

The Treasury of Blessings

Transcription Series

Teachings given by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche



Part 7: Shamatha Meditation

[00:00:15] Let us have a short period of equipoise. And what do we mean by equipoise? Well, we have body, we have speech, and we have mind. The body is made of these physical components. The speech is the expressions we make. And the mind is that which notices all that goes on -- whether it's enjoyable, not enjoyable or uninteresting. This mind notices a whole lot and it has a whole lot of opinions and makes a lot of judgements about what goes on.

[00:01:00] With every event that takes place there is a judgement. Either we see something that we feel is beautiful and attractive, or we see something that is repulsive. Or there is the third option which is that we think it's just not very interesting. So we see things that we like, that we dislike or that we don't care about. These are the three basic reactions that follow absolutely everything that takes place. They come with any aspect of consciousness. They may seem innocent, because we're just liking or not liking or not wanting to bother with whatever it is. But in fact these are subtle expressions of the negative emotions, the mental poisons – desire, anger and ignorance. They are nothing else than this and they are not innocent. When our liking becomes stronger, then it becomes desire and craving. And when it's dislike that grows stronger, then it's anger and hate that manifests on that basis. Before there was something we didn't like and now we hate it.

[00:02:00] Ignorance is when we feel that something is not interesting and that we just couldn't bother, we just don't care. This is the basic impulse of ignorance that dims the mind and

prevents us from experiencing the qualities of insight. So, far from being innocent these basic reactions are actually the three mental poisons that arise continuously. Whenever there is consciousness, they are there as well. This is our situation from morning time when we wake up until finally when we fall asleep, it's one poisonous event after another. And what does it mean to fall asleep? It's simply a collapse of consciousness. The cognition that we have now vanishes and disappears into the all-ground state, which is completely oblivious. [03:00] After having gone completely unconscious, then new perceptions begin to take place. We begin to dream. These dreams resemble what goes on in the day, but they are not exactly like that, they're not just ordinary daytime experiences. But still in dreams we have these same emotional reactions to whatever goes on. We are still liking and not liking and being indifferent. Equipoise is a way of trying not to be like that. It's a practice that is aimed at getting beyond this poisonous conditioning of always responding with like, dislike or not paying attention.

In Buddhism, meditation practice involves two aspects: shamatha and vipashyana. Shamatha is the basis for insight and is a way of resting the mind. This sense of mental rest, mental ease, and mental peace is the basis for true insight. [04:00] So shamatha is a method rather than an end. It's a means. And this is what we begin to train in. We cultivate the abilities of the mind to let be, to rest and to come to a sense of equanimity and equipoise. How do we accomplish this? There are many ways of doing it, but one of the most simple methods is to just keep in mind a simple reference point. This simple reference point can be something that we visualize or something that we have before us that we can actually see. It could be a little pebble, it could be a stick that we place in front of us, or it could be a statue of a holy object, a Buddha statue, for example. It should just be a relatively simple thing that we visualize or have before us. We keep it as a reference point.

Another excellent way of keeping a reference point is to simply be attentive to the breath. [00:05:00] The good thing about focusing on the breath is that this definitely isn't going to make us overly excited. It's not terribly exciting that we breathe, nor is it terribly irritating. In other words, like and dislike don't manifest very easily on the basis of the thought "I breathe." We feel fairly neutral about this. So all we have to do is keep this relatively neutral reference point in mind. As long as that's all we have in mind, then the mind remains in a neutral state. We won't become agitated or aggressive by doing this. Our meditation practice then is to just exhale and inhale in a very natural way without trying to do anything in particular to the breathing, just allowing it to be as it comes naturally. Then there's only this one thought in our mind. There's nothing else we need to keep in mind. Our reference point is the breathing, so if we get distracted then we just go back to noticing "I breathe in, I breathe out." It's a very simple noticing. Our meditation practice involves a very simple sense of being aware that "I breathe in, I breathe out" and allowing for the peace and calm that accompanies this simple state of mind. If we get distracted, there is just this returning to the simple reference point.

This is a way of cultivating shamatha and all of the excellent qualities that come with meditation practice. These qualities are cultivated on the basis of a mind that has this ability to let be. [00:07:00] Vipashyana, our special insight, dawns as the basis of shamatha. And that's

why there is an emphasis on first learning shamatha. It is the basis for the dawning of special insight.

[00:07:30] *Meditation Gong*

[00:10:00] Dedication of merit