this area as small as possible to increase the meditator's stability and dexterity. The meditator then focuses on this small area of bone as long as possible.^c

LOVE

Gedün Lodrö explains love as the wish "that sentient beings have either temporary or final happiness"; he distinguishes it from compassion, which is the wish that they be free from suffering.^d

According to Lati Rinpoche, one cultivates love in meditation by taking friends, persons toward whom one is neutral, and enemies, in that order, as objects of observation, and meditating on those objects of

^a Gedün Lodrö, pp. 98-99.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 99.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 99.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 102.

observation according to either the method of mental engagement of belief or that of taking to mind. Mental engagement of belief involves seeing the sentient beings who are the objects of observation as having already attained happiness. In the method of taking to mind, the meditator first thinks with regard to those persons, "How nice it would be if they possessed happiness free of suffering!"; then, "May they possess happiness free of suffering!"; and finally, "I will cause them to possess happiness free of suffering!" The first type of meditation is placed in the present, whereas the second is directed toward the future.^a

Gedün Lodrö also explains the system of Chandrakīrti's *Supplement to (Nāgārjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle"* and its *Autocommentary*, explicitly Mahāyāna texts outside the usual Indian sources for the presentation of calm abiding, special insight, and the concentrations and formless absorptions. Here the meditator "observe[s] sentient beings regardless of whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral]" and cultivates three types of love that correspond to the three types of compassion set forth by Chandrakīrti.^b

The three types of love, in the order in which they are cultivated, are:

- 1 Love observing mere sentient beings (*sems can tsam la dmigs pa'i byams pa*, **sattvālambanā maitri*)
- 2 Love observing phenomena (*chos la dmigs pa'i byams pa*, **dharmālambanā maitri*)
- 3 Love observing the unapprehendable (*dmigs med la dmigs pa'i byams pa*, **anālambanā maitri*)

All three types of love observe sentient beings, and all three have the subjective aspect of wishing that sentient beings have happiness. Gedün Lodrö describes the first type, love observing mere sentient beings, as "our usual type of love"; the meditator does not observe the sentient beings who are the objects of observation as qualified in any way.^c

The second type, love observing phenomena, observes sentient beings "within the thought that they are disintegrating moment by moment" and, therefore, are impermanent.^d It also refers to love observing

^a *Meditative States*, p. 84. Gedün Lodrö (pp. 102–103) discusses variations of the method of taking to mind, suitable for some practitioners, in which one initially takes an unpleasant or neutral person as the object of observation.

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp. 103–104.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 104.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 103.

sentient beings "who do not substantially exist in that they are not self-sufficient"; here "observing phenomena" is a contraction of "observation of sentient beings who are designated to mere phenomena."^a

The third type, love observing the unapprehendable, observes "sentient beings who are empty of inherent existence"; here "observing the unapprehendable" is a contraction of "observation of sentient beings qualified by an absence of true existence."^b

In the second and third types of love, the meditator first develops the realizations that sentient beings are impermanent and do not exist from their own side, and then, within those realizations, cultivates the wish that sentient beings have happiness.^c

It is important to understand the distinctions between the cultivation of love as an object of observation for purifying behavior in order to achieve calm abiding, and the cultivation of love in other types of meditation. Gedün Lodrö points out that when love is cultivated as an object of observation for purifying behavior, there is no certainty that love will actually be generated in the meditator's mental continuum. This is because the generation of love is not the goal of this meditation; rather, the goal is that the meditator's predominant afflictive emotion, hatred, be sufficiently pacified to allow him or her to proceed with the cultivation of calm abiding, usually by returning to the original object of observation—the body of a Buddha, for example. The pacification of hatred may occur when the meditator has achieved "the same type of wish for happiness in relation to the enemy that he or she already has in relation to friends"—that is, when some degree of even-mindedness has been achieved but before the generation of love.^d

Thus, although Chandrakīrti's three types of love, in their original context, are all types of great love, each of which "observes all sentient beings,"^e there is no guarantee that great love will be generated when this type of meditation is used in order to pacify hatred as a predominant afflictive emotion preventing the attainment of calm abiding. The

^a Tsong-kha-pa, "Illumination of the Thought: An Extensive Explanation of Chandrakīrti's 'Supplement to the Middle Way'" in Tsong-kha-pa, Kensur Lekden, Jeffrey Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1980), p. 121.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 122; Gedün Lodrö, p. 104.

^c Gedün Lodrö, p. 104; Tsong-kha-pa, "Illumination of the Thought" in *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 122. See also Guy Newland, *Compassion: A Buddhist Monastic Textbook* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1984), pp. 58–61.

^d Gedün Lodrö, pp. 106–107.

^e Newland, *Compassion: A Tibetan Analysis*, p. 55.

relationship between the cultivation of love in this context and the great love necessary for the generation of the altruistic mind of enlightenment is indefinite. According to Gedün Lodrö,

It is possible first to develop calm abiding and then to cultivate the seven cause-and-effect quintessential instructions [for generating the altruistic mind of enlightenment]; it is also possible first to cultivate the seven quintessential instructions and then, when one has generated an altruistic mind of enlightenment at the time of the Mahāyāna path of accumulation, to develop calm abiding.^a

Dependent-arising

Dependent-arising is the object of observation for meditators whose predominant afflictive emotion is obscuration. Lati Rinpoche presents in this context a basic meditation on phenomena as arising from causes and conditions and “creating their own specific effect.” He regards this meditation as an effective method for refuting the existence of a permanent self and, therefore, as “one of the best meditations for eventually generating special insight.”^b

Gedün Lodrö’s presentation is more complicated. He distinguishes between obscuration as a predominant afflictive emotion that prevents the attainment of calm abiding and ignorance in general and, further, between two general types of ignorance: (1) that which is obscured regarding the cause and effect of actions and (2) that which is obscured regarding reality (*de kho na nyid, tathatā*). He gives as an example of someone who has the first type of ignorance “an ordinary being who, not knowing the virtues to be adopted and the non-virtues to be discarded, engages in activities such as killing and stealing”; that person’s ignorance “specifically...consists of not knowing that happiness arises because of having done virtue and suffering, because of non-virtue.” Therefore, the person commits non-virtuous actions. Someone who has the second type of ignorance “accumulates actions that will cause rebirth in one of the pleasant migrations in cyclic existence, perhaps thinking, ‘I will take rebirth as a god.’”^c

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 106. Immeasurable (*tshad med, apramāṇa*) love is not discussed in the context of the cultivation of calm abiding because, for the generation of immeasurable love, an actual concentration is necessary (see Denma Lochö Rinpoche in Perfections Transcript, p. 84).

^b *Meditative States*, p. 85.

^c Gedün Lodrö, p. 73.

Gedün Lodrö identifies a person in whom obscuration is predominant as someone who has the second type of ignorance, ignorance of reality, which also has two types: it “can relate to either the temporary or the ultimate nature of phenomena.” According to Gedün Lodrö, a meditator whose predominant afflictive emotion is obscuration is “obscured with regard to the temporary nature of phenomena”—in this case, the presentation of calm abiding. This person’s obscuration “is simply a matter of not having studied,” and, therefore, “the antidote is to study about calm abiding”—that is, to “study and contemplate books or listen to a teacher.”^a

A more advanced form of this meditation involves application of the four reasonings to what has been learned. The four reasonings are:

- 1 Reasoning of the performance of function (*bya ba byed pa'i rigs pa, kāryakāraṇayukti*)
- 2 Reasoning of nature (*chos nyid kyi rigs pa, dharmatāyukti*)
- 3 Reasoning of dependence (*ltos pa'i rigs pa, apekṣāyukti*)
- 4 Logical reasoning (*thad sgrub kyi rigs pa, upapattisādhānyukti*; literally, “the reasoning that establishes correctness”)^b

Each of these reasonings helps to pacify obscuration. As an example of reasoning of the performance of function, Gedün Lodrö mentions examination of “the activity of the eye consciousness,” which is “to see forms.” Such reasoning “eliminates obscuration with respect to the three—object, agent, and action (*bya byed las gsum*).”^c

Gedün Lodrö explains reasoning of nature as “an analysis of the nature of things”, as Denma Lochö Rinpoche points out, “Nature’ here refers to the nature of phenomena as it is known in the world.”^d As examples, Gedün Lodrö refers to common definitions, such as those of wind and fire. Such reasoning helps to dispel obscuration because, by extending it, a meditator can learn “the natures of the afflictive emotions to be abandoned and of the various good qualities to be achieved”—especially, “that adventitious things do not have the nature of good qualities and can be eliminated.”^e

Gedün Lodrö’s example of reasoning of dependence is an analysis of how “the person does not exist from his or her own side” but “is

^a *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74, 109.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 110.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 110.

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 110; *Meditative States*, p. 155.

^e Gedün Lodrö, p. 110.

designated in dependence on the aggregates.” This analysis helps the meditator realize “that the person is not something able to stand by itself.”^a He mentions reasoning establishing that a pot is impermanent as an example of logical reasoning.^b

Gedün Lodrö’s explanation presents some difficulties. Although, as he remarks, there are many “people who have neither heard nor thought about the cultivation of calm abiding yet who desire to cultivate it,”^c it is not clear how the study of scriptures and textbooks dealing with calm abiding can be interpreted as a meditation on dependent-arising. Moreover, although each of the examples of the four reasonings can be regarded as, in itself, a meditation on dependent-arising, Gedün Lodrö does not directly apply the four reasonings to what a meditator obscured concerning the presentation of calm abiding learns from study.

Gedün Lodrö also mentions a simplified meditation on the twelve-linked dependent-arising as an antidote to obscuration. In this context, it is a meditation on “the coarser form of the order of the twelve-linked dependent-arising, both the forward progression and the reverse one” that makes it possible for the meditator to decide that the second through twelfth members “all derive from ignorance...in this way obscuration can be eliminated or suppressed.”^d The detailed presentation of the twelve-linked dependent-arising, however, is not one of the objects of observation for purifying behavior but an object of observation for developing skill. (See Chapter 6.)

The divisions of the constituents

There are several presentations of meditation on the divisions of the constituents. Lati Rinpoche explains a meditation on the six constituents—earth (*sa*, *piṭhivi*), water (*chu*, *āp*), fire (*me*, *tejas*), wind (*rlung*, *vāyu*), space (*nam mkha'*, *ākāśa*), and consciousness (*nam shes*, *vijñāna*). Since “persons” are designated based on a composite of these six constituents,” the meditator identifies these six in his or her continuum.

The earth constituent is identified as flesh, skin, bone that which is hard. Water is blood, lymph, and so forth. Fire refers to the heat in one’s own continuum. Space refers to the empty

^a *Ibid.*, p. 111.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 111.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 109.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 111.

places within the body. Consciousness, in this context, refers to the mind that is connected with this body.^a

Gedün Lodrö presents a meditation on the eighteen constituents—the six external objects (*yu*, *viṣaya*), the six sense powers (*dbang po*, *in-driya*), and the six sense consciousnesses:

Six Sense Powers	Six Objects	Six Consciousnesses
eye sense power	visible forms	eye consciousness
ear sense power	sounds	ear consciousness
nose sense power	odors	nose consciousness
tongue sense power	tastes	tongue consciousness
body sense power	tangible objects	body consciousness
mental sense power	other phenomena	mental consciousness

As is the case with Lati Rinpoche’s presentation of six constituents, a composite of these eighteen can be considered as the basis of designation (*gdags gzhi*) of the person.

The meditator is to contemplate four characteristics in relation to these: (1) the fact that many causes are involved in bringing them about, (2) the place in which the causes were amassed, (3) the person who amassed them, (4) the causes through which the eighteen constituents are enhanced.^b

There are also several explanations of how meditation on the divisions of the constituents works to break down pride. According to Lati Rinpoche, meditation on the six constituents breaks down pride by fostering “a sense of unpleasantness...with regard to the body.”^c Gedün Lodrö, however, emphasizes the development of an awareness of how little one knows about the mind and body as the meditator analyzes his

^a *Meditative States*, p. 86.

^b Gedün Lodrö, p. 74. Gedün Lodrö also presents a meditation on the aggregates as an antidote to pride; this meditation uses the same method as the meditations on the six and eighteen constituents—namely, the analysis of the person into smaller and smaller parts. In this case, the set of divisions in question is the aggregates. The meditation works by breaking down “the pride that thinks ‘I,’” which “is based on the view that the aggregates are a partless whole” (Gedün Lodrö, p. 112). Lati Rinpoche discusses the eighteen constituents in the context of objects of observation for developing skill (*Meditative States*, p. 88).]

^c *Meditative States*, p. 86.

or her continuum into smaller and smaller parts.^a The Fourteenth Dalai Lama also gives this explanation.^b

6 OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION: II

THE EXHALATION AND INHALATION OF THE BREATH

The exhalation and inhalation of the breath is the object of observation for purifying discursiveness (*mam rtog*, *vikalpa*) when it is a predominant afflictive emotion preventing the attainment of calm abiding. Technically, *mam rtog/vikalpa* is coarse conceptuality; according to Gedün Lodrö, it “is included within mental discomfort” (*yid mi bde, daurmanasya*).^a In this context, however, the word *mam rtog/vikalpa* is translated, for practical purposes, as “discursiveness,” since it refers to excessive thinking—that is, mental busyness in which, distracted by a constant stream of thought, the meditator is prevented from focusing on the object of observation.

Gedün Lodrö notes the importance of distinguishing among the various degrees of conceptuality: Although, in general, conceptuality is “abandoned by the path of seeing” with the attainment of the non-conceptual exalted wisdom (*mam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*) directly realizing emptiness, conceptuality is not completely eliminated until the attainment of Buddhahood.^b “As one goes higher and higher on the path, the conceptuality to be abandoned becomes more and more subtle.”^c In the context of a beginner’s cultivation of calm abiding, conceptuality refers merely to “those factors which hinder calm abiding.”^d

Ge-luk presentations do not explain why the exhalation and inhalation of the breath is considered the best object of observation for “purifying” discursiveness. Simply, it works; the choice seems to be an empirical one, based on a long tradition of Buddhist practice. The governing principle seems to be the one cited earlier in the context of the settling down of the winds, the breath meditation done at the beginning of the session (see pages 78ff.)—namely, that in systems asserting six consciousnesses, different conceptual consciousnesses of a similar type cannot operate simultaneously in the mental continuum of one person. Therefore, meditation on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath is able to *pacify* discursiveness, even though it is “not an actual antidote” to discursiveness^e and, thus, cannot eradicate it. Meditation on the

^a Gedün Lodrö, pp. 75, 76.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 77.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 77.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 77.

^e *Ibid.*, p. 75.

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 112.

^b *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, p. 185.

exhalation and inhalation of the breath pacifies discursiveness because it causes “all other minds” to “settle down into a neutral (*lung du ma bstan pa, avyākṛta*) state”; from that ethically neutral state, “it becomes easy [for the meditator] to develop a virtuous attitude.”^a

As a basic explanation for beginners, Lati Rinpoche gives a simplified presentation of breath meditation similar to the one Gedün Lodrö gives under the topic “the settling down of the winds”^b (see page 78). However, Gedün Lodrö presents the settling down of the winds as a three-stage process in which the first two stages are watching and counting, whereas Lati Rinpoche distinguishes between watching and counting according to the faculties of the meditator; according to him, meditators of dull faculties have to count, whereas meditators of sharp faculties are able to watch the breath without counting.^c Both Gedün Lodrö’s and Lati Rinpoche’s explanations are intended to serve not only as introductory presentations of the Ge-luk system according to their respective colleges’ textbooks but also as practical instruction for beginning meditators.

In his more extensive exposition of objects of observation for purifying behavior, Gedün Lodrö follows Jam-yang-shay-pa in distinguishing between the presentations of the two main Indian sources—Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers*—in addition to the basic presentation for beginners he had already given under “the settling down of the winds.”^d He also follows Jam-yang-shay-pa in regarding both Vasubandhu’s and Asaṅga’s presentations as internally coherent systems,^e each of which offers a sequential practical method to the meditator. He discusses Jam-yang-shay-pa’s exposition of the presentation of the *Treasury* but not Jam-yang-shay-pa’s presentation of the “system” of Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers*, which he considered too long and complicated for a semester-long lecture course; he therefore offered, as a substitute, his earlier presentation of “the settling down of the winds.”^f

^a *Ibid.*, p. 40.

^b *Ibid.*, pp. 34–36.

^c *Meditative States*, p. 86.

^d Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, in his condensation of Jam-yang-shay-pa’s text, omits the presentation of both systems, as well as explanations of the remaining objects of observation.

^e Gedün Lodrö, p. 112; Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 115.3 (*nyan sa dang mdzod lugs gnyis*).

^f Gedün Lodrö also presents an alternative explanation of the “system” of the *Treasury*, refuted by Jam-yang-shay-pa, which I will not discuss here (Gedün Lodrö, pp. 113–14).

THE PRESENTATION OF VASUBANDHU’S TREASURY OF MANIFEST KNOWLEDGE

Vasubandhu introduces the topic of meditation on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath with the statement, “Mindfulness of exhalation and inhalation is wisdom” (*Treasury* 6.1.2a). The *Autocommentary* to this verse notes that mindfulness is equated with wisdom in this context just as it is in the context of the four mindful establishments (*dran pa nye bar bzhaḡ pa, smṛtyupasthāna*)—namely, “because [wisdom] occurs by generation of the force of [mindfulness].”^a Expounding this passage further, the First Dalai Lama notes in the *Path of Liberation*, his commentary on Vasubandhu’s *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,”* that mindfulness actually precedes wisdom; wisdom is called mindfulness in this context “because when the strength of mindfulness has been developed, [wisdom] engages the object.” In his oral commentary on the *Path of Liberation*, Lati Rinpoche adds that “since wisdom occurs due to the power of mindfulness, the effect—wisdom—is given the name of the cause—mindfulness.”^b

Although Ge-luk scholars make these observations when they direct their attention to Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and its *Autocommentary* as a topic in its own right, they do not appear to apply this analysis to citations and discussions of the same texts in their presentations of breath meditation in the context of the cultivation of calm abiding, as part of the topic of the concentrations and formless absorptions. What they seem to overlook, especially, is the relationship between the *Treasury* and *Autocommentary* passages just cited and the *Treasury* and *Autocommentary* introduction to the presentation of the four mindful establishments (6.1.4a–b):

Having attained meditative stabilization by means of those two [that is, meditation on the unpleasant and mindfulness of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath], in order to achieve special insight

One who has achieved calm abiding
Should cultivate mindful establishment
For the sake of attaining special insight.^c

^a Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge and Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,”* 6.1.2a (P5591, vol. 115, 245.1.6; Shastrī, part 3, p. 898; La Vallée Poussin, 16:4, p. 153; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 921).

^b Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 38.

^c Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, 6.1.4a–b (P5591, vol. 115, 245.4.7–8; Sha-

Since Ge-luk-pa scholars typically regard calm abiding as a meditative stabilization and special insight as a wisdom consciousness,^a juxtaposition of the two passages might have suggested that the types of breath meditation discussed in the *Treasury* (and also in Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*) not only, in their initial stages, serve to pacify discursiveness and calm the mind but can also, in their higher developments, lead to special insight and beyond; for the first passage, with its reference to the four mindful establishments, associates mindfulness and wisdom, and the second passage states that cultivation of the four mindful establishments—preceded, in one mode of practice, by mindfulness of breathing leading to the attainment of calm abiding—leads to the attainment of special insight. But somehow, the juxtaposition was not made.

There may be two reasons for the Ge-luk failure to associate Vasubandhu's and Asaṅga's presentations of the higher stages of breath meditation with special insight. The first reason is that the main Ge-luk presentation of special insight is not drawn from the Indian source texts for the topic of the concentrations and formless absorptions; rather, it is Tsong-kha-pa's *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* presentation, based on Chandrakīrti's *Clear Words*, in the *Middling and Great Exposition(s) of the Stages of the Path*. The second reason is that practice traditions related to Vasubandhu's or Asaṅga's presentations of breath meditation were probably not transmitted to Tibet.

The practice tradition suggested by the *Treasury* itself—and also by Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*—is one in which mindfulness of breathing becomes a basis for inductive reasoning on such topics as the five aggregates; as a result of such inductive reasoning, the meditator progresses through the Hearer paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation. It seems at least possible that both Vasubandhu and Asaṅga presented their respective versions of such a method, analogous to but different from modern Theravāda insight meditation, and that Ge-luk-pa scholars were unable to reconstruct it in the absence of a practice tradition because of the great difference between this type of inductive

^a See also La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 158 and Pruden, vol. 3, p. 925. The Tibetan version of the *Autocommentary* is closer to Hsüan Tsang's, as given by La Vallée Poussin and Pruden, than to Shastri's.

^a Pan-chen Sö-nam-drak-pa, "Concentrations," 155b.6–156a.1; Jam-yang-shay-pa (followed by Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po) gives "meditative stabilization" and "wisdom" as the key terms in the definitions of "calm abiding" and "special insight," respectively (Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 110.6 and 162.3; Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 557.3 and 563.6).

meditative reasoning based on observation and the types of meditative reasoning using consequences (*thal gyur*, *prasaṅga*) or syllogisms (*sbyor ba*, *pravyoga*) with which Ge-luk-pas were familiar.³ Thus, although Ge-luk-pa scholars give detailed interpretations of the systems of breath meditation set forth in Vasubandhu's and Asaṅga's texts, they may not fully account for the higher stages of breath meditation set forth in those texts.

According to the *Treasury* (6.12d and its *Autocommentary*),^b meditation on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath has six aspects, or stages:

- 1 counting (*grangs pa*, *gaṇanā*)
- 2 following (*rjes su 'gro ba*, *anugama*)
- 3 placement (*'jog ba*, *sthāna*)
- 4 investigation (*nye bar rtog pa*, *upalakṣaṇā*)^c
- 5 change (*yongs su sgyur ba*, *vivartanā*)
- 6 purifying (*yongs su dag pa*, *parisuddhi*)

Following the *Autocommentary* closely, Gedün Lodrö explains the first, **counting**, as "the ability to withdraw the mind inside and count the breaths from one to ten single-pointedly without confusing the order."^d

The second, **following**, involves observation and recognition of where the breath goes in the body; the meditator examines whether the breath fills all or only part of the body. The *Autocommentary* lists some of the places in the body into which the meditator follows the breath—"the throat, the heart, the navel, the kidneys, the thigh, and so on to the two feet," and "out to a distance of a hand and a cubit."^e Lati Rinpoche seems to explain this as a *method* of breathing—"breathing in all the way to the feet and breathing out to a distance ranging from a fathom or a hand's span, depending on the strength of

^a See *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp. 360–61, 431–32, 443–53—and indeed, the entire work is an extended presentation of the use of reasoning in meditation.

^b Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge and Autocommentary*, 6.12d (P5591, vol. 115, 245.2.4–245.3.8; Shastri, part 3, pp. 899–900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, pp. 154–56; Pruden, vol. 3, pp. 922–23).

^c "Investigation" is an English translation of the Tibetan *nye bar rtog pa*; a more literal translation of the Sanskrit *upalakṣaṇā* would be "characterization."

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 115.

^e Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the "Treasury of Manifest Knowledge"*, 6.12d (P5591, vol. 115, 245.3.1–4; Shastri, part 3, pp. 899–900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 154; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 922).

the individual"^a—rather than as an aspect of *mindfulness* of breathing—that is, as part of the process of *observing* the breath. Gedün Lodrö introduces from Tibetan meditational physiology the notion of analyzing the “many coarse and subtle channels (*rtsa*, *nāḍī*) through which the breath passes,”^b which is not found at this point in the *Autocommentary*.

As Gedün Lodrö notes, the third way of meditating on the breath, **placement**, involves examination of “how the breath brings help or harm to the body.”^c Lati Rinpoche, paraphrasing the *Autocommentary*, explains the meditator’s method:

...one observes the breath abiding like a string for a necklace from the tip of the nose to the bottom of the feet. Then one considers whether this abiding wind is harming or helping the body, or whether it is hot or cold.^d

Thus, Lati Rinpoche explains placement in terms of observation of the breath, although he had explained following in somewhat different terms.

Gedün Lodrö, developing his earlier reference to analysis of the channels in the body, explains placement as involving the straightening of channels which, up to that time, had been “bent or contracted.” According to him,

The beginning meditator imagines the wind moving through all the coarse and subtle channels of the body and considers if it is helping or harming. Initially this is an aspiration, but with practice unsuitable winds can be stopped and a wind developed through the force of meditation can be directed through the coarse and subtle channels down to the feet. At this time the coarse channels straighten out.^e

Thus, Gedün Lodrö seems to understand placement as something other than observation; he interprets the *Autocommentary*’s reference to “a [straight] string in a rosary,” or necklace, as referring to “a rosary grasped at two ends and pulled taut,” and, therefore, as alluding to the process he describes—perhaps because of the implicit analogy between

^a Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 39.

^b Gedün Lodrö, p. 116.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 116.

^d Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 39.

^e *Ibid.*, p. 40; Gedün Lodrö adds that he does not think the Vaibhāshikas’ method (as he understands it) affects the subtle channels.

the taut rosary and the straightened channels.^a

All accounts of the fourth way of meditating on the breath, **investigation**, agree that it differs radically from the first three: whereas the first three involve counting and observation of the breath itself, the fourth involves an inductive analysis, based on observation, that leads to the experiential discovery of the five aggregates. According to the *Autocommentary*, which summarizes the meditator’s process of analysis and states its conclusion, “Not only are there just the winds (*vāyu*); there are the four great elements (*mahābhūta*), along with the [secondary] materiality (*rūpa*) resulting from the great elements [and] the minds and mental factors based on these; thus [the meditator] investigates [and characterizes] (*upalakṣayati*) the five aggregates.”^b

Gedün Lodrö notes that the first three and the last three meditations on the breath differ in function, but it appears that neither he nor Lati Rinpoche recognizes that the fourth meditation involves experiential discovery through inductive rather than deductive analysis. Rather, Gedün Lodrö suggests that “the first three...are primarily for beginners attempting to achieve or deepen calm abiding,” whereas “the last three meditations are primarily used for developing proficiency in the calm abiding one has already achieved or for attaining special insight”; his categories overlap, since he also suggests that “the second and third can also be used by those with calm abiding for cultivating special insight.”^c Summarizing and extending the brief analysis given in the *Autocommentary*, Gedün Lodrö explains that the first “three ways of meditating on the breath all involve meditation on the breath itself, which is a tangible object (*reg bya*, *spraṣṭavya*),” whereas the fourth involves “putting aside the examination of [breath as] wind” and investigating “what is and is not of the nature of the five aggregates in relation to wind.”^d Lati Rinpoche, who also briefly summarizes the analysis given in the *Autocommentary*, notes that “when considering the breath in the above way, one is investigating its mode of existence.”^e However, he too does not seem to consider the possibility that the meditator discovers the mode of existence of the breath through an investigation begun inductively through mindfulness.

According to the *Autocommentary*, the fifth stage of mindfulness of

^a *Ibid.*, p. 40.

^b Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,”* 6.12d (P.5591, vol. 115, 245.3.4–8; Shastri, p. 900; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 156; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 923).

^c Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 40.

^d Gedün Lodrö, pp. 116.

^e Aronson, “The Buddhist Path,” p. 40.

breathing, change, involves "modifying the mind that has wind as its object of observation," so that the meditator "practices with respect to higher and higher virtuous roots up to the supreme [mundane] qualities" (*Jig rten pa'i chos kyi mchog, laukikāgyadharmā*) of the path of preparation.^a The *Autocommentary's* descriptions of the fifth and sixth stages are brief and do not give specific practical instructions or describe the meditator's actual procedure in detail. Thus, the literal wording of the text, especially with regard to the fifth stage, is ambiguous. It can be read to imply that the meditator—who, up to that point, had been observing the breath and, on the basis of that observation, drawing conclusions concerning the aggregates—either changes the object of observation in some way, or attains the four levels of the path of preparation, or both.

Lati Rinpoche's interpretation includes both meanings:

"Change" involves the transformation of the object of observation from the breath to the paths of preparation. One now observes the heat stage of the path of preparation through to the stage of highest mundane phenomena..., changing the mind in to the four levels of the path of preparation.^b

Similarly, in his interpretation of the sixth stage of mindfulness of breathing, purification, Lati Rinpoche states that "one transforms the mind into the paths of seeing and meditation."^c

Gedün Lodrö, however, emphasizes the change of object of observation, both in his lectures on calm abiding and in his comments on the sixth chapter of the First Dalai Lama's *Path of Liberation*.^d Although he explains, in the latter context, that observation of the path of preparation by someone who has attained calm abiding can lead to attainment of the heat level of the path of preparation and, subsequently, to attainment of its remaining levels—peak, forbearance, and supreme mundane qualities—he seems to imply that, if a meditator attains the path of preparation during the fifth stage of breath meditation, or the paths of seeing and meditation during the sixth, those attainments are the successful result of having taken those paths as objects of observation: "while one contemplates the paths as objects of observation, one

^a Vasubandhu, *Autocommentary on the "Treasury of Manifest Knowledge,"* 6.12d (P5591, vol. 115, 245.3.6-7; Shastri, p. 600; La Vallée Poussin, vol. 4, p. 156; Pruden, vol. 3, p. 923).

^b Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," p. 40.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 42.

^d Gedün Lodrö, p. 117; Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," pp. 40-41.

is also subjectively cultivating them."^a

The two contemporary Tibetan commentators, Lati Rinpoche and Gedün Lodrö, explain the first three stages of Vasubandhu's system in practical terms, for the most part, since the first two, especially, are practices a beginning meditator might use to overcome discursiveness, and the third still involves direct observation of the breath, although it also involves drawing conclusions from that observation. However, they do not state that, in the last three, the meditator progresses through the Hearer paths of preparation, seeing, and meditation by using mindfulness of breathing and inductive reasoning based on such mindfulness, even though Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and its *Autocommentary* explicitly lay out such a correspondence.

Moreover, neither scholar posits a relationship between the attainment of the heat stage of the path of preparation at the beginning of the fifth stage of Vasubandhu's system of breath meditation with the attainment of special insight. Although such a correlation would have been consistent with the synthetic system-building methods of Ge-luk religious scholarship, and although Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, in his *Condensed Statement*, twice states the commonly held Ge-luk assertion that the attainment of the heat stage of the path of preparation and the attainment of special insight are simultaneous, he does so only in the context of meditation on emptiness or selflessness as such meditation was understood by Ge-luk-pas.^b It appears that neither Ge-luk-pa textbook writers nor modern scholars such as Lati Rinpoche and Gedün Lodrö were in a position to conclude that the first moment of the fifth stage of Vasubandhu's system of breath meditation coincides with the attainment of special insight and that, therefore, the first four stages must be a method for cultivating special insight.

THE PRESENTATION OF ASAṄGA'S GROUNDS OF HEARERS

Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* has been, for the most part, unexplored by Western scholarship; an examination of the theories of meditation and practical instructions set forth in it would require a separate study. It

^a Aronson, "The Buddhist Path," p. 41.

^b Kön-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 552.2 ("the attainment of the wisdom arisen from meditating on [emptiness], of the special insight on [emptiness], and of the heat [stage of the] Mahāyāna path of preparation are simultaneous") and 575.6 ("a state arisen from meditation which analyzes the object, selflessness; the mental contemplation [arisen from] belief; [and] the heat stage of the Hearer path of preparation...are attained simultaneously").

seems possible, however, that Asaṅga has collected in *Grounds of Hearers* versions of several meditation techniques better known to Westerners from Theravāda texts and modern systems of practice, and that Tibetan commentators, lacking such practice traditions, developed theoretical interpretations based solely on the descriptions in Asaṅga's text. Comparisons with analogous Theravāda presentations suggest that even Asaṅga's accounts of Hearer practices may not have been based entirely on practice traditions.

Although Jam-yang-shay-pa and Gedün Lodrö refer to the "system" of Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*, it is possible that Asaṅga's descriptions of various practices of breath meditation represent neither a single system nor a progressive sequence and that the extreme complexity of Jam-yang-shay-pa's explanation of Asaṅga's presentation may stem from his trying to find internal coherence in a section of Asaṅga's text that may not have been intended to have it. Lacking a Tibetan practice tradition for most of these meditations, Jam-yang-shay-pa seems to have posited or constructed relationships among the headings and subheads of Asaṅga's lists—a hypothetical order of practice that, in some cases, does not agree with what is known about analogous meditations from Theravāda sources.

Jam-yang-shay-pa presents Asaṅga's "system" of meditation on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath under five major headings, all of which represent modes of purification:

- 1 thorough purification through counting
- 2 thorough purification through engagement in the aggregates
- 3 thorough purification through engagement in dependent-arising
- 4 thorough purification through engagement in the [four] truths
- 5 thorough purification through sixteen aspects^a

According to Jam-yang-shay-pa these five modes of purification follow each other sequentially. His description of the first suggests that counting the breaths, in itself, can lead to the attainment of calm abiding, and it is clear from his descriptions and supporting citations from Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* how the second, third, and fourth meditations develop from conclusions reached by the meditator in the preceding meditation as the result of inductive reasoning based on observation.

Thorough purification through counting. In thorough purification through counting—which, despite differences in the methods

^a Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 116.1.

presented by the two texts, corresponds to the category "counting" in the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*—the meditator observes and then counts exhalations and inhalations. The exhalation and inhalation can be counted separately, or the two can be counted as a unit. In either case, the meditator counts from one to ten and then backward from ten to one; Jam-yang-shay-pa makes the interesting practical point that the forward and backward sequence must always alternate, since "if [a meditator] counts, for instance, 'one' immediately after 'ten,' [his or her] meditative stabilization becomes disturbed."^a Jam-yang-shay-pa cites Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* as stating that, by merely counting in this way, a meditator can generate physical and mental pliancy and calm abiding. Thus, it appears that thorough purification through counting can, in itself, lead to the attainment of calm abiding, independently of the other four modes of thorough purification. Jam-yang-shay-pa further notes that, according to Asaṅga, meditators of dull faculties count the breath, whereas those of sharp faculties direct the mind to the breath and watch it.

Thorough purification through engagement in the aggregates. Engagement in the aggregates is done after counting. "Engagement" refers to a process of inductive reasoning, based on previous observation of the breath, in which the meditator, examining mindfulness of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath in terms of the aggregates, thinks:

The basis of the breath, the body, is form; mindfulness—that is, the mindfulness of the going and coming of the breath—and the experience [of the going and coming of the breath] are feeling; the knowing of all those is discrimination; mindfulness of, attention to, and knowledge of [the going and coming of the breath] are compositional factors; and the mind (*sems, citta*) and intellect (*vid, manas*) at that time are consciousness (*rnam shes, vijñāna*).^b

"Thorough purification" refers to "abiding many times in having engaged in that."^c

Although Jam-yang-shay-pa does not use the term "analytical meditation," "engagement" in this context could be described as an analytical meditation if the meaning of "analytical meditation" were

^a *Ibid.*, 116.3–4.

^b *Ibid.*, 116.6–6.

^c *Ibid.*, 117.1, with citation from Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*.

extended to include inductive reasoning based on observation in addition to the usual reasoning using syllogisms and consequences.

Thorough purification through engagement in dependent-arising. Jam-yang-shay-pa explains engagement in dependent-arising as a meditation that follows engagement in the aggregates and that involves research into a series of causes; working backward, the meditator traces the cause of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath to ignorance. This meditation, however, differs from both the simplified meditations on dependent-arising suggested, under objects of observation for purifying behavior, for meditators whose predominant afflictive emotion is obscurity, on the one hand, and the detailed presentation of the twelve-linked dependent-arising included among the objects of observation for developing skill, on the other. Specifically, the meditator determines that the body and mind—that is, the physical and mental aggregates, which the meditator had analyzed in the previous stage of the meditation—are the cause of the going and coming of the breath; that the life faculty (*srog gi dbang po, jivitendriya*) is the cause of the body and mind; that former actions, or compositional factors (*sngon gyi las sam 'du byed*),^a are the cause of the life faculty, and that ignorance is the cause of former actions, or compositional factors. The meditator then reviews the series in forward progression, beginning with ignorance, and concludes:

By the ceasing of ignorance, compositional factors cease; by the ceasing of [compositional factors], the life faculty ceases; by the ceasing of [the life faculty], the afflicted body and mind cease; by the ceasing of [the afflicted body and mind], the exhalation and inhalation of the breath cease.^b

Purification, again, is explained as the result of the meditator's having repeated and "abided in" the above meditation many times.^c

Thorough purification through engagement in the [four] truths. In thorough purification through engagement in the [four] truths, the meditator comes to recognize the relationship between the dependent-arising analyzed during the previous meditation and the four truths, beginning with **true sufferings** (*sduḡ bsngal bden pa, duḥkhasatya*). The meditator thinks:

^a Ibid., 117.4. Hopkins has remarked in conversation that "or" (*sam*) is appositive here; these are equivalent, not alternative, terms.

^b Ibid., 117.5–6.

^c Ibid., 117.6.

These dependent-arising which are the breath, and so forth, are impermanent. Since they are impermanent, they arise and disintegrate. Therefore, they have the qualities of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Since they have the qualities of these four, they are [cases of] suffering and, therefore, are selfless, without independence, and without an owner.^a

The meditation on the second of the four truths, **true origins** (*kun 'byung bden pa, samudayasatya*), involves the thought, "All those [things] that are the sicknesses and effects of these sufferings arise from the causal condition which is cyclic existence." The meditation on **true cessations** (*gog pa'i bden pa, nirodhasatya*), the third of the four truths, involves the thought, "The abandonment of cyclic existence, which is the causal condition of suffering, is peaceful and auspiciously high." The meditation on **true paths** (*lam gyi bden pa, mārgasatya*) involves the thought, "Having known and seen in that way, when I abide many times in that way, I will abandon craving."^b Again, as with the previous "engagements," purification is explained as the result of the meditator's having repeated and "abided in" the above meditations many times.^c

Jam-yang-shay-pa, citing Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*, explains that at this point the meditator has manifestly realized (*mngon par rtogs pa*)—that is, directly realized (*mngon sum du rtogs pa*)—the four truths; such a meditator "has abandoned the afflictive emotions to be abandoned by [the path of] seeing."^d Jam-yang-shay-pa implies here that the meditator has attained the path of seeing. However, he has not yet identified an earlier point in these thorough purifications at which the meditator attained the path of preparation, which precedes the path of seeing and which, as was mentioned above (page 113), is attained simultaneously with special insight. Thus, he has not identified the point in these thorough purifications at which the meditator attains special insight, or even acknowledged that they might be a means of attaining it. Nevertheless, since he has identified the end of thorough purification through counting as the point at which the meditator attains calm abiding, the attainment of special insight probably occurs at the end of either thorough purification through engagement in the aggregates or thorough purification through engagement in dependent-arising, both

^a Ibid., 118.2-3.

^b Ibid., 118.3-4.

^c Ibid., 118.5.

^d Ibid., 118.7-119.2.

of which are the result of reasoning, albeit inductive reasoning based on observation.

Thorough purification through sixteen aspects. Having identified the point at which the meditator attains the path of seeing, Jam-yang-shay-pa, still following Asaṅga closely, asserts that the meditator undertakes the next thorough purification listed—the thorough purification through sixteen aspects—in order to abandon “the mere afflictive emotions to be abandoned by [the path of] meditation.”^a Contrary to the expectations of readers familiar with Ge-luk presentations of the sixteen aspects, or attributes, of the four noble truths—based on Vasubandhu’s *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* (7.13a) and its *Autocommentary*^b—Jam-yang-shay-pa “unpacks,” numbers, and summarizes Asaṅga’s presentation of the sixteen aspects referred to in this context as follows:

...a yogi who has done the purification through engagement in the truths, in order to purify mainly the afflictive emotions to be purified by [the path of] meditation, views and trains thinking (1) “Exhalation, inhalation,” with respect to the exhalation and inhalation of the breath while being mindful [of it], and similarly views, thinking, “Exhalation, inhalation,” (2) with respect to exhalation and inhalation as long breaths, (3) with respect to exhalation and inhalation as short breaths, (4) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having correctly experienced the entire body, (5) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having thoroughly purified the workings (‘du byed) of the body, (6) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having correctly experienced joy, (7) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having correctly experienced bliss, (8) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having thoroughly purified the workings of the mind, (9) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having correctly experienced the mind, (10) with respect to exhalation and inhalation when the mind has thorough and strong joy, (11) with

^a Ibid., 119.2.

^b Vasubandhu, *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge and Autocommentary*, 7.13a (P5591, vol. 115, 262.3.7–263.2.4; Shastri, part 4, pp. 1056–62; La Vallée Poussin 16:5, pp. 30–39; Pruden, vol. 4, pp. 1110–1116). For expositions in English of Ge-luk presentations, see *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp. 285–96; Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), pp. 203–204; Lati Rinpoche in *Meditative States*, pp. 134–43.

respect to exhalation and inhalation upon having set the mind in meditative stabilization, (12) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon the mind’s being released, (13) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon viewing impermanence, (14) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon viewing abandonment, (15) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon viewing separation from desire, (16) with respect to exhalation and inhalation upon viewing cessation; [thus] there are sixteen [aspects].^a

To support this way of identifying the sixteen, he cites in abridged form, with an ellipsis (*zhes pa nas*) indicating the middle, a passage from Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers* that begins, “What are the sixteen aspects? They are these: (1) When one inhales while being mindful, one trains thinking, ‘I am inhaling while being mindful,’” and that ends, “When, viewing cessation, one exhales, one trains thinking, ‘I am viewing cessation and exhaling.’”^b In itself, the abridged citation suggests that, in Jam-yang-shay-pa’s opinion, Asaṅga has identified the first item after the question as the first in the list of sixteen; Jam-yang-shay-pa’s manner of citing the passage is intended to imply that the first and last items of his own list agree with Asaṅga’s first and last items and that, therefore, Jam-yang-shay-pa has also interpreted the rest of the passage correctly.

Comparison with the *Āṅgāpānasatisutta*, however, and with Buddhaghosa’s presentation of mindfulness of breathing in the *Path of Purification*, which is based on it, suggests (1) that thorough purification through sixteen aspects is a method of cultivating the four mindful establishments; (2) that Asaṅga’s list, at least according to the Peking edition of *Grounds of Hearers*, agrees, for the most part, with Buddhaghosa’s citation of the *Āṅgāpānasatisutta* and, like it, consists of seventeen items—a general description of mindfulness of breathing followed by the list of sixteen—but that Asaṅga does not explicitly identify the series as a method of cultivating the four mindful establishments; (3) that the passage from Asaṅga’s *Grounds of Hearers* may be a citation or paraphrase of an unidentified scripture related to that cited in Buddhaghosa’s *Path of Purification*; and (4) that Jam-yang-shay-pa’s list differs from the Pāli presentations and Asaṅga’s in slight but significant ways that prevent Jam-yang-shay-pa from recognizing the boundaries of the four mindful establishments in his own list of sixteen.

^a Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 119.5–120.3.

^b Ibid., 120.3–5; P5537, vol. 110, 78.5.3–79.1.7.

The table on the following page compares Jam-yang-shay-pa's presentation of thorough purification through sixteen aspects, based on his own reading of Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*,^a with both the Tibetan text of the source passage in the Peking edition of Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*^b and the *Ānāpānasatisutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya*, 118), as cited by Buddhaghosa as the basis of his presentation of mindfulness of breathing in the *Path of Purification*.^c

Chart 1: Mindfulness of Breathing in Sixteen Aspects: Three Presentations

Asaṅga's <i>Grounds of Hearers</i>	JYSP's Concentrations	<i>Ānāpānasati-sutta</i>
0. When one inhales while being mindful...when one exhales while being mindful	1. Thinking, "Exhalation, inhalation," with respect to the exhalation and inhalation of the breath while being mindful [of it]	0. Just mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out
1. long breaths	2. with respect to...long breaths	[Contemplation of the body]
2. short breaths	3. with respect to...short breaths	1. long breaths
3. upon having correctly experienced the entire body	4. upon...having correctly experienced the entire body	2. short breaths
4. upon having thoroughly purified the workings of the body	5. upon having thoroughly purified the workings of the body	3. experiencing the entire body
5. upon having correctly experienced joy	6. upon having correctly experienced joy	4. calming the workings of the body
6. upon having correctly experienced bliss	7. upon having correctly experienced bliss	[Contemplation of feelings]
7. upon having correctly experienced the workings of the mind	8. upon having correctly experienced joy	5. experiencing joy
8. upon having thoroughly purified the workings of the mind	9. upon having correctly experienced the workings of the mind	6. experiencing bliss
9. upon having correctly experienced the mind	10. when the mind has thorough and strong joy	7. experiencing the workings of the mind
10. when the mind has thorough and strong joy	11. upon having set the mind in meditative stabilization	8. calming the workings of the mind
11. upon having set the mind in meditative stabilization	12. upon the mind's being released	[Contemplation of the mind]
12. upon the mind's being released	13. upon viewing impermanence	9. experiencing the mind
13. upon viewing impermanence	14. upon viewing abandonment	10. gladdening the mind
14. upon viewing abandonment	15. upon viewing separation from desire	11. stabilizing the mind
15. upon viewing separation from desire	16. upon viewing cessation	12. releasing the mind
16. upon viewing cessation		[Contemplation of mind-objects]
		13. contemplating impermanence
		14. contemplating separation from desire
		15. contemplating cessation
		16. contemplating renunciation

^a *Ibid.*, 119.5–120.3.

^b P5537, vol. 110, 78.5.3–79.1.7.

^c *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, in *The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, trans. I. B. Horner (Pali Text Society: London: Luzac, 1967), vol. 3, 125–26; Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (visuddhimaggā)*, 8.145; Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, trans. Nyānamoli [Berkeley and London: Shambhala, 1976], vol. 1, pp. 285–86.

Asaṅga—like Buddhaghosa's Pāli scriptural source, the *Ānāpānasattisutta*—presents a series of seventeen items: a topic head giving the general characteristics of mindfulness of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath and sixteen subheads under it that divide evenly into four, corresponding to the four mindful establishments. The *Ānāpānasattisutta* itself goes on to identify this series of sixteen as a method of cultivating the four mindful establishments.^a Asaṅga, however, does not identify the series in this way. Moreover, Jam-yang-shay-pa interprets the topic sentence as the first of the sixteen aspects and omits the seventh of Asaṅga's and the *Ānāpānasattisutta*'s series, mindfulness of exhalation and inhalation upon having correctly experienced the workings of the mind. Since Jam-yang-shay-pa's citation gives only the beginning and end of the passage, with an ellipsis in the middle, there is no way of knowing whether he misread Asaṅga or was working from a corrupt text. It is clear from the extensive debates concerning the level of the mental contemplation of individual knowledge of the character, which revolve around the presence or absence of the negative (*ma*), that several versions of the Tibetan translation of Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* existed in Tibet even in Tsong-kha-pa's time and that some of them were textually corrupt.^b Moreover, Jam-yang-shay-pa's experience with lists in Indian commentaries would have led him to expect that the topic sentence "What are the sixteen aspects? They are these:" would immediately introduce a list consisting of sixteen items and not seventeen items, the first of which is a second topic sentence introducing the actual list of sixteen; if Asaṅga is citing or paraphrasing a scriptural passage similar to the one in the Pāli *Ānāpānasattisutta* instead of giving his own list, he gives no indication that he is doing so. In either case, the result of Jam-yang-shay-pa's misreading of the key passage in Asaṅga's text is that he does not recognize in it a way of cultivating the four mindful establishments and, therefore, is prevented from drawing any conclusions that might have been drawn from such a recognition.

Jam-yang-shay-pa's explanation of the passage also presents problems. According to him, Asaṅga identifies two types of meditators who

^a *Ānāpānasattisutta*, in *The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, trans. I. B. Horner, vol. 3, p. 127.

^b See page 206. The only extant Sanskrit manuscript, discovered in the 1930s, is also corrupt and, moreover, incomplete. (Alex Wayman, *Analysis of the Śrāvakabhūmi Manuscript*, University of California Publications in Classical Philology, vol. 17 [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961], p. 1; *Śrāvakabhūmi of Ācārya Asaṅga*, ed. by Karunesh Shukla, Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series, vol. 14 [Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1973], pp. xx-xxii.)

cultivate the thorough purification through sixteen aspects—(1) "meditators on...[the first three of] the sixteen mindfulnesses of exhalation and inhalation of the breath that are explicitly taught on this occasion" and (2) "meditators who have previously counted the exhalation and inhalation of the breath [before they reach the level of these sixteen practices]."^a In brief, he identifies the first type of meditator as "necessarily a learner Superior"—that is, someone who has attained the path of seeing but has not yet attained the path of no more learning (*mi slob lam*, *asāiḥsamāra*), in this case, Foe Destroyerhood, since Asaṅga's text is called *Grounds of Hearers*—and the second type of meditator as "necessarily someone on the path of accumulation and below."^b

Jam-yang-shay-pa's interpretation appears to be inconsistent with the earlier passage introducing the list of sixteen, in which Jam-yang-shay-pa had identified only the first type of meditator; he begins the earlier passage, "a yogi who has done the purification through engagement in the truths ..., in order to purify mainly the afflictive emotions to be purified by [the path of] meditation, views and trains thinking..."^c This is the meditator identified earlier (see page 118), who had previously directly realized the four truths and attained the path of seeing and who is undertaking the thorough purification through sixteen aspects on the path of meditation in order to abandon the afflictive emotions to be abandoned on that path; having attained the path of seeing, such a meditator is a learner Superior.

Jam-yang-shay-pa's reason for distinguishing here between these two types of meditators who undertake the thorough purification through sixteen aspects is that

- (1) a meditator on [the sixteen mindfulnesses of exhalation and inhalation of the breath] that are explicitly taught on this occasion is necessarily a learner Superior and, however low he or she may be, must definitely be someone who has entered the path and (2) a meditator who has previously [counted the exhalation and inhalation of the breath] is someone who has not entered the path and, however high he or she may be, is necessarily someone on the path of accumulation and below.^d

As Hopkins points out, the wording of Jam-yang-shay-pa's reason is

^a Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 120.5-6.
^b *Ibid.*, 120.6-7.
^c *Ibid.*, 118.7-119.2.
^d *Ibid.*, 120.7-7.

atypical since, once a debate text states that something is *necessarily* (*kyab pa*) the case, it is very unusual to qualify the statement in a manner suggesting that there may be exceptions. Moreover, the terms of the qualification are also odd, since, as Hopkins also points out, there is no doubt that a learner Superior "must definitely be someone who has entered the path." Hopkins suggests that Jam-yang-shay-pa is implicitly making a concession; it is as though he had said, "Even if you do not agree with me that such a meditator is necessarily a learner Superior, at least you have to admit that such a meditator has definitely entered the path." Hopkins also notes that the second part of the reason is done the same way and is also very strange, since someone on the path of accumulation *has* entered the path and cannot be "someone who has not entered the path."^a

Paraphrasing his citation from Asaṅga, Jam-yang-shay-pa explains that the first type of meditator

has definitely attained the four mindful establishments and, hence, is someone who has entered the path; not only that: he or she is posited as a person who, having directly realized the four truths, makes effort in order to abandon the remaining thorough enwrappings.^b

He explains the second type of meditator with reference to the three divisions of the path of accumulation: according to him,

before entering the path and on the lesser and middling path of accumulation, certain persons who have very great predominant discursiveness purify it in meditation by counting the breath, but since such a fault of discursiveness does not occur on the greater path of accumulation and above, there is no need for meditation on [counting the breath]. This is because in the period of the greater path of accumulation, anyone of any of the three vehicles has necessarily attained calm abiding. This is because, thereby, (a) the attainment, in dependence on calm abiding, of a state arisen from meditation by means of analytical meditation on either of the two selflessnesses, (b) the attainment of such special insight, and (c) the attainment of the path of preparation are simultaneous.^c

^a Jeffrey Hopkins in conversation.

^b Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 120.7–121.1.

^c *Ibid.*, 121.3–5.

Here, indirectly, he finally identifies the point at which special insight is attained in this type of meditation and implicitly admits that the meditator in question will attain it. However, he does not identify the practice by which *this* meditator attains it. He names the practice his own system identifies as the means of attaining special insight and implies that, in order to have attained special insight, this meditator must have engaged in that practice, but the passage from Asaṅga suggests that a meditator who cultivates the thorough purification through sixteen aspects is not engaged in "analytical meditation on either of the two selflessnesses" as Jam-yang-shay-pa understands it but, rather, in a type of "analytical meditation" consisting of inductive reasoning based on observation.

It is possible that the awkward qualifications in Jam-yang-shay-pa's reasoning may result from some suspicion on Jam-yang-shay-pa's part that the traditions included in his own system did not fully account for the distinctions in Asaṅga's text. According to Buddhaghosa, mindfulness of breathing with sixteen aspects has two benefits: (1) it calms the mind by stopping discursiveness, and (2) it leads to realization of the four mindful establishments and to insight; he remarks also that the first three groups of four are relevant to both serenity and insight, whereas the last applies only to insight.^a Thus, comparison with Theravāda sources suggests the possibility that Asaṅga's and Jam-yang-shay-pa's two types of meditators may correspond, respectively, to followers of the paths of serenity and bare insight in modern Theravāda practice, and that Jam-yang-shay-pa had no information concerning the type of "analytical meditation" based on observation, described in Theravāda sources, from which the latter is derived and which it isolates as a practice vehicle in its own right.

Conclusion. It is clear that, according to both Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, and according to the Ge-luk-pa textbook writers and scholars discussed here, the early stages of breath meditation can "purify" discursiveness and lead to the attainment of calm abiding. Both Vasubandhu and Asaṅga give practical instructions for this type of meditation, as do Lati Rinpoche and Gedün Lodrö. The status of the later stages of breath meditation is less clear, however. From one point of view, their inclusion among objects of observation for purifying discursiveness may be regarded as yet another instance of the Ge-luk presentation of all objects

^a Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (visuddhimagga)*, 8.238–39, 237, citing the *Ānāpānasatisutta*; Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, trans. Nyānamoli (Berkeley and London: Shambhala, 1976), vol. 1, p. 315.

of observation under the heading "calm abiding" even though—like some of the four types of object of observation in the classic layout derived from Asaṅga, Kamalashīla, and the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*—they may be objects of observation for the attainment of special insight or higher stages of the path (see page 81). The presentation of the later stages is complicated, however, by the virtual omission, in the Ge-luk presentations considered here, of any clear identification of the point at which special insight is attained, or even of any acknowledgment that special insight can be attained by this type of meditation, despite references to the path of preparation in the Indian sources. This omission may be due to several causes:

1. Limitations imposed by the transmission of the Indian source texts to Tibet without practice traditions based on those texts, and without knowledge of other Buddhist cultures in which such practices existed.
2. Non-application to the topic of the concentrations and formless absorptions of Vasubandhu's equation of mindfulness and wisdom in the *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and its *Autocommentary*, as well as his reference to the four mindful establishments as an example—points Ge-luk writers and contemporary scholars discuss when they study the *Treasury* as a topic in its own right; given the nature of Ge-luk system-building, it seems possible that, if they had been able to apply this point to Vasubandhu's presentation of breath meditation, they might have applied it to Asaṅga's as well.
3. Non-recognition of methods of attaining special insight outside the system of Chandrakīrti and, to a lesser extent in the context of the concentrations and formless absorptions, outside those mentioned in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*—especially a method that relies on inductive reasoning based on observation.

OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION FOR [DEVELOPING] SKILL

The objects of observation for developing skill are: the aggregates, the constituents, the twelve spheres, the twelve-linked dependent-arising, and the appropriate and the inappropriate (*gnas dang gnas ma yin pa, sthānāsthāna*). Meditation on them involves the detailed analysis, in the meditation session, of Manifest Knowledge topics previously studied outside the context of meditation. Although Lati Rinpoche's summary of each topic ends with advice to the meditator to stabilize on what has

been understood through analysis and thereby achieve calm abiding,^a according to Gedün Lodrö, objects of observation for developing skill are in general not used for the attainment of calm abiding but to strengthen and consolidate calm abiding already attained and enable the meditator to begin the cultivation of special insight.^b Despite Lati Rinpoche's advice concerning the use of these objects of observation to achieve calm abiding, it is clear—from his identification of what skill in each of these objects of observation consists of—that he, like Gedün Lodrö, also regards the objects of observation for developing skill as preparatory to the cultivation of special insight, since all of them, according to his presentation, lead to realization of the non-existence of a partless, independent person and to an understanding of causality.^c

The topics themselves are discussed at length in the Manifest Knowledge texts—Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and its *Autocommentary* and Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge*—and in Ge-luk monastic textbooks based on them. Since Ge-luk presentations of these topics are discussed in detail in English in Hopkins' *Meditation on Emptiness*, I will merely sketch them briefly here, mainly from Lati Rinpoche's concise oral presentation.

THE AGGREGATES

Lati Rinpoche explains meditation on the five aggregates in this context as recognition of these five—forms (*gzugs, rūpa*), feelings (*tshor ba, vedanā*), discriminations (*'du shes, saṃjñā*), compositional factors (*'du byed, saṃskāra*), and consciousnesses (*rnam shes, vijñāna*). Skill in the aggregates is the understanding "that there is no partless, independent person apart from these aggregates."^d

THE CONSTITUENTS

According to Lati Rinpoche, meditation on the constituents in this context involves the analysis in meditation of the eighteen constituents for the sake of acquiring skill in them. The eighteen constituents are the six sense powers—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental sense powers—the six consciousnesses corresponding to these sense powers, and the six objects of those consciousnesses. The meditator considers

^a *Meditative States*, pp. 87–90.

^b Gedün Lodrö, p. 139.

^c *Meditative States*, pp. 88–90.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 88.

the relationship of each of these to the other, especially their causes and conditions. Skill in the constituents is attained when the meditator understands “that there is no separate creator of these, such as a substantially existent (*rdzas su yod pa, dravyasat*) self.”^a

THE TWELVE SPHERES

Lati Rinpoche identifies the twelve spheres as the six sense powers and the six sense objects included within the eighteen constituents; he notes that “through rearrangement of these, all phenomena can be included in the twelve [spheres].” The meditator comes to understand that the sense powers and their objects are in the relationship of user and used and that pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings are produced as a result of this use. Again, skill is attained when the meditator realizes that “there is no substantially existent person separate from these.”^b

THE TWELVE-LINKED DEPENDENT-ARISING

According to Lati Rinpoche, skill in dependent-arising involves understanding of the causes and conditions that produce a lifetime in cyclic existence (*khor ba, samisāra*); the fundamental cause is ignorance (*ma rig pa, avidyā*), which is followed by the remaining eleven links—compositional action (*‘du byed kyi las, saṃskāra karma*), consciousness (*nam shes, vijñāna*), name and form (*ming gzugs, nāmarūpa*), spheres (*skye mched, āyatana*), contact (*reg pa, sparśa*), feeling (*tshor ba, vedanā*), attachment (*sred pa, tṛṣṇā*), grasping (*len pa, upādāna*), existence (*srid pa, bhava*), birth (*skye ba, jāti*), and aging and/or death (*rga shi, jarāmaraṇa*). In his more detailed presentation, Gedün Lodrö identifies this as the forward progression and adds that the meditator can also become skilled in the reverse progression and in the various presentations of “how one person cycles in cyclic existence by way of the twelve-linked dependent-arising.”^c According to Lati Rinpoche, skill in dependent-arising occurs when the meditator realizes “that a lifetime in cyclic existence is not produced causelessly and is not produced from discordant causes, such as a permanent deity.”^d

^a *Meditative States*, p. 88. See also Gedün Lodrö, pp. 122–23.

^b *Meditative States*, p. 89.

^c Gedün Lodrö, p. 123; he sets these forth in detail. Another detailed presentation in English can be found in *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp. 275–83 and 707–11.

^d *Meditative States*, p. 89.

THE APPROPRIATE AND THE INAPPROPRIATE

The appropriate and the inappropriate is a meditation on actions and their effects; the topic is seen as an aspect of dependent-arising.^a According to Lati Rinpoche, “The appropriate and the inappropriate means the possible and the impossible.”^b It is appropriate—that is, possible—for birth in a happy transmigrator to be caused only by a virtuous action and not by a non-virtuous action, and, similarly, for birth in a bad transmigrator to be caused only by a non-virtuous action, and not by a virtuous action. Lati Rinpoche identifies skill in the appropriate and the inappropriate as the realization that “these births are not created by a permanent deity and do not result from the activity of a substantially existent person.”^c

OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION FOR PURIFYING AFFLICTIVE EMOTIONS

Objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions are used after the attainment of calm abiding by meditators who wish to progress mentally to the next higher level—for example, by a person of the Desire Realm who has attained calm abiding and who wishes to attain an actual meditative absorption of the first concentration, or by someone who wishes to progress from the first concentration (either as an actual absorption or as a rebirth level) to an actual absorption of the second concentration (*bsam gtan gnyis pa, dvityadhyaṇa*). As mentioned in the previous chapter, objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions pacify equally all the afflictive emotions of a given level. Ge-luk monastic textbooks and oral presentations generally explain them in the context of the preparations for the first concentration (see Chapter 8).

OTHER OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION

In addition to the classification of four types of object of observation originally set forth in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*, Ge-luk commentators explain two other sūtra-system objects of observation—the body of a Buddha and one’s own mind. Gedün Lodrö also mentions briefly objects of observation used in tantra but not in the sūtra system; these

^a *Ibid.*, p. 90.

^b *Ibid.*, p. 92.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 90.

include meditations in which the meditator, generating him- or herself as a deity, visualizes him- or herself as having a divine body. Also included is the visualization of hand symbols (*phyag mtshan*, *mudrā*) or of subtle drops (*thig le*, *bindu*) at important points of the body, such as the center of the heart or at the point between the eyebrows.^a I will not discuss tantric objects of observation here.

THE BODY OF A BUDDHA

Ge-luk presentations of meditation on the body of a Buddha are taken from Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*; it is the object of observation considered best by Asaṅga and Tsong-kha-pa and by the Ge-luk textbook writers studied here. The meditation involves visualization of the Buddha Śākyamuni seated on lotus, sun, and moon cushions—and, if the meditator is able to do the full visualization, also on a lion-throne—with his hand in the earth-touching gesture. This image is visualized in the space in front of the meditator, about six feet in front of either the eyes or the navel, depending on the meditator's temperament.^b

In oral presentations, the body of a Buddha is generally used as an example of an object of observation when no object of observation is specified; it is, so to speak, a "generic object of observation." Moreover, it is the object of observation still generally taught to beginners in practical instruction; Gedün Lodrö describes it as the best sūtra-system object of observation for a beginner.^c In this opinion, he is following Jam-yang-shay-pa's *Great Exposition of the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions*, which states that the body of a Buddha not only performs the function of other objects of observation by enabling the meditator to achieve meditative stabilization but that each session of meditation on it also increases the meditator's collection of merit (*bsod nams kyi tshogs*, *puṇyasambhāra*) and, thus, contributes to his or her eventual attainment of Buddhahood.^d

^a Gedün Lodrö, p. 140.

^b Gedün Lodrö, pp. 143–44; *Meditative States*, p. 57.

^c Gedün Lodrö, p. 142.

^d Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 135.4–6 (abridged in Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 558.6). Jam-yang-shay-pa's explanation is a condensation of Tsong-kha-pa's (*Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* [Dharmasala: shes rig par khang, 1964], 679.2–680.5). See also *Meditative States*, p. 80.

ONE'S OWN MIND

The mind itself is the main object of observation mentioned in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and, in a citation from that text, is mentioned by Pañ-chen Sō-nam-drak-pa.^a Lati Rinpoche describes it as clear (*gsal ba*), a knower (*rig pa*, *samvedana*), and empty (*stong pa*, *śūnya*).^b However, instead of recommending this object of observation, Ge-luk oral explanations caution against the errors likely to be incurred in its practice. Lati Rinpoche warns that it is possible to repeat the error of earlier Tibetan meditators who, in his opinion, mistook the calm abiding attained by using this object of observation for the realization of emptiness. Moreover, he states that those meditators mistook the bliss of pliancy for the innate bliss and the calm abiding attained by using this object of observation for "the primordial, innate wisdom-consciousness."^c

He also warns against the possibility of mistaking the meditational fault of subtle laxity (*bying ba*, *laya*) for meditative stabilization (*ting rige 'dzin*, *samādhi*) and cites Sa-kya (*sa skya*) Pañḍita as having said "that a stupid person who tries to cultivate the Great Seal (*phyag rgya chen po*, *mahāmudrā*) usually" makes this error and, thereby, "creates the causes for being reborn as an animal."^d It is not clear that this argument would stand in debate, since an animal rebirth is rebirth in a bad transmigrator (*ngan 'gro*, *durgati*), and rebirth in a bad transmigrator is generally held to be caused only by a non-virtuous action, whereas subtle laxity is considered to be either virtuous or, at worst, ethically neutral, but not non-virtuous.^e At best, Lati Rinpoche's argument seems to be based on the forgetfulness and mental dullness that are the observed consequences of subtle laxity in this lifetime, and their similarity, in Lati Rinpoche's opinion, to the stupidity that is held to be the salient characteristic of animals.^f Lati Rinpoche seems to be arguing mainly from analogy; what he seems to be saying is that a meditator whose way of meditating leads to forgetfulness and mental dullness comes to resemble an animal mentally and, thus, is in danger of being reborn as one, but he does not establish that such a way of meditating is non-virtuous. These warnings seem to be mainly disguised sectarian polemics against the Nying-ma (*rnying ma*) Great Completeness (*rdzogs chen*) and Ka-gyu

^a Pañ-chen Sō-nam-drak-pa, "Concentrations," 155b.4.

^b *Meditative States*, p. 80.

^c *Ibid.*, p. 81.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 61.

^e *Ibid.*, p. 59; Gedün Lodrö, p. 177.

^f *Meditative States*, p. 61.

(*bka' rgyud*) Great Seal meditations.

Unlike the other Ge-luk commentators considered here, the present Dalai Lama recommends the mind itself as an object of observation and gives clear directions for meditating on it:

Another type of meditation involves looking at the mind itself. Try to leave your mind vividly in a natural state, without thinking of what happened in the past or of what you are planning for the future, without generating any conceptuality. Where does it seem that your consciousness is?...

With persistent practice, consciousness may eventually be perceived or felt as an entity of mere luminosity and knowing [the classic textbook definition of a consciousness], to which anything is capable of appearing and which, when appropriate conditions arise, can be generated in the image of whatsoever object. As long as the mind does not encounter the external circumstance of conceptuality, it will abide empty without anything appearing in it, like clear water. Its very entity is that of mere experience. In realizing this nature of the mind, we have for the first time located the object of observation of this internal type of meditation. The best time for practicing this form of meditation is in the morning, in a quiet place, when the mind is very clear and alert.^a

It is probable that his recommendation, which appears to be based on experience, stems, at least in part, from his strong efforts to overcome Tibetan sectarianism.^b

OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR BEGINNERS

The objects of observation generally given to beginners are the body of a Buddha and, from among the four main types of object of observation, those for purifying behavior. According to Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po and Jam-yang-shay-pa—who follows closely, but does not cite, a passage in the calm abiding section of Tsong-kha-pa's *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*—meditators who have any of the predominant afflictive emotions must use the corresponding object of observation for

^a *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, p. 68.

^b See his "Union of the Old and New Translation Schools," in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, pp. 200–24.

purifying behavior, whereas meditators in whom the five predominant afflictive emotions are of equal strength, or who have few afflictive emotions, are not restricted but may choose any of the objects of observation set forth above.^a Tsong-kha-pa emphasizes that "It is especially necessary for someone with excessive discursiveness definitely to meditate on the winds [that is, the breath]."^b

It is evident from the present Dalai Lama's description of the process of meditating on the mind itself that it would be considered a difficult object of observation for most beginners, especially for those with discursiveness, since he instructs the meditator initially to "[T]ry to leave your mind vividly in a natural state...without generating any conceptuality."^c This is only the first step. Moreover, recognition of the mind as "an entity of mere luminosity and knowing" is just the initial finding of the object of observation;^d there remains the task of sustaining meditation on it.

Emptiness is also considered a difficult object of observation; beginners who are capable of using it are extremely rare. As Gedün Lodrö explains, in general

it is necessary to find the object of observation and then, to stabilize on it; here it is difficult even to find the object of observation, much less stabilize on it. One must analyze in order to find it, and for a complete beginner who is analyzing without stability, even the first of the nine mental abidings (*sems gnas, cittasthiti*)^e is impossible.^f

Thus, according to Gedün Lodrö, who cites Kamalashīla's *Stages of Meditation*, most meditators achieve calm abiding using a conventional object of observation; they then cultivate special insight observing emptiness. He notes, further, that "when the cultivation of special insight is set forth, it is done only in the context of meditating on emptiness, not on other topics" and that "A person who achieves calm abiding using emptiness as the object of observation and then, still taking emptiness as the object of observation, achieves special insight, has the best type

^a Kōn-chok-jik-may-wang-po, *Condensed Statement*, 558.3–6; Jam-yang-shay-pa, *Concentrations*, 135.1–4; Tsong-kha-pa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, 678.4–679.2.

^b Tsong-kha-pa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, 679.1–2.

^c *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, p. 68.

^d *Ibid.*, p. 68.

^e The nine mental abidings are the nine mental states through which the meditator passes in order to achieve calm abiding; for a full discussion of them, see pages 155–164.

^f Gedün Lodrö, p. 141.

of special insight."⁴

Beginners do not use the remaining objects of observation discussed here in order to achieve calm abiding. As was mentioned earlier (see page 127), objects of observation for developing skill are used after the attainment of calm abiding in order to consolidate and enhance the calm abiding already achieved. Objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions are used during the preparations for the concentrations, when the meditator has already achieved calm abiding and is trying to attain an actual concentration; they are generally explained in the context of the preparations for the first concentration. (See the chart listing the types of object of observation and indicating those suitable for beginners, next page.)

Chart 2: Objects of Observation

(Objects of observation in *italics* are considered suitable for beginners.)

THE FOUR TYPES OF OBJECT OF OBSERVATION (from the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought, Asanga's Grounds of Hearers*, and Kamalashīla's *Stages of Meditation*)

- 1 Pervasive objects of observation
 - a. Non-analytical image
 - b. Analytical image
 - c. Observing the limits of phenomena
 - (1) the varieties (conventional phenomena)
 - (2) the mode (their emptiness)
 - d. Thorough achievement of the purpose
- 2 *Objects of observation for purifying behavior*
 - a. *The unpleasant: for persons in whom desire predominates*
 - b. *Love: for persons in whom hatred predominates*
 - c. *Dependent-arising: for persons in whom obscuration predominates*
 - d. *The divisions of the constituents: for persons in whom pride predominates*
 - e. *The exhalation and inhalation of the breath: for persons in whom discursiveness predominates*
- 3 Objects of observation for [developing] skill
 - a. The aggregates
 - b. The constituents
 - c. The twelve sources
 - d. The twelve-linked dependent-arising
 - e. The appropriate and the inappropriate
- 4 Objects of observation for purifying afflictive emotions
 - a. Those having the aspect of grossness/peacefulness
 - b. Those having the aspect of the truths

OTHER OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION

A Buddha's body

One's own mind

OBJECTS OF OBSERVATION USED IN TANTRA

A divine body (visualization of oneself as having a divine body)
Subtle drops

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.