

Obstacles and Antidotes in the First Four Stages of Shamatha⁴

Standing Meditation Instruction

TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN by discussing the basic approach we are taking towards shamatha practice. We will start by doing standing shamatha practice. [Rinpoche stands on his throne, audience stands] This is legal! [Laughter] When we do shamatha, we usually go in and sit right down, but at times we can just try to get a sense of our body and our breathing. This is something that you can do at home by yourself, whenever you want to do it.

As we have sitting meditation, we can also have standing meditation. The way we are going to do this basic standing meditation is to place our feet comfortably apart, the shoulders rolled back, and our arms at our sides, slightly away from our body, with the palms of our hands facing forward. If you see statues of the standing Buddha or similar figures, sometimes they are in this posture and sometimes they have the right hand raised with the palm facing forward. This is a basic standing posture. The hands are open and facing out so that there is an openness, as opposed to having the hands in a fist or facing in. Again, uplift your head, shoulders, and chest. You should have a firm base—which I don't! [Laughter; Rinpoche is standing on his throne cushion] Don't bounce like me.

Play with the feet a bit. Feel your toes and extend them out. Feel the arch of your feet, your calves, the back of your knees. Instead of stiffening your knees, find the position where they are neither locked nor bent. You shouldn't feel that you could be easily pushed over. That is, if I walked around and pushed you, you wouldn't fall backwards. You should be a little bit grounded, just as in t'ai chi or yoga. Stand here and feel your body. Relax the hands as much as you can. They don't have to stick out. They might just end up down here [closer to his sides]. The chin is in as well, as in sitting meditation. [Pause]

Beginning the Standing Practice

Start with the feet and move up the body. Relax the feet, relax the calves, relax the knees, the thigh muscles, the buttocks, the lower back, the pelvic area, the stomach, the lungs. This is basically a way of practicing mindfulness by being aware of our body parts. [Pause]

The object of this meditation is refining the feeling of the body. At this point, it is having the consciousness in the body and feeling the mind. Relax the stomach and the chest. Begin to close your eyes more. Now feel grounded—as if you were a tree, with roots on the bottom of your feet. [Pause]

We could try different things. After we have relaxed the body and scanned all the way up to the top, we could relate just with the breathing. If we want, we could meditate by

⁴ Please refer to the Nine Stages of Shamatha chart in the Appendix for a listing of all obstacles and antidotes.

focusing on the heart center. [Pause] The other thing we may want to do at this point is to get a feeling of the energy moving up and down the center of our body, from the head all the way down to below the navel. [Pause]

One thing that is helpful here, which is sort of what we have been talking about all along, is that as we are standing here we simply realize, "I am a human being." [Laughter] We begin to really feel that we are part of nature. We are part of the world, the air we breathe. [Pause]

Okay. That is enough fun. Now back to work! [Laughter; all sit down]

MINDFULNESS AND AWARENESS

Reflecting on the Teachings

I understand that you had a discussion group this morning and that you will have another one tomorrow. If you who have not heard or studied these particular teachings before, it may seem as if there is a lot going on—although I am trying to keep it very simple. If you have taken notes, you can use them to reflect on these teachings after you leave. When you are at home, you will have time to do that. It is good to read your notes or to review what you have learned in a book before you practice meditation. For example, you could read a paragraph or a page or a section, then put it down and try the meditation. It will give you some inspiration. Often, when it's left to us, we don't think about what we are doing. When we sit down probably not much comes to mind about what is happening with our practice. So it is important to have something to stimulate us. Even if it is just one paragraph, it is good to read and reflect on the teachings before we meditate.

Honest Meditation

I would like to say a little bit more about the outer circle and about practical ways for you to break up your meditation sessions when you go back home, and even when you are still here. Some of you have not done a lot of meditation, so practicing an hour or more is difficult, frankly. So if you have an hour for meditation, you could break it up. There are many different levels of practice. For instance, you might come here and do a *dathün*, one month of practice. Obviously at the beginning of the *dathün* you will look at it and think, "It's probably going to be difficult for me to maintain my focus for one month without wandering at all. It's possible, but unlikely." So when you come into such a situation, you could say, "Okay, now how do I pace myself?" It is very important to gauge what is happening to you and pace yourself based on where you are in the course of meditation practice.

If you are sitting a *dathün*, chances are that at a certain point you will space out. Using our analogy of working with a wild horse—at some point the horse has taken in so much information that it needs to just go out and run around. More training at that point is not going to do much good. You are aware of this, and you also have a sense of how much running around you will allow. You have a certain amount of control over that. Likewise, if you are meditating, you can say, "I've really been trying to focus, and now I'm letting go." You can look back and say, "I started out by trying to deal with big thoughts, and lately I have been focusing on more subtle meditation. But now my focus is getting tired. My mind and my meditation are getting tired." You try to recognize that point and to realize that it is fine. The mind is just like the body: it gets tired and needs to rest. So you need to slow

down. At that point you can say, "Right now, a certain level of discursiveness is fine." This is honest meditation.

If we don't relate to our tiredness, we space out totally. We get up, and whatever happened, happened. However, instead, if we are more aware, we can say that a certain amount of thinking is fine. We are being mindful of our tiredness and saying that some thinking is okay. It is like children who have had a lesson and then have time to play. A certain amount of playing is okay. However, you don't want them to get too wild. So you keep your eye on them and say, "This is okay and that is okay." But after a while, if they are throwing mud at each other and that kind of thing, you may say, "That is too much."

We have to realize that *we* are in charge of our meditation. *We* direct the course of our practice. If we don't realize that, we are often just led about by the force of our mental activity and karmic flow. It overpowers us. For example, when you are meditating during a dathün and doing long sessions, there may be times when you find it is too much to relate to the breathing. At that point, you might take another approach and completely drop everything. You have the technique, you have the theories, you have all these things—and it is all too much! So you completely drop it, just let it go. You let the whole thing dissolve. You can do that in many stages. It is like carrying a big load: you can put down one thing at a time, or you can just drop the whole thing.

Feeling as the Object of Meditation

The point is that as we are going along with our meditation, we have to understand where we are. We may notice a tendency in our mind for the thoughts and emotions and whatever else is coming up to get wilder and wilder—and then we have to back off a little bit. We have to become a little more accepting of the situation. Then, within that, we can say, "Now what is the focus going to be?" Maybe rather than going right to the breath, we could say, "Okay, now let's take a look at the body." It is like we were doing with the standing meditation—we are getting oriented again. This is helpful because when you are following your breath and using it as the basis of the mindfulness practice, you are basically relating with the body as the object of meditation.

If you want to get more accurate, you can say that the object of meditation is what we call *tsorwa*, or "feeling." You can divide it in many ways: you could say that the body is the object of meditation or that it is the breath. However, the breath is not a very tangible thing. When we breathe, we literally cannot see our breath. Nonetheless, we know we are breathing: we can follow the breath in terms of how it *feels*. So another way of looking at it is that the object of meditation is feeling. From that point of view, it falls under the category of mind. The object of meditation is feeling, or *tsorwa*, which falls under the category of mental activity. You are being mindful of the mental consciousness having a feeling of what is taking place. In terms of the five skandhas, this is the second skandha of feeling.

First we have the skandha of form and then we have feeling—but I won't go any further than that! [Laughter] When we talk about sight and sound, we realize that we are dealing with how the mind works. In the same way, when we are sitting here meditating, and we think, "Where does the breath begin? Where does it end? Where is the breath?"—we realize we are talking about the mind having the *feeling* of breath, the consciousness being aware. However, the way our consciousness can feel things is through the body. It is together with,

or unified with, the notion of body. Again, what is the object of our meditation? It is the feeling of the breath, but now it is also the body. We are making a subtle shift.

Relaxing the Body Through Breathing

We are doing two things when we meditate: relating with the breathing and relaxing. First we are relating with the breathing, or dealing with the wind in the body. Second, doing so has a direct correlation with relaxation and releasing. This is why people say meditation deals with tension. When we breathe, it deals with stress, as people who do things like yoga know. Breathing plays a big part in terms of how we relate to the muscle and the fiber of the body. Generally, we hold a lot in. Everything that happens to us in this life is either held in our mind or in our body in some way. Somehow that has to be worked with here.

As we meditate we are beginning to relax the body through the breathing technique. Every part of the body needs the breathing, and the breathing begins to access everything in the body. In this way, breathing is a way of approaching the tension that takes place inwardly. That is why noticing the breathing in the body is a very important thing to focus on when we are meditating. It truly affects how we can begin to relax. People who are yogis and do meditation are very, very competent in dealing with their breathing. That is especially true of some of you whom I see doing vajrayana practices that are very closely connected with what we call *tsalung*, or “channels and winds,” such as the Six Yogas of Naropa. These all have to work together...but I am getting off on many tangents today.

The Assets of Using the Breathing

So we are here meditating and learning how to deal with the breathing. I am leading up to the inbreath/outbreath business. I am presenting my case.

SARAH COLEMAN: We’re holding our breath!

SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE: Okay! At least you are holding the inbreath! [Laughter]

In terms of the purpose of the meditation, what is the breath doing here—why deal with the breath as we are breathing out and breathing in, breathing out, breathing in? We could say that it is just a grounding factor, a way of settling the mind. We have also learned that focusing on the breathing is not a matter of desperately holding on to the breath, but simply holding our mind to the pattern of the breathing. It is like holding our mind to the fluttering of a flag, or holding our mind to the movement of a stream like Zen people who sit next to a stream—so do other people, obviously. [Laughter] The point is that we are dealing with movement, it is not a stagnant thing. Holding our mind to the flowing water is important. How can we hold the mind there? Because it is easier to hold the mind to some kind of movement. If the object of meditation is stationary, there will be a lack of interest in what is happening.

The breathing is an interesting object for meditation. That is why we use it. It is moving, it is relaxing, and it deals with the channels; therefore, it directly accesses discursiveness. In terms of meditation and the anatomy of the body, discursiveness has a direct correlation with the breathing of the body. So everything is getting connected in this way. It is not that we just happened to pick breathing randomly. We choose breathing because it has many assets. We aren’t saying that discursiveness starts in the lungs with the breathing; but that the mind and the body have a connection. They have a dependency upon

each other, a symbiotic relationship that has developed over time. Therefore, breathing is one way to relate with discursiveness. Another way to look at this is to ask, "What is breathing?" It is wind; and when wind happens, things move. That is another way to look at the breath and the mind-body connection.

The Rhythm of Tightening and Loosening

We are breathing, which is grounding—anything that can ground the mind is helpful. We are letting our mind begin to deal with the internal workings of the body and mind as we breathe out and we breathe in. Ideally, when we start the meditation we follow the outbreath. We are acknowledging and being mindful of the outbreath. We are holding our mind to the breathing process, being aware of it. You can use all these descriptions, but basically we are breathing out—and what we are interested in is just the movement of the whole thing

There is a breathing out, and we hold the mind there; then the breathing comes in, the breathing goes out again, and so forth. So there is a rhythm taking place, which allows the mind to tighten and loosen, tighten and loosen. The mind can hold and then relax a little bit. It is not just on a singular track, it all comes together. Another way of looking at it is that working with the breath massages the mind. It massages our ability to stay on the object of meditation.

All of this depends on learning how to hold our mind to the object, or placement. We are learning how to do placement properly. If we don't do it properly, then we'll never know exactly what we are doing, what is the point of it, or how do we do it. Sometimes we don't really know what the object of meditation is. We are not sure what aspect of the breathing we are trying to focus on, and we are not sure what the purpose is. In fact, it all relates with how we hold our mind to an object. Once we learn how to do that, in accordance with our level of meditation, then it is very easy. However, if we step beyond our level of meditation and try to say it is more than this, then it is very easy to get into daydreaming, to go to sleep, to get discursive, and many other things. So we have to gauge what our mind is able to do in terms of this practice. This is the notion of training.

Balancing the Inbreath and Outbreath

When we breathe, we are both breathing out and breathing in. Paying attention to breathing in as well as to breathing out enables us to have a feeling for what is happening internally, within our body and our mind. By paying attention to both going out and coming in we are dealing with the mind's tendency to be too extreme. It is important to learn how to draw the breath in as well as how to breathe it out. In this way, we are learning how to hold the mind. If we hold the mind too tight, breathing in, it becomes too claustrophobic. If we hold the mind too loose, going out, we tend to space out and lose our focus of meditation. So we are learning how to hold the mind to the feeling of breathing.

As the practice begins to include breathing in, what we are doing is holding the mind internally. In that way, we are also beginning to work with the notion of body. Ultimately we are not really that interested in the body with this meditation practice, we are interested in the mind. That is really what we are after—the sixth consciousness, or the mind. However, we begin by using the body. We are grounding ourselves in the body. We are using the body and the energy flows and so forth so that we can ground the mind and work

with what is going on. In that way, although we begin by using the body, ultimately we are using the mind as the basis of meditation.

One step is simply following the outbreath and following the inbreath is dealing with the tension of the mind. As you are sitting there, initially what I recommend is just follow the breath out and follow the breath in. Pay attention to it. Then just following the outbreath is a technique you can use when you become a little bit too tight. When you focus inward and you are having a hard time, holding on too tight, you can breathe out and relax with the outbreath. That can be a remedy: it relaxes your mind. You become a little less withdrawn into your mind. You feel a little more relaxed holding your mind to the object of meditation. It feels more environmental. However, it is still mindfulness practice.

The danger of just following the outbreath is that you have to know when to stop. Otherwise it can lead to discursiveness. You begin to daydream, and you can't really tell where the boundary is. It is important to realize that focusing on the outbreath is a technique. When to use that technique is based upon how competent we are as meditators and how able we are to hold to it. If we are able to relax with the outbreath and still hold the mind, then it is fine.

Penetrating the Body and Healing

As we can see, breathing meditation has many different levels. If we have the ability to follow both the outbreath and inbreath, that really begins to enhance our meditation practice. By being able to hold the mind to the feeling of the breath as it goes out and in, we are able to penetrate inside our body. We begin to develop mindfulness of our body altogether and how the breathing process affects our whole being, in terms of purifying, relaxing, and many other aspects. As we focus our mind on the breathing, we begin to feel the breath penetrating our whole body. We are no longer now simply holding our mind to the lungs or to the breathing system alone. Instead, there is a feeling of the oxygen or air coming in and penetrating our whole body. Therefore, there is a nourishing and medicinal effect taking place with the meditation practice.

An example of this is people who do meditation on cancer. They might visualize the cancer cells being either reduced in size or shrink them using shamatha, or they might use another visualization practice. Either way, they are utilizing the ability of the mind to focus inwards and to hold. The mind has the power to relate to the various aspects of the body's workings, and the development of this skill begins with the breathing practice. So we are saying that, yes, meditation can be a skill in terms of helping our health and so forth—but we have to learn to relate to it properly before it is actually going to affect us. Then as we are meditating we can actually heal ourselves. We may not get over some things—we all are born with a certain karma as to sicknesses and so forth—but if we can relate to the breathing and the body in this way, we can begin to heal ourselves and have more of a sense of vibrancy. That is an aspect of shamatha meditation.

Seeing How Thoughts and Emotions Arise

We are beginning to see the importance of knowing how the meditation process works and how the various techniques work to balance our meditation. The notion of balancing is related with feeling, in this case. We are holding our mind to the sensitivity of feeling.

As we begin to hold our mind to the breathing out and breathing in, the mind becomes more stable. What we are aware of at this point is the *feeling* quality of our mind. The mind feels the breath, and as it is held to that experience of feeling, it becomes more and more stable.

We begin to work directly with thoughts at a certain point. If we can become precise enough to notice feeling, we can get to deeper levels of how the thought process works. We can learn how to access emotions and liberate thoughts. We have already discussed the notion of familiarity in meditation. Here we are becoming familiar with feeling, seeing how the mind reacts to all sorts of things: "This feels good, this feels bad." We see our mind going through that process. We see how we experience things and what we feel about them. We may not be seeing the genuine birth of an emotion yet, but it is certainly a beginning.

We see how thoughts such as "I like it" or "I don't like it," "It feels good" or "It feels bad" begin to arise. Later it gets more complicated; but generally speaking, things either feel good or they feel bad. If they are neutral, it must not feel *that* good, otherwise we would want it, and they are not quite bad either. But basically, thoughts either feel good or they feel bad. We begin to see our mind reacting to things. We see how our mind reacts and we begin to see how thoughts come about. We realize that thoughts are based upon things we like or things we don't like. We are angry because we don't like it, we are desirous because we do like it—and there are millions of other combinations that we all know about.

Fundamentally, what we are getting down to is not so much the final product, so to speak, but rather, how the mind is producing all this. If we are not able to get our mindfulness down to the sense of feeling and see how the birth of feeling takes place in the course of meditation, it is going to be very difficult to release thoughts. We could still cut thoughts in half, perhaps, but here we are learning to see how and at what point they come about to begin with.

This is getting more and more subtle. We start off by just recognizing what a thought is. That is just the beginning. Now when we meditate we are getting down to where a thought is coming from and how it is being generated. Sometimes our whole approach becomes too simple-minded, in looking at the object of meditation. What we are dealing with is much, much more than that. What we are really interested in is the direction meditation goes *after* our mind has become stabilized. In the beginning, it really doesn't matter what we visualize or whether we following our inbreath or our outbreath. Either way, it is just something to ground the mind. However, we might as well take up something that is going to be useful later, which is why we use the breath or we use a visualization practice. The breath is known as a genuine and correct object of meditation, as opposed to something that is incorrect or not useful to us. The object of meditation is the experience of feeling, whether it is feeling the breath or the body.

Understanding the Focus and the View

We are still discussing how to handle our meditation in terms of the various states of mind that can come up. If we are at a dathün, or in whatever time frame we are in, we can change the object of meditation to a certain degree. If it is a longer session, we can say that now we are going to focus our meditation more on the body. Just as when we were doing the standing meditation, we feel the body. The mind is held on the feeling of the body.

Basically, when the mind experiences the body; that automatically is going to have a grounding effect on us.

When we are in the middle of a long meditation practice, and we still have forty minutes to sit, we may feel we have tried everything possible on earth. We realize that at this point, our meditation is based on wishful thinking. We are just hoping that our clock is wrong or something. [Laughter] We think that the incense is burning more slowly. "What happened? I bought forty-minute incense. This incense takes an hour-and-a-half! I want my money back." [Laughter]

We have to understand what the practice is for. Right now, what is it for? Essentially, we are just trying to stay present. We are still doing the shamatha practice, so we can use the body. We can say that for now we are going to relax and feel grounded. Otherwise, we just go off into a cloud and disappear somewhere. Let's say we have a focused meditation in the beginning and the middle of a session, but towards the end we go through twenty minutes when it is not that focused. At the same time we are sort of present and grounded. That is okay. We are learning how to deal with that situation. We are gauging how we are, and we begin to feel that we know ourselves. Sometimes we realize that we need to actually apply ourselves more.

The other point to mention here concerns movement, as we discussed the other day in terms of the first stage of meditation experience. Perhaps in the back of our mind there is a slight awareness that we are meditating, but we are experiencing a lot of discursiveness. As we sit here, lots of thoughts come up. We are learning how to place our attention on the breathing and hold our mind on the inbreath and outbreath; however, at the same time our mind is darting off, going here and there. It is possible that to some degree we are still meditating. However, the lesson we are learning is to be aware of the *movement* of the mind, which is being demonstrated to us very clearly by the mind going off to various thoughts. When we are sitting here meditating, rather than becoming overwhelmed, we can learn simply to notice the movement of the mind.

In the beginning of meditation practice, we are shocked not just by the amount of movement and discursiveness, but also by the force and energy of it. There is a massive quantity of thoughts—and the endlessness of it is shocking. Sometimes we feel that it is just *our* problem. However, we must realize that everyone has this experience when they first sit down. This is the nature of our mind, unless it is worked with.

What is the view here? The view at this point is to realize the amount of movement that is taking place as we meditate. That recognition and understanding of the movement of our mind is going to help our meditation. Why? Because it creates a little bit of a distance in our meditation. The tendency is to feel that we are thrown into a river which has a big whirlpool, or many rapids. So by realizing what is happening, we are gaining perspective on it.

In a certain respect, we are holding our mind to the object of meditation, which is the breathing. We are getting familiar with it and we are getting familiar with the present moment. Having the view means that we also understand the *point* of meditation, which is to calm and to train the mind. However, at first, the view is to realize what is taking place right now—which is movement.

Movement and the Gap

This point about perspective brings us to a discussion of “the gap.” What exactly is this “gap,” this term that we generically and commonly use? People often say that there is a gap in their meditation practice; therefore something happens. [Laughter] Now depending on who you are and what kind of gap you are having—I don’t know, it could be anything! I am talking in terms of people generally, your average schmoe. For example, your average meditator may be meditating and there is a lot of thinking and so forth—and then all of a sudden there is a moment where things become very clear. There is a gap from the thinking, a moment of stillness, some synchronicity. You could ask, “What is that? Is that a profound realization? Have I become Buddha?” Is that experience a complete unadulterated nonduality experience, or *ngönsum*, recognizing emptiness, or *tongpanyi*? I don’t think so! Emptiness is a different subject.

Often what is happening here is that through the practice of meditation we experience that the mind has begun to slow down. When we have a moment in our meditation in which all of a sudden things become a little more stable and profound, it is usually the mind slowing down ever so slightly. There is just a *slight* reduction in the speed. However, experientially, that feels enormous! The mind has been moving so fast that if it suddenly slows down a bit, there seems to be tremendous space. Once we have experienced the movement and volume and intensity of thoughts and concepts coming up, when we reduce that just a fraction, it has a profound effect on us.

What else is possibly happening here? It could be that the body is beginning to relax. For a moment our breathing and the winds in our body [indicates movement up and down the body] are able to move a little more fluidly. There is a kind of connection, joining heaven and earth. There is a relaxation. We are beginning to feel a little more human. And as more movement happens within the body, naturally that relaxation process will directly affect the mind. We notice that the mind is slowing down.

It is important to understand the movement quality of the mind and to realize that any sudden shifts that take place are apt to be seen as quite extreme. It is like driving very fast in a car, maybe 150 kilometers per hour, then all of a sudden going a little slower. Let’s say you end up going 80. Usually 80 is quite fast, but now you feel as if you could step out of the car, because compared to 150 it feels as if you are not moving at all. Obviously, if you *did* try to step out, you would probably break your neck. But your experiential *feeling* is that you could. What is happening is that we are beginning to relax and relax and relax. This could be one possible explanation of gap.

How does this experience feel? Remember it is mindfulness that we are applying. In this sense, it is the mind experiencing true mindfulness. Mindfulness can be quite amazing. As I mentioned before, the experience of shamatha is connected with joy. We feel joyful to have a mind that is completely workable. When the mind begins to slow down in this way, our meditation feels joyous. We feel expansive and relaxed; we feel synchronized. Some may say that this experience could not happen in mindfulness. That is not true. This is completely an experience that happens within mindfulness. We might have to expand our ideas of what we think mindfulness is. We are realizing what wonderful experiences can take place when the very mind we have becomes synchronized. This is what meditation is really about. From meditation comes an ability to actually work with the mind. We are no longer spooked by the mind.

Awareness as Presently Knowing, or Sheshin

We will talk a little bit about awareness now. In Tibetan, we call awareness *sheshin*. Those of you who end up reading a lot of different things will notice that we have many, many usages of the word *awareness*. In *dzokchen*, we talk about awareness, and we also refer to *lhakthong*, or vipashyana, as awareness. There are many different kinds of awareness, so this one English word is used for many purposes. In this case, within the context of shamatha, we have mindfulness, or *trenpa* in Tibetan, and awareness, or *sheshin*. So *trenpa-sheshin* is “mindfulness-awareness,” or you can say “mindfulness-introspection.” *Sheshin* literally means “presently knowing.” So this word has two qualities. It has *presence*, which means immediate: not yesterday, not tomorrow—now. It also has *knowing*, which is intelligence, wisdom. So altogether it is knowing what is happening or what is going on right now. This is a natural part of the mind. It is a natural expression of the mind that is not always felt because the movement of the mind is disturbing it.

The movement of the mind creates a lot of haziness in the consciousness. One way you can look at it is that you have a pool of water; you take a stick and stir the bottom; and the whole pond becomes muddy. We talked yesterday about the mind being clear and knowing. You could say that the clarity of the mind is like water: when the sediments go down to the bottom, the water is clear. The water may be muddy when you stir it, but its true nature is clear. In describing the qualities of water, you could say that when you have pure water, it is clear and you can see through it. It is the same thing with the mind, although we don't experience it that way all the time. Often, it is as if we have never seen clear water; we always see muddy water. That clear water of our mind is also knowing, aware. Not only is it knowing, but it is knowing presently. Since there is awareness, one is aware and cognizant of what is going on.

Sometimes we have an experience of environmental awareness. For instance, I am aware that I am in this tent. If I am meditating and I have an experience of awareness, I feel what is going on around me. There are many ways to consider this. You can have a mindfulness experience in which the mind feels settled, a sense of relaxation begins to take place, and the mind feels very big and broad. In that case, awareness would be the cognizance of what is going on. So mindfulness includes an experience that you might say is awareness. When the mind begins to relax, it also becomes expansive and it has an environmental feeling—but that is still mindfulness. Perhaps eighty-five percent of that is mindfulness. It might have a little bit of awareness, but fundamentally it is the mind being more solid. Therefore, you have an environmental experience of mindfulness.

Awareness in the Context of Placement

Awareness, or *sheshin*, means knowing what is going on presently in the mind. We touched on this earlier when we talked about mindfulness and awareness as the tools of meditation, comparing them to the spatula and frying pan for a cook, or the scalpel and stethoscope for a doctor.

At this point, I am going to focus on the aspect of how awareness works in the context of placement. At the beginning of placement, awareness has the quality of knowing what it feels like to meditate. It is the experience that we are sitting here meditating, being mindful of our breathing, and our posture is correct. So awareness is the aspect of the mind that has a

consciousness of what is going on: that I am meditating, I am balanced, I am doing things correctly. That is awareness—knowing that.

Awareness also plays an important role in how we hold our mind during placement. We have some understanding of what the breath is and what the feeling of the breath is. When we place our mind there, that is a cognizance. We know. We have a feeling of what meditation really is. In learning how to do the meditation practice and balancing the different facets of meditation practice, one has to have awareness.

Cognizance and Not Thinking

Sometimes we feel that we just need to be mindful of the breathing, we only need to follow our breath. Mentally, we sort of blank out. If we meditate that way, the last moment of consciousness that we have, in the sense of knowing what we are doing, lasts only so long. After a certain point, we find our mind becoming very dull. There is not a lot of taming going on. What happens is that the mind begins to sink in. Although it feels as if we are not really thinking, what we have really done is deadened the mind. Therefore, we are not really cognizant of what is going on.

It may feel like, “Oh, I am not thinking, I am just following my breath,” but what we have done is to suppress the desire to think, the desire to have movement. If we look at that and ask, “Is that a true nonthought experience in this case?”—not necessarily. Instead, you could say it is a nonwisdom experience, a noncognizant experience. I think that sometimes we feel—because thinking is so neurotic and marauding, so tedious and obnoxious—that anything is better than this. We feel that not having any thoughts would be a relief: “Let’s just not have anything!” And that is what we do. We go to the extreme of just doing nothing. However, it is very difficult to say if that is really what happens.

It would be pretty amazing if we could actually do nothing, because the mind is still being generated and it is still generating. What happens when we get into that state of mind? There are a couple of options. One possibility is that the mind sort of gets nullified. There is so much going on that it implodes—the thoughts and emotions cancel each other out. There is so much going in our mind that when we sit down, we just fall asleep, sink in. The mind has gotten overwhelmed, and it doesn’t know what to do. This is connected with boredom. We get to the point in our experience where we say, “This is really boring.” The mind is frustrated because it needs constant entertainment, and now it cannot even produce interesting thoughts. It just cannot generate that kind of energy. So the mind becomes bored—seemingly with meditation, but actually, bored with itself. We are sitting there unable to produce anything even remotely interesting. And part of that is the thoughts are canceling each other out.

Another possibility—these are just theories and you don’t have to believe them, you can make up your own—is that when we have a lot of thinking, we try to suppress all of it. We try to hold onto the notion of mindfulness, and we try to have a nonthinking experience. What happens is that this leads to an experience of dullness, of the mind sinking down.

The notion of sheshin, and the true notion of meditation, is that we have to be cognizant. We have to be awake. Otherwise we enter into a sleep, or into dullness. It is like lethargy, and it is one step this side of sleep. If we perpetuate that, it is not going to lead anywhere. Meditation has to be a progressive thing, understanding more. Sheshin is presently knowing what is going on: the experience of meditation should be that we do know

what is going on. Awareness means that we understand what the practice of meditation is. And as we meditate more, we get more of a sense of what it is.

In the beginning, both mindfulness and awareness are in their adolescent state, or their infantile state. In terms of the stages, it is said that mindfulness becomes mature and powerful at the end of the third stage or the beginning of the fourth stage. Where awareness comes in and becomes very powerful is at about the fifth stage. However, we do experience both of them, obviously, from the beginning.

The Example of the Spy

Shamatha is knowing. We place our mind on the object of meditation and we know that we are meditating. We are breathing, and we know we are there and we pay attention to how we are holding onto the object. In terms of the various functions of awareness, the first is that awareness is the principle of observing our meditation, the point again being that we can know what we are doing.

The example we are going to use is that of a spy. We are spying on ourselves meditating. This is what we are talking about. Sometimes people say it is like the watcher, because of that sense of observation. There is a level of consciousness where we know what we are doing. We are breathing, thinking—and at the same time we also have a sense that we are meditating. One of the functions of awareness is to tell us when we are *not* meditating. We are off doing something else, and awareness comes to us and says, “By the way, you are not really doing shamatha practice.” [Laughter] The thing with awareness is that it doesn’t really have a lot of power, in the sense that it doesn’t have any corrective power. It does have tremendous power in terms of observation, but it can’t correct things. The corrective power comes from mindfulness. Awareness reports, and the mind says, “Oh, you’re right.”

We can look at it as if there were some kind of skirmish or war going on. We have a spy and a general. When there are disturbances happening, the spy comes and tells the general, “By the way, the enemies are getting closer and the troops are in the wrong place.” And the general says, “That is very important information. I didn’t know that before.” Now the spy can’t go out and fight everybody. The spy can’t go out and tell the troops what to do, no one would listen. The spy is the awareness. However, the general—being the mind, or the self—says, “Where is that mindfulness anyway? He’s off getting familiar with something else. We have to bring him back here. Go get mindfulness!” In this case, mindfulness is the troops. The general, our mind, it is able to correct and to redirect the deployment of troops.

What Awareness Needs to Know

Another function of awareness is seeing if we are doing the correct meditation for our present level, as I talked about earlier. It is the aspect of our mind that asks, “What meditation should I be doing right now?” It may be that we are not that focused, but we are generally stable. That would be fine. The awareness would say, “For the level of meditation I am at now, this is what is appropriate.”

Awareness, like mindfulness, is not very strong at this point. It has a hard time. It is not capable of much recognition because that aspect of the mind hasn’t been developed. We go through prolonged periods of time where awareness doesn’t really come to us, and this tells us that our meditation is slightly off, it is not very developed. You can say that is the fault of

awareness, or maybe the general doesn't listen, or maybe it is because there are many other things taking place.

In terms of the aspect of watching, what does that mean in the context of meditation? It means that we ask, "Are we being mindful? Are we holding our mind to the object of meditation?" That is the main point: we are trying to overcome discursiveness, stiff mind, shallow mind, and so forth. Awareness, sheshin, has to know what the purpose of meditation is. Any meditation practice usually falls into the categories of either introduction or familiarity. At this point we have been introduced. No matter what kind of meditation we do, that is the first phase we have to go through.

We have been introduced to the breath as the object of meditation, and now we are becoming familiar with it. Awareness knows the objective of meditation, which right now is to stay mindful. This includes the three aspects of developing familiarity, not forgetting, and being able to hold to the object of meditation. Sheshin comes to us and tells us if we are doing that or not, and if one of the aspects is weak. Then we can correct it. That is being a meditator. That is what we do.

The Motion Detector and the Sheriff

Our mindfulness can be stolen in many ways. A metaphor for awareness is that we are in a house where there are many precious jewels, and we are watching over them, safeguarding them. Awareness is the ability to see if there are any thieves coming in to steal the jewels. It is like a motion detector. We have to realize that is what is going on, to know what disturbs our meditation, to be aware when it is happening.

A final aspect of the awareness is that once we have achieved some level of stability in our practice, it allows us to detect disturbances before they happen. Such awareness is very strong and acute. It is like a very skilled spy. Or we could use the analogy of the sheriff. When we start out meditating, it is as if we live in a small town where there are cowboys and bandits and thieves, all kinds of people like that. Everybody is shooting each other, and all kinds of chaos is happening. That is our meditation in the beginning. After we meditate awhile, we may have many sheriffs around and there is less and less chaos in this town.

Eventually we have one strong sheriff, and there is very little chaos. This sheriff's main duty is to protect the peace. Before there were many other things going on, but now that's basically his job. This sheriff, being awareness, has the ability to see trouble before it starts, and to go to areas before the trouble breaks out. So we are sitting here in this saloon... [laughter]...at the bar or wherever, and the sheriff is there. He notices two people starting to fight over their oryoki set or about lunch. The sheriff knows, "There is going to be trouble here." He immediately tells the mayor. The sheriff is able to detect problems right away. In fact, the sheriff now has binoculars—he can see people coming from miles away. He can see some bad person riding on a black horse coming to disturb this peaceful town of meditation. [Laughter]

The notion of awareness is that at a certain point our mind has the ability to look really far and see disturbances before they even happen. It is like being able to look at the weather and see a storm coming before it actually takes place. Sometimes farmers can look at a completely blue sky and know it's going to rain. You think, "It is not going to rain!" Then two hours later it rains. Awareness is that ability to know beforehand. If we have these two

elements of mindfulness and awareness, *trenpa* and *sheshin*, then we have the ability to do the meditation practice properly.

OBSTACLES AND ANTIDOTES

The First Obstacle: Laziness

Now we will backtrack a little bit. We have placement, and we have mindfulness and awareness. We know who the players are, so to speak, in this particular play. These are the main characters. At this point it is a matter of how they are all going to get along.

One basic factor we have to consider in the beginning is looking at the obstacles to getting ourselves to the cushion. The first obstacle to the practice of meditation, and particularly to *shamatha*, is what we call in Tibetan *lelo*. *Lelo* sounds like “lay low”—and that is kind of what it means! [Laughter] We can translate *lelo* many ways, but generally people call it “laziness.” You are trying to lay low. Laziness is probably *the* major obstacle to the preparation for meditation. *Lelo* has three elements: the first is basic laziness; the second is disheartenment, a feeling of being overwhelmed, or wanting to give up; and the third is attachment to unproductive or negative activities, or to things that are not that helpful to oneself.

1. Basic Laziness

In any culture, basic laziness means lying around, not doing anything. It is not because you didn’t get enough sleep—you are lying around because you are completely uninspired, and more interested in your own pleasure and contentment than anything else. It is lying around on a couch watching television, or lying passed out on the floor after reading a magazine, whatever it may be. There is really no effort, there is just “Uhhhhh.” [Groaning sound]

When we get in a state like that, we have to understand that from a meditative point of view, this is a particular way of holding the mind. Sometimes in its more extreme versions—when we are *really* lazy—the whole world seems very far away. It seems impossible to do anything. We feel like a snake crawling along the ground. We’d rather crawl than walk—and everything else is like the treetops, very high and far away. If someone says, “Why don’t you *do* something?” we immediately get irritated and upset. Our way of dealing with situations is very limited. We are dug in, like an animal in a hole. The notion of laziness here is that the mind has withdrawn into itself a bit. It is not interested in exterior things, it is more encapsulated in itself. This is a state of being, you could say.

Attachment to Laziness. This particular obstacle has a quality of attachment. We are not talking about big attachment here, just minor levels of laziness. For instance, if we are preparing to meditate, that means we have to let go of certain things. But we are slightly attached—perhaps to a cookie, a cup of tea, a thought, a posture like sitting down or lying down, a piece of clothing, a conversation, the weather. Maybe it is nice outside and we don’t want to come inside. It could be a feeling of pleasure, whatever it is.

At this point, we are not trying to get personal and analyze everybody’s life to see if they are lazy or not. We are just saying that if our objective is to meditate, what prevents us from doing that? Before we sit down, or even as we are sitting down to meditate, there is a level of laziness taking place. There is a slight level of *lelo*, a feeling that we are sinking in. As we watch our mind, we realize we are sort of stuck to certain experiences. We are unwilling to let go of them because we are attached, and this is an obstacle. We tend to only look at

extreme versions of this, but often we are more in the middle. We think, "I just don't want to do it. I don't have time." Or we feel, "I don't really need to do it." Whatever it may be, if we look at our mind and ask what exactly is going on, we realize that there is attachment. Something else just feels better to do.

We see that if we are about to sit down and work on our mind, apply mindfulness to an object of meditation and so on—this is preventing it from happening. So what we have to do is realize that there are obstacles and understand them. The point is not to make us feel bad—it is to recognize various things occurring that are actual obstacles. Moreover, these are classical obstacles, the same obstacles experienced by people who were meditating thousands of years ago. They too were attached to cookies and whatever else, and they saw that this was an obstacle. Basically if you find yourself doing something else, rather than meditating, you can't say that benefits your meditation. You can watch your mind and recognize that—and then you can say, "I need to overcome this in order to get into the meditation room and practice."

Speed and Our Lifestyle. Laziness does not refer only to collapse, we can also look at it in terms of speed. This is laziness not in the sense of sluggishness, but more in terms of avoiding the practice of meditation. Another way of looking at it is that we procrastinate.

We come up with lots of little things to do right before we have to meditate. All of a sudden, things occur to us that wouldn't occur to us if we were about to do anything else—but right before we meditate, they come up. Not only that, but we have to do them right away. There is no other time to do them except right now. Again, we simply realize what is happening. It is the mind slightly freaking out.

We can also look at laziness in terms of lifestyle: how are we engaging in our life? Are we leading a life where we are sleeping too much or eating too much? When we indulge in too many things, we end up kind of sunken in. At that point, it is very difficult to come out, because we are uninspired to do the meditation practice. So laziness is connected to how we are dealing with things generally. This doesn't necessarily mean that we are slobs, or that we are messy. It could mean many things. We have to look at our whole lifestyle and see how it is. This is, again, the outer ring.

We are beginning to see laziness in many ways, and one way is in terms of speed. We see how we find many, many things to do to keep ourselves occupied. These may even be good activities, such as dedicating our time to animals or to helping people. We may think these activities are as good as meditation, or at least that they are good things to do. However, if we want to meditate, and the end product is that we are not meditating, we should look at this and consider the cause. We are not saying that these activities are bad, but underneath there may be avoidance. That avoidance manifests as speed: we find ourselves doing many, many things—but not practicing.

The Middle Ground is the Most Difficult. We need to recognize that these patterns are very much obstacles. I think this is similar to the notion that the middle ground is the most difficult. When most of us are meditating, if we have major thoughts and daydreams, we can say, "Okay, that is definitely a thought. I probably should label it." We can recognize it and acknowledge it, and everything else we have said about it. Then there is usually a middle range of thoughts where we think, "This is not that bad. [Laughter] What are a few of these going to do? They are not really going to hurt or harm anyone." So we let them hang out. They aren't obnoxious and they aren't that bad, they are seemingly normal. However, at a

certain point we are going to have to deal with these middle range thoughts, because eventually we find ourselves becoming fascinated with them.

In looking at long term meditation, there is a time when it is okay to rest in a state where we have a mild level of thoughts—but at a certain point, we have to reduce the amount of the discursiveness of the mind, the movement of the mind. If we do not, we can get stuck in that middle area for a long, long time—even years. Our whole meditation may consist of middle range thoughts that are seemingly not all that harmful or helpful.

In a way, all these patterns are dealing with lifestyle. We may be saying, “You know, what I’m doing in my life is actually pretty good.” But that is not really the point. We need to ask if we are using that as an argument to abandon the practice of meditation. If so, from a traditional point of view, you can say that we have a level of lelo taking place—whether it is basic laziness, speed, procrastination, or many other things.

2. Laziness as Disheartenment

The next area of laziness is disheartenment. As we begin to meditate, or as we are about to begin, a feeling overcomes us that meditation practice seems undoable. We sort of fall back, and it is overwhelming. According to traditional texts, this is considered to be positive disheartenment—you want to do something positive, but you can’t. You could also have a negative disheartenment. For example, you are really mad at somebody and you want to go tell them off. But as you approach them, you say to yourself, “I just can’t do it.” That is negative disheartenment—your intention was to do something negative, but you couldn’t get up the nerve to do it. Maybe you want to kill somebody and you say, “You know, I just can’t do it. I don’t have the know-how.” That would also be negative disheartenment. It is basically a good thing, because you are stopping yourself from carrying out a negative activity. A neutral disheartenment is where it doesn’t really make much difference to you.

An example is that you are going for a hike up a mountain, and all of a sudden you look up and realize how big it is. You say, “Oh, geez, I can’t climb that!”—and you give up. That is neutral. It doesn’t much matter if you climb it or not, it won’t make a big difference. No one is really going to care.

Another example of positive disheartenment is when you say, “The dharma is so vast. Meditation is so much,” and you get disheartened. As a result you end up not doing something that is actually very positive. We can experience this with any kind of action, anything we are trying to do. We feel, “Oh-h-h, I can’t do this,” and we begin to fall back onto ourselves. The funny thing with disheartenment is that it begins to affect us in many ways. First, we say, “How is it that I can develop an ongoing meditation practice?” If we are already meditating, we say, “How is it that I can finish this session?” Eventually it extends to whatever we are doing in our life—“How is it that I can do this and do that?”

In the context of meditation practice, when we are about to meditate, we become overwhelmed. We think, “How can I do this? How can I work with my mind and go through all these stages of meditation?” We have to look at our disheartenment and realize how it works. Most precisely, we are dealing with disheartenment in terms of meditation. It is an obstacle to meditation, and we need to find ways to counter it.

3. Attachment to Non-Beneficial Activities

The third area of laziness is attachment to what we might consider to be non-beneficial activities, activities that are probably not good to do—for example, working in a slaughterhouse. We need to ask ourselves, “What kind of lifestyle am I leading? Does it support my practice? Are my activities beneficial in terms of meditation?”

This aspect relates to the need to reduce unhelpful activities, in terms of how we are leading our life. Sometimes when we say we can't find time to meditate, we are having other problems in our life, as well. It may be that we have a relationship where we are fighting all the time, or there may be some situation at our work that is creating a lot of anxiety. Perhaps we are doing things that are really counter to the process of meditation. All of that very much influences our meditation. When we come home, we are exhausted and we can't do it.

There are many things that can become deterrents to our practice. As we talked about earlier, we need to look at our lifestyle. What happens is that we tend to become fixated or attached to those things, and we feel that we must do them. But they are not all that beneficial. They not only don't help our overall life, but in particular, they act counter to the practice of meditation.

Four Antidotes to Laziness

Before we look at the various obstacles in meditation such as laziness, it helps to have some perspective. People sometimes say to me, “I am having problems with my meditation, with the technique, and so forth. What can I do?” Often, to solve the problem and to understand what is happening in our meditation, we have to take a few steps back. For example, we may be feeling tired, or sleepy, or agitated. Many things go on in meditation practice; often it is not just one or two things. Obviously we can try certain remedies, if there are obstacles to getting to the meditation seat or problems within our meditation. We can work with the posture and many other aspects. But the approach we are taking here, as I said at the beginning, is that the way to success in meditation is understanding the view.

A lot of the problems that arise in terms of the stability of meditation, the length of meditation, and the quality of meditation come from not understanding what we are doing, not understanding the view. So when we are looking at laziness, for instance, we have to ask, “Is it just that we are lazy? Is that simply what the problem is, and that's it?” It is a little deeper than that. Laziness is just a symptom, so to speak. When we find ourselves in the situation of laziness and look more closely, we realize there are many aspects to it. There is disheartenment, lack of inspiration, and so forth.

Usually it is said that there are four antidotes to laziness: faith, aspiration, effort, and being thoroughly processed. There are more antidotes to it than any other obstacle, which already tells you the story. Obviously, this is a major problem, not just for us but also for meditators in the past. So it is something we have to look at closely.

The first antidote is faith, or trust; the next one is aspiration; the third one is effort; and the fourth antidote is being thoroughly processed, or in Tibetan, *shinjang*. Some of you know the word *shinjang* already. We can look at it from many points of view. The overall problem is not being able to do the meditation for whatever reason. Why can't we? Generally speaking, it is because we don't have faith and aspiration—and we need effort in the process of meditation, of course, we understand that. What is it that truly overcomes the obstacle of laziness? It is a processed, pliable mind which is the result of meditation.

The Fourth Antidote: Shinjang

A lazy mind, with its lack of inspiration and so forth, is a mind that has become very small. It has become very fixated, and that fixation has become a routine. We have a certain way of doing things and regarding things, and meditation doesn't fit in. We have set up certain precedents, habitual tendencies, habitual patterns. The way ultimately to overcome what is happening here is the notion of pliancy. A mind that becomes pliable and processed would not fall into laziness and the other obstacles. It would have more possibilities, more openness, variability, and flexibility.

Why is it that we can't meditate? Fundamentally it is because we don't have a pliable mind. That is the point of the whole meditation, isn't it? The fruition, you could say, is to have a pliable mind. But in order to overcome laziness, there is a certain approach we have to take: we need to have a relatively open mind, an open view, inquisitiveness. We could also call this being curious, or having a sense of appreciation and imagination. These all are aspects of a pliable mind.

A pliable mind is one characteristic of shinjang. Another characteristic of shinjang is interest. We have to get the mind to be inspired and to have some imagination. That is really what this is about. For example, if you feel lazy and somebody comes along and says, "Let's go for a hike"; you say, "I don't want to. I'm tired. I'd rather just sit here." Then they say, "You know, there is this beautiful spot in the woods with this amazing tree. Look at this photograph I took!" They show it to you and you realize, "That looks really nice!" All of a sudden there is a little room in your mind. For a moment you think, "Maybe I *will* go for this walk." A little opening has taken place, something has shifted. Before, your mind was closed—now, there is a workability. You have become imaginative, interested. Automatically you are stepping out of that state of mind that was very sunken in. In the same way, we can relate to how we might work with overcoming laziness by asking what attributes we need. I think we often have to look at ourselves in that way. These are all elements of how we might get ourselves inspired about meditation.

The Power of Hearing

Now that we have talked about what being shinjanged looks like, what causes that? It is faith, or trust, and aspiration. These qualities are connected with the power of hearing. In order fully to complete the shamatha journey, we need what we call the six powers that develop in meditation—and the first power is the power of hearing.

We can talk about this in many ways. Literally, this is about how the process of meditation works. Hearing means listening to the teachings, understanding them, and making sure we have them right. At that point we have truly heard them. We can make a distinction between, "I have *listened* to it," and "I have *heard* it." There is a big difference. The power of hearing means that we have heard about meditation.

The first antidote to laziness is faith or trust in the practice of meditation. In order to have faith we first have to hear the teachings on meditation, and then we must know them. In order successfully to go through the first of the nine stages—placement—we must have good power of hearing. Otherwise, we can't get through the first stage. If we don't have the power of hearing, a lot of the time we sit there thinking, "You know, I don't really remember the reasons why I meditate. I heard a talk, and I read a book, but now that I am sitting here,

all of that has gone. I don't know why I am here, and I have no inspiration." Of course we don't have any inspiration, because all the reasons we are meditating have left us.

So first we listen; we hear the instructions. Somebody says, "This is how you meditate. This is the view. These are the things you do." Then at a certain point, a shift takes place. Simple hearing and listening becomes the *power* of hearing. It goes from just hearing the instruction superficially to the point where the teachings penetrate us. All of a sudden we take in the teachings and gain confidence in meditation. The teachings are becoming part of who we are. This allows us to go to the meditation seat.

Making a Shift in our Life

We not only have to hear but we also have to make that hearing powerful. We have to make it something that really penetrates us. When we say that we have heard the teachings, it means that we have a reason for meditating. We know about that. To do the formal sitting meditation, it has to make sense. No matter how good a teacher we have or what we have read or whatever else has happened, if we don't internalize it, we are never going to be able continuously to maintain good meditation. The meditation becomes powerful when the hearing becomes powerful. The teachings on meditation actually become a power—and when something is powerful, it is effective. This is the meaning of the word *power*. That is why we have the five powers: the power of hearing, the power of contemplation, the power of mindfulness, the power of awareness, and the power of exertion.

We also have to understand the dynamics taking place. The power of hearing relates directly with the first antidote to laziness, which is faith. That means that as we are sitting here, at some point something makes sense about meditation. Right now we are talking about meditation—I don't know whether this is the first time or the last time for some of you. [Laughter] The point is that if we are going to meditate, whether we hear it from Shambhala Training, from me, or from somebody else, at a certain point it has to make sense. We have to say, "That sounds like a good idea! When I look at it, yes, my mind *is* like that. I understand the reasons; therefore, I should work with it. It is not just that I understand why *his* mind is like that, and why *he* should meditate—I understand why *I* should meditate."

Hearing becomes powerful because someone has said, "You know, this is what you should do," and you have listened to that, it has gone in your ear—and then it goes into the mind. Ten days later, one year later, at some point, you say, "Okay! I finally have heard what they were saying!" At that moment hearing has become powerful. All of a sudden you find yourself doing something. You are sitting around thinking, "You know, I finally understand"—and the next thing that happens is that you find yourself sitting on the cushion. Hearing is powerful because it got you from whatever state of mind you were in onto the meditation seat. Before, the instruction may have been interesting, unique, funny, whatever it may have been—but now it has actually made a difference.

What we are talking about is very similar to contemplating death. When somebody close to us dies, we contemplate the notion of death. It is so near, so tactile, we cannot deny it. All our life we have heard about death and that we might die any time—but now we are experiencing it. We feel the potency of what is happening and we are actually contemplating it. Our mind has penetrated the subject of death, and it is very frightening. Suddenly it has become very powerful and it dominates our whole life, because we truly realize, "Everybody

could die. I could die.” We may have heard the words before, but we had never thought about it all that deeply.

The characteristic of power is that all of a sudden it makes a shift in our life. We can simply listen to the teachings of dharma and meditation. But what we are really trying to do is go from purely listening or contemplating to hearing, making it powerful. We have to make that transition; otherwise, there is no real reason to meditate. If it is not powerful, there is no reason to do anything. This notion of taking hearing and making it powerful is very important, because now we have both a reason and a desire to meditate: “I understand that I need to practice meditation and why.” As we know, change is not going to come overnight—but over time, as we contemplate and think about the teachings, it will happen.

Involvement and Aspiration

If there is no power for us in hearing the meaning of dharma and meditation; afterwards, there will be no action. There will be no meditation. We won’t want to hold our mind to it. There are more interesting things to hold our mind to, and meditation is the last thing we want to do. So we have to make this transition. That is why I say dharma, or meditation, is really about involvement. We have to get involved. To a certain extent, we can be helped environmentally. For instance, it helps to be at Dechen Chöling. However, if you stay here a long time, it might cease to be helpful. You have to understand the inner journey taking place; otherwise, after a while you just take it for granted. That is what we are talking about in terms of listening and hearing, and how hearing the dharma actually becomes powerful.

How is it that we get to the first meditative stage of placement? We place our mind on the object of meditation because of the power of hearing. Why? Because as we meditate, we think, “I know this is an important step in the course of meditation. I can deal with the discursiveness of my mind, and this is an opportunity for me to do it.” We also see that we can practice for all the other reasons we have discussed, in terms of what the mind is or the mind is not. We feel inspired, we are ready, and we want to do it. Our inspiration has actually gotten us to this point. If we are sitting there thinking, “I am not sure why I am doing this. I don’t know if it is really helpful,” and that sort of thing, then it all goes downhill. Of course, we won’t have a very focused meditation.

We have to go through the reasons for meditating: somehow we either have to read about it or think about it. It has to make sense. This comes about through a process of engaging. It is not that it is inspirational on the first day—and one hundred days later, we have the same amount of inspiration. We continuously have to look up to the top of the peak and get re-inspired, so to speak. So part of this process is asking ourselves if we willing to do that. I don’t know if people are willing to do it—ultimately, it is up to each of us.

The First Antidote: Faith

When we have faith, it is because we have truly heard. We are not talking about having blind faith in meditation or in Buddhism. We don’t have faith in something and just jump in blindly without really knowing what it is. Faith has to be long lasting. Another way to describe it is trust.

Clarity. In talking about faith as a counter to laziness, there are three kinds: clarity, confidence, and actualizing. The first kind of faith is clarity: the mind becomes very clear. It is like seeing or experiencing something for the first time. We may hear the word *meditation*,

or see somebody meditating, or see a picture that strikes us; or perhaps we have met somebody, and something about that individual is memorable. We have a moment of clarity and we say, "There is something there that I am very interested in." We feel very inspired and drawn to it. That first moment of clarity or inspiration is important in terms of meditation. We hear about it or see it, and suddenly we perk up. We feel we are going in the right direction.

Confidence. In order to go further, we need the second kind of faith, the faith of confidence. Having the faith of clarity, the next step is that we look into that experience and say, "How did that happen?" If we are impressed by somebody, we say, "I wonder how that person became that way? What did they study? What did they meditate on? What did they do? Why am I so drawn to them?" If we hear about meditation, we say, "What is sitting practice? I want to know more."

The first faith, feeling inspired about something, lasts only so long. It begins to slow down and peter out. With the faith of confidence, another level of trust takes place. You realize, "Oh, this person is like this because they practiced meditation and they studied these things." Very quickly, there is much more depth to it. We are moving to the second level of faith. We become much more confident in the dharma, because we are learning more about it. This kind of faith comes from actually studying the teachings. It is based on hearing the dharma—as we are doing here—as well as meditating, and, to a certain degree, realizing the depth of the whole thing. As we hear more and more teachings, we realize that it is good and it makes sense. A lot of development is taking place.

Actualizing. There are many ways to talk about the third kind of faith. It could be described as actualizing. At this point we are saying, "Having become inspired about something and having looked into it, now what I want to do is to actually become it. I want to emulate that person. I want to follow through." It no longer suffices just to be interested—we ourselves want to go forward and become that thing. There is a process beginning to take place, our mind is becoming deeper and deeper.

The Analogy of the Sailboat

It is like seeing a boat and being inspired to take a journey. The first thing that happens is inspiration. We look at the boat and say, "Oh, what a beautiful boat! I am going to take it across the ocean." We get this idea of a journey, which sounds very magical and interesting and courageous and so forth.

Next we say, "I'd better check out this boat and make sure it hasn't got a hole in it. I don't want to get halfway across the ocean and suddenly realize that it is not going to work." So we look closely at the boat, checking underneath, looking at the sails and everything, until we can say, "Okay. Now I feel confident about this boat." That is the second level of the faith.

The third level is: "Now I am ready to take this boat on this journey. I completely trust it and I want to sail." We can take this same kind of approach to meditation practice. Faith is the first antidote we can apply in our meditation. We realize that we fall into laziness because we lack faith. Basically we don't trust the situation or ourselves. Without faith in its three aspects there is not much inspiration in our practice.

The Second Antidote to Laziness: Aspiration

The second antidote to laziness is aspiration. To meditate, we need to have aspiration. Aspiration sounds very similar to faith, and it is. Aspiration and the desire to meditate are somewhat connected with the third kind of faith, in which we aspire to go. This is a further development of that same quality. In Buddhism, you'll see the words used in many ways. In this case, having already discovered the three kinds of faith and especially the third, aspiration, means that a deep desire has matured in us.

To review, when we begin to meditate and we think, "I want to be just like the Buddha," this is the first faith, the faith of clarity. Maybe we have seen a picture of the Buddha and gotten very inspired, so we begin to meditate. You could say that is very simple minded. We haven't really looked into it much, it is purely inspiration. This level of faith is like looking at a picture of a mountain and saying, "I am going to go climb that mountain." We don't know where it is or how tall it is, but we just look at it and say, "I want to do that." How long is that faith of clarity going to last in our meditation? I don't know, it could last ten or twenty minutes, one day, a few months. But the reality is that it is probably not going to last very long. With the faith of confidence, we begin to have the ability to really look into it. Then we need the third faith of actualizing, where we deepen our understanding of what is going on as we meditate.

To go even deeper, we have to have aspiration. If we do not have aspiration in our meditation, we cannot overcome laziness. When we are in the state of laziness, we really haven't digested the situation. Even if we are running around speedily and saying, "I know meditation is good," that is just listening, not hearing. We say, "Sounds good"—however, we haven't quite digested it enough to say, "It is not just good for everybody else, it is good for *me*. I need to do this now, and I really want to."

We have been brought to this point by aspiration. We are meditating, and we have aspiration and trust in that we've looked into it and we realize, "If I actually do this, it is going to work. The process is going to happen." Lack of faith and aspiration is when we are meditating and think, "I am not sure about this. It might work for some people, but it doesn't work for me." There are many variations of this.

The Third Antidote: Effort

The third antidote to laziness is the idea of effort. We have to have it! That is all I'll say about that subject! [Laughter] There is a myth that we don't need effort in meditation. We believe that meditation is simply getting ourselves into the right position, and then something is going to happen to us. This relates to what I often talk about as engaging, or being proactive in meditation. We have to be part of the process. That doesn't mean grinding it out, like walking up a steep hill. But it does take the mind being engaged.

When the mind is engaged, it has a level of power, a movement towards the act of meditating. How does that feel? When we are meditating we feel that we are actually engaged as opposed to holding back. That level of effort can be involved in the course of meditation. There is a tendency to just leave it alone—leave the breath alone, leave everything alone. However, if we don't have mental effort, what we are going to do is drift away. We need to develop the ability to hold the mind. In this case, when we have faith and aspiration, we also have to have effort. That brings us from our laziness up to the level of wanting to meditate, and then applying ourselves to meditation. We get ourselves up and we

bring our mind to the action of meditating. [Ed. The fourth antidote, pliancy, was discussed earlier in the talk under the heading, The Fourth Antidote: Shinjang.]

The Second Obstacle: Forgetting the Instructions

The second obstacle is forgetting the instructions. More precisely, what does this obstacle mean? Let's make meditation very simple at this point. When we first begin to meditate, what are our instructions? We are told to hold our mind to the object of meditation, which is the breath. Quite simply, we are told to place our attention on the breath and keep it there. Everything else aside, that is our basic instruction. With this second obstacle, that is precisely what we forget. This means that as soon as we leave that instruction, as soon as our mind goes from the breath to somewhere else—immediately [snaps fingers]—we have forgotten. That is known as the second obstacle. We have engaged in forgetting the instructions. We were breathing—and now we are thinking, we have gone off. At that point we are under the influence of the second obstacle, because we have forgotten what we were doing. That is a very simple of looking at it. We could also refer to this as a *hurdle*. Maybe *obstacle* is too harsh a word, although this certainly is something that blocks the road of meditation.

Forgetting the instructions is also connected with the power of hearing, and the extent the teachings have or have not penetrated our being. There are many reasons that our minds leave the object of meditation. We may also simply forget why are we meditating. Not only do we forget the simple instructions, but we may forget the whole thing. We forget the view, the purpose of meditation, everything. It basically comes down to the point where we are not even interested in the practice of meditation any more.

I think this particular obstacle has to do with approaching meditation a little bit too simple-mindedly. Sometimes we look at meditation and say, "It is not that complicated. There are just a couple of things to do, and that's it." However, when we look at what actually *happens* in meditation, we see that the power of practice comes from the details and the depth of the process. You could think about the practice of meditation as being like a carpet or a tapestry. What is it that makes the whole fabric of meditation very beautiful? Each detail we have talked about is like a thread that makes the fabric of meditation stronger and stronger. These are the instructions, and that is why we meditate. The more instructions we have, in terms of understanding the depth of meditation, the stronger our meditation will become.

Strength in the Details

If we get too simple-minded, we say, "The details aren't really that important. It is just the big picture that matters, the general idea." That is fine, if you have that kind of undying faith where you don't need a lot else. In that case, maybe you do need just one or two words. It depends on what kind of person you are. Often in the meditation texts, after talking about the nine this's and the twenty that's, it says, "Now we can reduce it down to three basic things, and then we can reduce that down to one basic thing." It says that if you are the kind of person who doesn't need a lot of talking to, all you need to hear is, "Put your mind on the object of meditation and stay there." Then you just do it. Every reason that you should do it simply comes to you: "It makes sense. I see that my mind is wild. I see it is this, I see it is that." Your mind doesn't waver. If you have that ability, that is fine. However, many of us need more. We need a contextual background to make it happen, because if it is too simple-

minded, our meditation becomes weak—and then all of a sudden, we don't find the reasons to do it at all.

The image here is that we go into a meadow, like the ones here, where there are a lot of beautiful flowers. There are trees and grasses, birds, and all kinds of things. When we look at it, we say, "Oh! That is very stunning, very beautiful." What has made this image so prevalent and strong in our mind is the details. There is not just one tree, not just one bird, not just one blade of grass. It wouldn't be very stunning if it were that way. Instead we realize that there are many different kinds of flowers, many different kinds of birds, many different details. In that way the whole image suddenly becomes very strong in our mind and we are struck by it. The teachings of meditation are similar. In a sense it is the detail that is so overwhelming and so poignant. Those details enable the meditation practice to be truly deep and profound.

The Second Stage of Shamatha: Continual Placement

That gets us to the second stage of the nine stages, known as continual placement, or continuous placement. What this means is that having learned how to place our mind on the object of meditation and keep it there for a while; at the second stage we are able to *continue* to hold our mind to the object—the breath, or image, or whatever it may be. Our experience is that the periods when our mind is on the object continue longer. We are becoming more stable. We realize that stabilizing the mind is the first thing we are trying to establish, and that is related to *how long* we can hold our mind on the object of meditation.

We are able to hold our mind longer because the power of hearing and the power of contemplation are becoming much stronger. Now, not only have we heard the instructions, but we have actually contemplated them. The whole process is becoming very meaningful to us, it makes sense. Therefore, our meditation begins to deepen. The reasons for doing it are no longer just hearsay. We suddenly begin to feel the benefits a little bit—we see that it is actually working. Consequently, there is a deepening desire to practice. There is more faith and aspiration happening, in terms of keeping our mind to the object.

What is relevant and interesting is that this is not just simply mindfulness. Instead, it is mindfulness along with hearing and contemplating that enables us to maintain and stay on the object of meditation longer. In particular, through the powers of hearing and contemplating, the reasons for meditating are more in our stream of consciousness.

Our purpose—the feeling of knowing why we are meditating—doesn't go away any more. It is very prevalent and strong. We have heard about it and thought about it, and we know why we do it. That is what enables us get from the first stage of shamatha, or placement, to the second stage, continual placement.

Often, when you read about this you will just hear, "There's stage one, and then stage two, where the mind just stays longer, and the third one is even longer." That is not very helpful. We have to understand *how* it can stay longer. It is like coming here to Dechen Chöling. You come for a day and you're inspired about something. Then suddenly you find yourself living here, practicing and studying. The reasons to stay have become much stronger, and you realize you want to be here longer. It is that whole feeling, where all the reasons begin to add up.

This basically comes from contemplation. For the first three stages of shamatha, the obstacles are laziness and forgetting the instruction. So as we move from the first stage to the

second and third, we are still working on the antidotes of faith, aspiration, and effort. The way we work with them is to bring them more and more into the stream of our consciousness. Through contemplation, the reasons we meditate become more prevalent.

The Fifth Antidote: Mindfulness in Remembering the Reasons to Practice

This brings us to the fifth antidote, which counters the obstacle of forgetting the instructions. Mindfulness is the fifth antidote. We have talked about mindfulness in many ways, but here we are keying in on one particular aspect of it, which is remembering. In colloquial Tibetan, *trenpa*—or recollection, can be used in such sentences as “Do you remember such-and-such?” “Do you remember that thunderstorm last week?” So although we say the antidote here is mindfulness, it is not just the basic mindfulness of holding to an object; it is more specifically the quality of remembering. Specifically, we are talking here about the quality of the mind being able to remember, or to hold the reasons that we meditate in its continuum. Up to this point, we have not been able to do that.

There is a transition here. Sometimes people come to me and say, “How can I stay more focused? Just tell me something simple I can do.” I could tell them to try this or that Band-Aid. More importantly, though, the point is that they need to go back and figure out why it is that they are meditating. You don’t have to go all the way back to the beginning; however, you need to take a bigger perspective and see what is going on here. You need to ask if you are meditating purely because someone told you that it is good to do. Is it that at one time you were inspired to practice and now you are not, but you still keep doing it? If that’s the case, that doesn’t work. One of the qualities of *shamatha* is joy in practice. We are joyful because we see its effectiveness. We enjoy the mind being able to settle down.

The Signs of Leaving Stage Two

There are many little interesting bits and pieces all over the place, but we’ll move on to the third stage, because it is an important one. We must remember that our experience is still that of movement. So far, by the way, throughout stages one and two, and now stage three, the experience is still that of the waterfall. That is the predominant feeling. By stage three, the waterfall is a little smaller, because at stage four it turns into a brook, a big stream. Obviously it is not one day a waterfall and the next day a stream—it gets smaller as we go. However, at stage three it is still closer to a waterfall than a stream.

We are entering into stage three when we are able to continue our attention on the object of meditation. What are some signs that we are leaving stage two? Basically we are able to continue the placement—but for how long? At the end of stage one, we said twenty-one breaths. At the end of stage two, it is 108 breaths. [Audience member exclaims, “Ohhh!”; laughter] That was one breath! [Laughs] A word of caution here— don’t count like this: [looks at watch as he counts with his mala]. I mean, if we really wanted to, we could force ourselves to stay for twenty-one or 108 breaths. It is not that hard. But here we are talking about the mind basically staying on the object of meditation *without* forcing it.

For example, in an average session our breathing cycles more or less 100 times, and the mind begins to rest for basically that amount of time. That is developing mindfulness and familiarity. The mind simply likes to be there, it enjoys it. As the powers of hearing and contemplating develop, the reasons we want to meditate are beginning to outweigh the

reasons not to meditate. Before, it was the other way around. We would wonder, "Why am I meditating, why do I want to be here?" Now, that has suddenly shifted.

The Third Stage of Shamatha: Repeated Placement

We are now approaching actual stability. The third stage is known as "repeated placement." In Tibetan we say *len-te jokpa*. There are many qualities to the word *len*, but people generally translate it as "repeated." Another way to translate it is that it has the quality of "retrieving," meaning "bringing something back." *Len* means "to bring back." I like the analogy in which you are a cowboy and a cow goes running away—and you take a rope and throw it around the cow and bring it back. Likewise, you are sitting here and you are able to bring something back.

The third stage is known as repeated placement, because in the context of the nine stages of shamatha, we are at a point where our mind is beginning to settle down a bit. However, occasionally it still does go off—so our experience is that at times we have to bring it back. At the previous stage, we were more or less on the object of meditation for about 100 cycles of breath. Now our ability to be with the object is getting longer than that. The mind is beginning to stabilize. Mindfulness and all these other elements we talked about are working. However, occasionally we have a thought where we leave the scene of meditation totally; our mind goes away. Before, we may have had a little discursiveness here and there, but by and large our mind was on the breathing for 100 breaths, and later it begins to stay a little longer. But at some point, it does go off: ice cream, tea, bathroom, whatever it is. The technique is that we bring it back. There are many different ways of retrieving the mind from thoughts.

A Major Milestone

The end of the third stage and the beginning of the fourth stage is a milestone. It is probably one of the biggest moments of our meditation career. It is sort of the moment that we have been looking for. In some ways, after this it is all gravy—or ice cream, whatever you would like. This is the point at which the mind is finally becoming stable. It is as if you are climbing up a tall mountain, and you are going through forest most of the time—then all of a sudden you come to the first clearing. For the first time you are able to see with certainty where you have come from, how far you have traveled, and how much further you have to go.

The Fourth Stage of Shamatha: Close Placement

At the end of repeated placement, we enter into the fourth stage, known as "close placement." At this transition point between the third and the fourth stages, we finally get to the level where the mind *never* leaves the object of meditation. After this stage, throughout every period of meditation that we set up, our meditation has the strength to simply remain on the object of meditation.

Stage four is known as close placement because we are still dealing with *placing* the mind and we are *close* to the object of meditation. We are not *on* it, but we are getting closer. The point of saying *closeness*—and what is happening here—is that now the mind is finally stabilized enough so that it doesn't really feel it needs to take off. How do we feel? We feel like we

are finally learning how to meditate. It is obvious that we have processed the preparation to meditate, which is the first three stages—and now, at the beginning of the fourth stage, we are entering into what is known as actual meditation. When our mind always remains on the object of meditation, that it is considered to be actual meditation.

Okay. For the benefit of all the beings, I will stop here. After your discussion groups tomorrow, I would like for you to write down your questions for me. Let's see what all the various issues are, so that we can make the best use of the time we have left. It takes time to look at this and to think about it. We are just beginning to get an idea of how the process of shamatha works.

People always say, "Shamatha, it is so simple." And it *is* simple, depending on who you are. For some of us, it also helps to go into the depths a bit. I hope this is not too tedious for you. However, it is important to look at the landscape and see what there is. Later in the journey of meditation, pride often becomes a big obstacle for meditators. We feel that we know, and that becomes a big blockage for us. So it is important to realize the vastness of the teachings.

Thank you.

[Dedication of merit]

Perfecting the Practice of Shamatha

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, we are in our final day of discussing the practice of shamatha. At this point, we have been introduced to what shamatha practice is about, and we are beginning to understand. Soon we will begin a period of digesting what we have heard. That is an important part of the process. We might expect to understand everything right away, and many of the things we have been talking about are obvious and straightforward—but there has to be a period of integrating them into who we are.

When we study the tradition of meditation and dharma, it is not like normal studying: what we are really trying to do is integrate it into ourselves. This is very much what the practice is about and how we go about studying it. We are not only trying to hold the teachings and the idea of meditation close to us, but we are also trying to absorb them into our being. This takes some time. It is not merely hearing or reading about it once—it is a path.

Meditation is very much about life and the process of working with our life. As we begin to look at our life in a very intimate and profound way, we realize that the practice of meditation is not a hobby and it not an extracurricular activity. We don't squeeze it in between tennis and cooking lessons—it is part of who we are. I think we sometimes treat meditation practice as something novel or interesting and different. Yet what we actually are doing is begin to actually acknowledging our mind. If we contemplate what we have discussed here, a transformation will take place.

Changing and Developing Positive Qualities

One of my big shticks, my big indulgences, is the notion of change. Buddhism and Shambhala and meditation are really about change. Some kind of change has to take place. We are not taking the approach that there is something wrong with us so we must change, that we do not like who we are. It is not analysis or therapy in that sense. But if we are going on this journey of the nine stages of shamatha, from the beginning to the end of that journey a process of change takes place. As we begin the path of meditation and as we go through each stage, we are changing and developing.

We have talked a lot about being aware of distraction and discursiveness and about developing our view and understanding. Another quality is that when we sit down to practice shamatha, we are actively developing and strengthening ourselves. In particular, we are strengthening the positive aspects of ourselves. We are maturing as individuals. Sometimes we say, "Why don't I change? Why am I this way?" We have to realize that working with the mind *is* itself a change and a maturing.

When we sit down to do the practice of meditation, it is not simply about calming ourselves. That is a good ground, a good basis. Meditation is like taming the land, working the earth, taking the weeds out, cutting the overgrown grass, tilling the soil, planting a crop, and caring for it. In meditation we are planting what we consider to be positive aspects of

our mind—such as mindfulness, awareness, introspection, having a sense of who we are and what we are doing. Having planted, we begin to strengthen these aspects. We are also developing the qualities of compassion and love based on an understanding of ourselves and others. Altogether we are engaged in a process of sitting down and bettering ourselves.

There is a fine line between sitting and developing ourselves. Our tendency sometimes is just to sit down and try to discover our true nature. In Buddhism, we talk about discovering buddha nature or buddha mind. However, the reality is that one does not discover buddha mind by simply sitting and doing nothing, just hoping it is going to happen, or thinking that it will reveal itself. Instead, it requires an active process of developing ourselves. There has to be a quality of engagement and exertion in order for change to take place. That is what we are talking about.

When we sit down, the question we really have to ask ourselves is, “Do I actually want to become a better person? Do I actually want to work with my mind? Do I actually want to be saner?” It is very simplistic in a way: as we sit by ourselves, we think, “In my life, I would like to be a better person.” We are not talking about being a goody-goody, or getting candy and sweets, or just a child’s level of being good. We are saying that as human beings we have a choice. We can choose to be better, in the sense of becoming more mature and kind. Do we really want to do that? We realize that if we do, we will much more be able to work with others and with ourselves. So when we sit down to meditate we *are* developing ourselves. A process of change is beginning to take place.

Being Willing to Shed Concepts

We have already noted that the person beginning the first stage of shamatha is a different individual by the time he or she gets to the third or fourth stage. However, I think that our tendency as Buddhist practitioners is that we want to just be ourselves—and we want to have good results, as well. It is like saying, “I want to be who I am, but I also want to have magical qualities. When my mind becomes strong, I want to be able to do all these miraculous things. If I am kind, people can say, ‘Oh, he’s really kind!’ I want to be able to enjoy it.” We still want to have our old self there to enjoy it. It is kind of like being with our old buddy, our childhood friend, and saying, “Come look! See what I can do!”

At a certain point, we realize that the path *is* a path. What is happening on this path is a shedding, a maturing, and a developing. So at some juncture in our mind, we are going to have to be willing to let go. This does not mean becoming stupid, or not having any doubts. But at a certain point, we realize that if we are going to grow, then there are certain things we will need to leave behind. That is what we mean by maturing. It is leaving behind concepts, conceptualization.

Various qualities in us are changing and maturing. As this maturing happens, it is as if we can remember what it was like being a child, but now we are adults, we are different individuals. So part of this journey involves asking: “Are we really willing to go through this process of change?” A person who is beginning to stabilize his mind will find that other changes are beginning to happen as well. We can’t continue being neurotic on the outside while we are completely stable inside, in meditation. There is going to be some *effect* from the fire of meditation: it is going to begin to melt other aspects of our life, not just our practice. We have to realize that something actually takes place as we develop ourselves.

We should pay attention to how we are meditating and how things are going. We are not going to change overnight—but, basically, when we get up from meditation we should be a little calmer, a little more synchronized, a little more reflective than when we sat down. This may not happen every single time, but this is what should be happening. If we meditate and then we get up and we are more discursive and neurotic than before, then something is not right. Something is amiss in the whole picture and we need to work with that.

Stabilizing and Maturity

How can we be inspired and go forward without a lot of confusion and neurosis taking place? When we hear about the nine stages, we may think that it is like we are climbing a mountain: we have certain ropes and techniques, and we get up to a certain level. However, it is more like going on a long pilgrimage by foot. For instance, we decide to walk across Europe, or we decide to walk around the world. As we travel around the world, through India and all sorts of places, we are changing as individuals through the experiences we are having. We are developing and we can be aware of where we are in the process. The practice of shamatha is not simply mental gymnastics. It is not just having our mind oriented to techniques that we need to learn and do. Shamatha is more a process of change and of how to change in a positive way—and that depends on the stability of our mind, our ability to hold our mind to something.

Often what happens in the practice of meditation is that we are looking for something—we want something to happen. We want some kind of experience, some realization, some insight. And if we have already had a realization, we want it to happen again. That is fine, in a sense. But in order to act upon whatever insight or realization we have had, we have to have a mind that is able to stay there, nurture that experience, and develop it further. We cannot just have an experience and think that one experience is going to change our whole life.

Again, there is a process of development here. We have to realize what is happening in terms of meditation. I think sometimes we are meditating and thinking, “All I need is a profound realization.” We *will* have many profound realizations if we do the meditation. There will be all kinds of experiences. But they will be useless unless we are able to mature and develop them, and to incorporate them into our being. That happens by steady application of the practice of shamatha, by laying some kind of ground. We need to have a strong enough mind to be able to stabilize those kinds of insights.

I just wanted to mention this because we have been getting sort of technical and talking about all kinds of details. But we must remember it is a personal journey that is taking place. Meditation is very personal; but we have to take the middle way, and not make it *too* personal, or start making up our own meditation without really knowing what the original meditation was.

The Importance of Placement

Anyway, in terms of the nine stages of shamatha, yesterday we more or less got to the fourth stage, close placement. I believe that is where we were. We have understood how to get to a level of stability in our practice. Now we will backtrack a little bit.

In terms of the technique of meditation, we have placement, continual placement, repeated placement, and close placement—you will notice the word *placement* in all four

stages. [Laughter] So we are still *doing* something. There is still a meditator meditating on something. This is very interesting, I think. Perhaps you might not find it that interesting, but what this means is that in the beginning the most important aspect is having an object of observation, having something to focus on. We are still in the act of meditating, still holding our mind to something. We are still actively placing. Eventually the notion of placement becomes less necessary because the mind does this naturally—it just stays there naturally without any encouragement.

Even if we have a very spacious experience in our practice, we are still holding our mind to an object of observation. We could have an experience in which we feel that our mind is mixed with space, our mind is as expansive as space itself. That is one experience of the practice of shamatha: we feel that our whole being is like space with no limitations. In this case, the object might be space itself. But we have to realize that there is still an act of meditating.

The reason I am mentioning this is that sometimes when we begin meditation practice we feel that we don't need any object of meditation. However, once we lose the notion of placement, of actually meditating, we tend to begin to space out and lose our focus, in terms of the direction of the practice. So this is something to be aware of in our meditation.

Getting into a Routine of Mindfulness

In terms of getting to the fourth stage, I have talked of the power of hearing and the power of contemplation as key points. We know the reasons we want to meditate, and our trust in meditation is developing. These things help us to stay on the object of observation. This means that even from our regular conventional point of view, our maturity is developing as we gain stability through hearing and contemplating. At this point the power of mindfulness also becomes very important. We understand more what meditation is and we are overcoming our conceptual ideas about it. We are getting closer and closer to the real act of meditating.

There is a shift taking place. As I said yesterday, at first the reasons why we shouldn't meditate generally outweigh why we should. We can intellectually understand it, but internally we feel that there is no real reason to do it. Therefore we really have no desire to hold our mind to the object of meditation, because either we don't believe in it or we have doubts about it. Maybe it doesn't make sense to us; or we care about it, but it is not that important.

As we continue to work with the technique of meditation, what we are doing is continuously strengthening the ability of mindfulness to bring our mind back to the object of observation. In the third stage repeated placement, we are repeatedly bringing our mind back to the object of observation. When we begin a meditation session, it is important to recognize the movement and at the same time continue to use the mind in order to bring itself back. We have to get into a routine of coming back continuously, so that it becomes a repetitive and ingrained pattern.

However, at this point we are not just cultivating the repetition of mindfulness without knowing why. We have reasons. We have the powers of hearing and contemplation. This makes mindfulness more powerful. We continuously bring the mind to the object and hold it there. When it drifts off, we repeatedly bring it back. Again and again we bring it back.

Mind is Always Placing Itself on Something

If we observe our meditation very closely, we can see what we are ingraining. Generally we are ingraining the tendency to follow distractions—which is the opposite of placing the mind on the object of meditation. As soon as a distraction comes up, the mind naturally goes towards it. We realize that this is simply what we are used to. If we are repeatedly bringing our mind back to the object of observation, it may feel unnatural, like having to hold a child still. So we say, “Why do this?”

We have to realize that the mind is always going to be distracted, in the sense that it is always going to be focusing on something. Mind operates in a dualistic way. It has to have something to look at, to observe, something to cognize. It understands what is going on in the world by sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thoughts and memories. The mind bounces off all these things.

When we are sitting here meditating, the mind will tend to go out, or bring itself, to all those things. So when we find ourselves following a thought, it feels natural: “Well, of course, I would be thinking about that.” The mind is like a dog, always looking for a bone, always going after something. It is going after this thought, it is going after that sound, it is placing itself on this thing or that. It may be very brief, but the mind is placing itself somewhere.

Maybe the mind places itself on the idea of a cookie, so we think about a cookie—then we think about our tent—then we think about a restaurant—then we think about the people sitting in front of us, their clothing, for example. If we notice the mind, if we really look at it, we see that what is happening is placement, placement, placement. The mind has to place itself on something in order to cognize what is going on.

Streams of Thought and Bouncing Around

What we are doing in meditation is taking this mind and holding it to something for more than a few seconds. Generally speaking, placing is for only a few seconds. That is the case even when we are thinking a lot about something, such as thinking through a plan. For instance, if I am going from Dechen Chöling to Paris to get on an airplane, I think about how I am going to do that. Then I might think about where I am going after that, and then about what I’ve done, and then about somebody else. If we look at our mind as it is planning, we see that other thoughts are arising in between all those thoughts of the plan. Although it may seem we are having a stream of thoughts about one thing; if we look closely, we will see that the mind is continuously bouncing back and forth between many things. It is just that more of those thoughts are about that one thing, so we say, “Oh, I am thinking about such and such.”

Also, when you look at mind very carefully, you see that it cannot really observe several things at the same time; it can only observe one thing at a time. You can try it out if you want—and you should. It feels as if we hear the bird and we see the sunshine at the same time, but in terms of the actual experience, it is one thing happening after another. If we are thinking about what we are cooking for dinner, we’ll have consecutive thoughts about it; but in between, our mind will be placed on many other things. If we look closely at our mind, we see that it always behaves this way.

If we have enough similar thoughts, we call it a stream of consciousness, a stream of thought. But then we notice that the mind is actually going like this: [waves hand back and

forth]. That is how the mind figures everything out. It goes in and puts things together, like going into a room and saying, "I like this and this, and I don't like that." Then all of a sudden, what we don't like has more to it than what we do like, and the general impression becomes, "I am not sure if I like this." Time changes, and then maybe we like it more. The mind is always going back and forth.

Conscious Placement and Intensity

We begin to see the consistency of how the mind works and how it takes in information. We observe how it cognizes, how it knows. The mind is already engaging in that, but do we know it? Do we *know* that it knows? This is what we use in the process of meditation. Placement means that we are taking that mind that is already bouncing all over the place, and saying, "Okay, now. For the period of ten or twenty minutes I am going to place my mind on one thing." We are reducing the randomness of the odd and even thoughts. We are going to be less random and more consistent about putting our mind on one thing. That is the point of the placement of the mind.

Before this, we had already begun to notice how the mind is on this, and then it is on that. But at this point it is called placement. Why? Because now we are consciously placing the mind. We say, "I am beginning to meditate. I am going to do my meditation and I am going to place my mind on the breath." We could also place the mind on the image of Vajrayogini, Manjushri, or whatever our visualization practice might be within the mahayana or vajrayana traditions.

As we try to focus our mind, the problem that suddenly arises is that we find it very hard to hold the mind. Many things happen. With the experience of stability and calmness and so forth, as our mind is held more consistently on something—our experience becomes more intense. Usually, our observation—how we cognize and understand the world—is somewhat watered down. We are not just talking about intellectual experience here, but about feeling, too. It is watered down because we have many thoughts in between all those other thoughts. When we have something very penetrating, happening in our life—we love, we hate—all of a sudden there are more frequent thoughts taking place and the mind is very intensely observing and experiencing those things. When we are in meditation, this is called meditative stabilization or concentration, and sometimes you will see it called absorption in meditation.

Absorption does not mean that we are ignoring everything else, but that the mind is suddenly able to stay very focused. The intensity of the experience is very absorbing because we are experiencing more of it. It is like eating pure sugar. The experience suddenly becomes much more intense. We are meditating along, and then suddenly it is very, very intense. What does that feel like, experientially? You could feel many different things: it could be a very profound experience, a very blissful experience. The mind now has a more direct access to whatever it is observing.

We can make use of that intensity. For example, we can use shamatha practice to develop compassion. Before, we may have wondered what true compassion feels like or what true love feels like. Our experience was very scattered. Now, as our shamatha gets better, we can focus more on compassion or love. Our access to what those experiences really are becomes much, much stronger and more potent. Our experience is more intense because it is

pure. We have to understand that usually any experience we have has been watered down. Cheers! [Rinpoche takes a drink of water.]

Strength to Overcome Discursive Mind

This is all getting around to repeated placement, the third stage of shamatha, and how we get there. At this point we have the reasons to meditate, and the powers of hearing and contemplation are very strong. Now what we are doing is exercising the mindfulness muscle. When we meditate, we are strengthening that aspect of ourselves. When the mind goes off, we bring it back; it goes off again, we bring it back again. After a while, the mind begins to listen to us. Previously, it wasn't really listening; it went its own way. That is why meditation is like training a horse: we are always trying to bring the horse back to the trail when it goes off this way or that. Likewise, in meditation we bring the mind back.

Bringing the mind back is an exercise in power, an exercise in focus. We are getting the mind to do what we want—to bring the mind under our own power. That is to say, placement happens when we say it happens, not just when it randomly occurs. Usually whenever the distraction wants to happen, it does; but the teachings say that shamatha overcomes distractions and discursiveness. So distracted mind is not innate; we've just gotten used to that method of understanding our world. We have assumed that the only way the mind can work is through random discursiveness.

In regarding the stage of repeated placement, we have to get very precise. As we have said, the mind experiences one thing at a time, and we bring it back to the object of meditation. After doing this for a while, we develop stability. The mind is able to stay longer on whatever object it is placed, due to the power of hearing and contemplation. Not only that, the power of mindfulness—and in particular, the aspect of familiarity—is also stronger. As we are more familiar with practice, the reasons for the mind being able to stay on objects are becoming more real and resonant.

In this context, when we are meditating we have to ask ourselves what our meditation really consists of. If we are basically just letting our mind drift to various things, how can that experience ever become very potent? The extent to which the mind can experience something depends on the amount of time it is placed on it. That determines the amount of penetration or depth of the experience. If the time of placement is always brief, the mind will only penetrate things so far. If we are getting discursive, we have to look at that and realize that, and bring our mind back. That is the method. We are strengthening our mind in order to be able to do that.

That is also why in the mahayana tradition we hear about *lojong*, training the mind. That is a very big part of the mahayana. Traditionally, mahayanists use training the mind to understand more profound issues. Nonetheless, it is still educating the mind to come back—in this case to certain things that are very important, such as compassion, loving kindness, and so forth.

The Advantage of Short Meditation Sessions

Some of you might say, "My mind doesn't need to be trained. I don't like that word. It is not natural enough." However, we are always training our mind for something. We are ingraining our mind in whatever we are doing. That is why we say that meditation is happening all the time: we are always engaging our mind in something.

Since that is taking place, we can use it positively. The problem is that if we meditate for long periods of time and allow our mind always to go off into discursiveness, we are just ingraining that more and more, and it becomes harder and harder to follow the technique. That is why I recommend short sessions of meditation, because it is very hard to do this for a long period of time.

Earlier we talked about how to divide our meditation time. Specifically, the best way to develop shamatha is to do it very often and for very short periods of time—five or ten minutes. If you are in retreat, for example, you could do it twelve times a day. The texts say to sit for ten minutes, then get up and do something else for a little time, then sit down and do it again. It may seem kind of tedious, but if that is all you have to do, it is fine. It helps the ability of the mind to focus in this way.

In terms of doing this on an everyday basis, how do we train the mind? The interesting thing is that you *can* train the mind, even if you just practice ten minutes a day. Ten minutes in the morning, ten minutes in the evening—twenty minutes a day, that's fine. Working with the mind in short bursts is good. If we have half an hour for a practice session like this, that is fine, too—we can loosen our discipline, which is also helpful. There is still a quality of practice, in that we are bringing our minds back; however, we are not so strictly bringing the mind back to the object of meditation. It is more that we are bringing our mind back in general, which is okay. The mind is still being worked with and trained. By funneling our intensity to one particular object, even in a general way, we are developing the mind's ability for repeated placement. Before we were just training the mind to randomly find objects to meditate upon.

Different Levels of Meditation

Of course all of this comes from the tradition of meditation, in which this is all we do. We meditate and we try to understand the process and the theories of meditation. We begin to get our mind very precise. Maybe I am talking about things that don't particularly pertain to most of us. Maybe you are not that interested in going to that level of detail. However, we could at least practice within that bigger circle.

Perhaps we could practice more simply. We don't have to be so intense. That's okay, too. It is still developing in the same direction. But if we choose to do the meditation and we really want to go further with it, then we have to know the details of what we are doing. Otherwise, we are sitting there being confused. We get lost and discursive. All kinds of things happen. We find ourselves thinking about things we don't want to think about, and it is not even up to us. That is not pleasant. But whatever it is, it just happens to us—thoughts flood in and we feel powerless.

We can also take an approach of simply calming down, settling down. By doing that, we will become more confident. Then when we feel we can go to the next level, we go further, to penetration, strength, and intensity. When we go from placement to continual placement, what is happening is that we have shifted our mind's ability to place itself from being more random to being less random. We've worked with that ability to bring the mind back. Now the mind is trained to do a specific thing, and it is getting more familiar with doing it. Through that we develop the mind. Within the context of buddhadharma, we can say that the mind is becoming very, very useful to us in terms of understanding the more profound issues.

Overcoming Fascination with Thoughts

When we get to the stage of repeated placement, the mind is only occasionally going off. The act of repeatedly bringing the mind back is becoming ingrained in us. When we become proficient meditators, we notice that the mind is like a pendulum: it will come back by itself. We no longer have to go through a long drawn-out process—noting, “Oh yeah, that is a thought,” and all that—the mind just immediately comes back. It feels more comfortable, and the mind is less drawn away.

Initially we have to do a lot with thoughts. We have to look at them, see how long they are, note where they begin and end. We have to let them dissolve and do all kinds of things. But we get to the place where we have overcome the fascination with thoughts. We also have overcome the potency of thoughts, to a degree. That is a process we go through. If we have done a long period of meditation, we have seen many thoughts coming up—discursiveness, long thoughts, various emotions—we’ve run the whole gamut.

We are also learning how to deal with the emotions. When emotions come up, we can understand how the mind is. We realize that all of this is the vibration, or movement, of the mind. We can see it fluttering and recognize it for what it is. We are now seeing the action of the mind as opposed to its product, which is a thought. Before, we were more fascinated with the product. We were more interested in the shape of the cloud, as opposed to just seeing the cloud itself. But here we are learning how to develop some discipline, in terms of holding our seat and watching the display of the mind.

It is interesting that as we get into the process of meditation, thoughts continue to come up, like steam rising. However, we are not as interested in them. That is the shift. It is not that we try to ignore all the thoughts, obliterate them, get rid of them. The mind is still producing them—but we are more focused and settled, and less fascinated. *Settled* may be a good word for this.

Knowing Where Thoughts Lead

It is like being young and then getting older. When you’re young, you chase things around—children run after everything. When you’re older, there are still interesting things out there, but you don’t chase them. You don’t even think of running around—and you can’t anymore. [Laughter] There is more contentment, ideally speaking. Likewise, we are just here, and thoughts happen. That settling comes from a maturity, a comfort with practice, and also from experience, frankly. We’ve been through the process of living, and as we have aged we have learned that there are other ways than chasing after things—because we have already chased after those things and experienced them and we know what they are.

If a thought comes up, we automatically know what it is. We see it and we know where this road is going to lead. We say, “If I follow this thought to the end, I am going to become irritated and frustrated. If I follow that thought, I am going to be desirous and passionate. And with that one, I am going to be sleepy and hungry.” When we see it, we automatically know it, because we’ve been through the process before.

If a thought tantalizes us and we play with it, all of sudden we will be embroiled in a whole scene in our mind. In the end, we are not very happy, and we wonder, “Why did I do that?” So the next time we meditate, we know what’s going to happen. It is like watching reruns of a television show. [Laughter] You’ve already seen that show, but you still watch it.

You say, "I wonder what is going to happen next?"—but you *know* what is going to happen next! [Laughter] But you still go... [indicates reaching to turn on the television]. "Maybe it is going to be different this time." [Laughter]

As our meditation develops maturity, we learn and change. That is what I begin my discussion with today: we are really changing here. Our approach to thoughts is changing, and our maturity and strength of mind are beginning to show. We are different individuals meditating right now than we were previously. We are stronger and more able to handle things. Our experiences of all these things are going to change.

It is like when we have slept well and we are well fed—we are in a better state of mind. We are here. If discursiveness comes up, we don't chase it; if emotions come up, we don't chase them. Somehow there is not even a thought of going after them. We feel content and strong. At other times they consume us, maybe because we are weaker and more vulnerable. But now, because of the strength of our mind, we can look at these things and see that they are basically just fluctuations of the mind. We see how they are related to the body and the environment. We can look at what arises and realize what is happening. When we have that strength, as we are meditating thoughts still come up; however, we are able to stay focused on the object of meditation.

The Analogy of the Vulture

The fourth stage, close placement, is sometimes described as being like a vulture high in the air circling carrion in a meadow below. The vulture sees it and circles above. Once it sees it, that vulture never loses sight of that meat. It knows where it is. The vulture may fly a little bit to the left or to the right, a little higher or a little lower, or maybe even over to the next valley. But it has very good eyesight and sees that meat steadily. In this analogy, however, the vulture is not yet able to land on the piece of carrion. The meditator is not quite able to handle the intensity of experience. Nonetheless, the point of the analogy is that at this stage—the end of the third and beginning of the fourth stage or shamatha—we never again drift off the object of meditation.

This has happened not simply because we are hanging on for dear life and we have figured how to hang on much stronger. It has happened through the powers of hearing and contemplation, and by developing the strength of mindfulness through placement and repetition. Through that process we have developed maturity and can more easily allow thoughts to go. We can sit there more contentedly. It is different than holding on but still wishing we were chasing after those thoughts. That does go on for a period—but at this point, that period is over.

Good Meditation and Bad Meditation

What does it really mean to be a good meditator? Does it mean someone is sitting there with a blank mind? There is a difference between a *good* meditator and a *consistent* meditator. A consistent meditator practices regularly. However, we don't know the *quality* of their meditation. A good meditator is defined as a person who is able to use the *whole* situation. He or she is able to use everything that is at her disposal. The knowledge and the techniques as to how to relate to the mind—he uses it all. A good meditator is also a person who knows how to gauge his mind: when to let something go and when to draw in. There is a quality of recognition.

In vajrayana Buddhism, people often say, "There is no good meditator, there is no bad meditator; there is no good meditation, no bad meditation." Yes, that is true—at a high level. [Laughter] That is the whole "journey without goal" business. But you've got to *have* a goal before you can have a journey *without* goal. So at this point we are saying that there *is* good meditation and there *is* bad meditation. This is not to say that there are good people and bad people, we shouldn't mix those up. We are just saying that there *is* a correct way to do meditation; and when we are doing it correctly, it is good.

When we get up, we can say, "That was good!" or "That wasn't so good." That is fine. We are going to have good days and bad days. Of course, we shouldn't get too much into that sense of good and bad, but we must realize that we are trying to develop a positive approach to meditation. Meditation has to be good; it has to be enjoyable, to a certain degree. Why? Because if it is not enjoyable, we will not do it. I guarantee it! Nobody wants to do things he doesn't like to do. Maybe we will torture ourselves for a while and say we need the pain. But ultimately, that is really not the point.

If you are meditating at home, and you want to have a consistent meditation session, you could set aside twenty minutes a day. When the time is up, if you feel that your meditation is going really good, you should probably just stop. It is better to get up from the meditation rather than trying to squeeze everything out of it. If you keep going and squeeze all the goodness out of it, then at the end it will be bad. If that is where you stop your meditation, it will have been bad in the beginning, good in the middle, and bad at the end—and probably what you will remember is the bad. [Laughter] You will think, "My meditation is not so great, although it was okay for a while." However, if you end your session when it is generally good, then you will have a positive attitude. You are more apt to develop consistency; the next day, you want to go back. Everybody wants to return to something that is good and enjoyable. However, if you truly can say, "No good meditation, no bad meditation," and it really doesn't faze you at all that you had a lousy meditation or a great meditation—it makes no difference and you still continue to meditate, then that is... [pauses]...interesting. [Laughter]

Doing the Appropriate Practice

What would make our meditation a joyful experience? What gets us to that point? In the beginning we may not be the most precise meditator, we just meditate and feel good. That is our level of enjoyment. Maybe we have a heavy, hectic life, and our meditation is simply sitting down, breathing, and being environmentally aware. We are aware of the room and of ourselves, and we sit there for twenty minutes and feel good about ourselves. Our mind has been worked with in a light way, we have accomplished something; and when we get up, that is fine. At that point, if we were to keep pushing it and pushing it, we might get to the point of saying, "Geez, my mind is really discursive, and that is very depressing." Maybe this is not the time for pushing.

When we are in a more positive surrounding—here for example, where there are other people to relate with and talk to—or there are more gaps in our life, then maybe we can try to go a little further. But if our life is difficult and we are dealing with family and friends, with career, school, and everything; then it may not be the best time. It is a matter of being aware of the right container for practice, and realizing when it is appropriate to do something and when it is not. Again, this is part of being a good meditator—gauging what is the right

practice to do. We tend to make it pretty black and white: "No matter how I am feeling, this is my meditation." That is fine in terms of consistency, we should have an ongoing meditation practice. But how that meditation actually evolves and is experienced is going to be very different day to day.

Another aspect to this is that we know ourselves. For instance, maybe we are doing this and that and then something else in our meditation; so we say, "I tend to have too many techniques, so I am going to stick with just one technique for one month. I'm not going to change it no matter what, because I know that I tend to squirm out of it." Knowing ourselves, we can set some basic guidelines for our practice.

Anyway, I am just trying to be helpful. I am not sure if this is making it worse for you. [Laughter] As we get into this whole idea of how to meditate and work with the mind, it all comes back to the same topic: how to gauge our meditation in terms of repetition, stability, and so forth.

The Third Obstacle: Laxity and Elation

After laziness and forgetting the instructions, we have the third main obstacle, laxity and elation. This obstacle is known as *chingwa* and *göpa* in Tibetan, or in English, "laxity" and "elation." You could say that this is the predominant obstacle. This obstacle can happen from the beginning, sure; but it is generally an obstacle in the later stages, when we are truly meditating, when we are actually doing the technique. So it is more predominant as an obstacle between the third and the seventh stages, although it can occur previously.

The first term is *laxity*. Let me go back to the meaning in Tibetan, which helps us to understand what is being talked about here. *Chingwa* literally means "to sink." If you are in water and drowning, this is sometimes the word that is used. It indicates that you are under the water's surface. The water is up here and you sink down. [Indicates a level, then sinking beneath it] It is like the English word *lax*, in the sense that the whole situation becomes lax and begins to sink. *Göpa* is the opposite of *chingwa*, it means that we are coming out. [Indicates a level, then rising above it] Basically *chingwa* means we are somewhat withdrawn into the mind and it is less clear. *Göpa* means that we come out of our mind, we are exterior to it.

In meditation, *chingwa*, or laxity, describes the feeling of the mind not being completely clear. Our meditation may be stable and strong, but it is not very clear. We feel distant from things. We are lax in that way. We are beginning to sink into our mind. The quality of how we are holding our mind is hazy, fuzzy. It is like dusk as opposed to morning, when the sun is bright and clear. As we are meditating, the sun is quickly setting. The feeling is of being far away, very distant. When you have an object of meditation and you are under the influence of laxity, the description and purpose of that object is not clear. The image is not very sharp and not very strong. You are still sitting here and you are still able to meditate, but the quality is not very good. *Göpa*, elation, means that the mind rises up. Another way of looking at it is as excitement. The mind gets excited and comes out of itself. It is unable to contain itself. So that is the sense of laxity and elation.

Before going further, we should say that within each of these, we have two divisions. There are two kinds of laxity and two kinds of elation: coarse laxity and subtle laxity, coarse elation and subtle elation. Let's start with coarse elation, because it is the most predominant obstacle on the third stage. At the fourth stage, it is coarse laxity that is mostly the problem.

When we get to the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages, there are variations of subtle laxity and subtle elation to deal with.

Coarse Elation: Going after Desire

Coarse elation means that we are meditating and our mind suddenly departs. It goes after an object that we are not meditating on, something other than the breath. It goes after a thought, usually one of desire for pleasurable things. The mind, unannounced, no warning, [snaps fingers] takes off, and it is automatically after ice cream, pizza, a cup of coffee, a pleasant memory, sunshine—it could be anything. The experience is that we are no longer in charge of the mind, in control of it. The mind is no longer home—it is excited and elated, and it has gone after something.

The mind here usually goes after desire, because although we also have aggression and ignorance and so forth, those generally tend to settle down. We may have a day when we are upset about something; but, generally speaking, we will get to a level in meditation where we won't have a lot of anger or jealousy or pride. Those settle and don't disturb our meditation that much. Of course, if we are in a period of our life where there are a lot of problems and we are upset with somebody, those will be there. But usually, when you get down to it, what is happening is that we are caught by desire or pleasure.

We are not talking here about wide, wild passion. We are talking about pleasurable little things. We are meditating and the mind [snaps fingers] takes off after them. And furthermore, we don't know it. It is just gone. That is known as the obstacle of coarse elation, and that is what we experience at the third stage. We are practicing and everything is fine—then all of a sudden we are off thinking about having a nice cappuccino, or whatever it is. We may be thinking about our childhood, or our future plans, but it doesn't even have to be that developed.

As we may remember, the third stage is known as repeated placement. The mind is pulled back repeatedly. What is it pulled back from? It is pulled back from these kinds of thoughts. We are meditating and we are pretty settled. We are able to maintain our focus, we are stabilized. We can maintain roughly a hundred breaths without discursiveness. Then what is it that disturbs our meditation? It is just—[snaps fingers] a pleasurable thought—and our mind is gone.

Stability, Clarity, and Strength

At the fourth stage, we have coarse laxity. [Pause]

Before going further, I have to talk about something else—the three qualities of the mind we are developing in shamatha practice. The first one is stability; the second one is clarity, or vividness; and the third one is strength, or power. When we are meditating, what are we doing and what is our experience? How does the meditation feel? When we develop shamatha, we have a good balance of these three. In other words, when we have these three elements completely, then we probably have a true and genuine experience of shamatha. In terms of the nine stages, that roughly happens at the eighth stage.

Stability. We've already been talking about stability, the first one. It is the quality of the mind being at peace. When we talk about *shi-ne* or shamatha, as peacefully abiding, calmly abiding; this generally refers to the notion of stability. Why? The desire for the mind to move is so great that when we finally settle down, it is a peaceful experience. The notion of

stability here is that we feel like a mountain or a calm ocean in the context of our meditation. The mind doesn't feel small, it feels very big; and it doesn't shift. The mind is able to be very, very stable and solid. Stability is such an important aspect that in the beginning it is more or less all we focus on. It is a monumental thing to accomplish and establish. That is why the fourth stage, when we have finally accomplished stability, is known as *close* placement. At that point the mind is close to the object of meditation and it is stable.

Clarity. The second quality or aspect of the mind is clarity, or sometimes I like to say, vividness. Once we have developed stability, we soon begin to see the whole spectrum of mind, the beauty of the mind. As meditators, we won't continue to sit there and practice just because our mind is stable. Initially that suffices, but after a while it is not a good enough reason. What we want now is clarity. We see that the mind is becoming translucent. The water has begun to stop churning and the mud is settling. Clarity comes when the sediment starts sinking down and we begin to experience the pure quality of the water.

The mind is becoming very translucent, clear. In Tibetan we call this *sel*. You may have heard the word, *ösel*, which is "clear light." *Sel* is the clarity of the light that we are looking at. It is the clarity and the precision of the mind coming through. Things are very, very precise and we begin to have a sense of lightness. We also have stability, which is not a heavy thing. We don't want a mind that is burdened and heavy. Since we realize the mind doesn't have any weight, we want to see its true nature. When we see the clarity of the mind as we meditate, it feels very buoyant. We experience that the mind feels very light—and at the same time it is not disturbed because it is stable.

Power. The third quality of mind is the notion of power, or strength. Now that we have stability and clarity, we must have power—because the mind is very, very potent and capable. This is the strength aspect that we have been developing. Sometimes we experience the tremendous force of the mind and we are unable to handle it. There is a latent energy in the mind, a strength.

When we begin bring all these elements together— stability, clarity, and strength—our relationship to meditation becomes very, very precise. We are able to hold our mind right there on the object in a very precise way.

Coarse Laxity and Subtle Laxity

When we have coarse laxity at the fourth stage, we also have stability; but generally speaking we do not have clarity and strength. What has happened? We are meditating and we are very happy that we have accomplished stability. However, the quality of the meditation is kind of hazy. It is not clear or buoyant.

We have to understand that while coarse laxity a fault on the fourth stage—if we experienced this mind of coarse laxity at the first stage, it would seem luminous and bright and very solid, relatively speaking. From the viewpoint of the ninth stage, this is not a very clear state of mind; but from the first stage point of view, we would be very happy with coarse laxity! [Laughter] In fact, we also would be very happy with coarse elation. So we are not saying that the meditator of the fourth stage is *all hazy*. Their experience is *relatively* hazy.

How do the three qualities of stability, clarity, and strength come about? It is through the meditator's learning how to hold the mind still. This brings up the terminology you have heard about of not too tight and not too loose. In the tradition of meditation, this is

precisely what that phrase is referring to. Coarse elation comes about when we hold the mind too tight, and the mind takes off. Coarse laxity happens when we hold the mind too loose and all of a sudden the mind drifts away. It is just like holding a child. If we hold too loose, the child gets up and runs away.

Once we have achieved the fourth stage, working with coarse laxity, at the fifth stage we have to deal with subtle laxity. Here we have stability, vividness, and clarity; however we do not have strength. The mind is stable and clear, but it doesn't have any intensity. Relatively speaking, the mind has no energy or vibrancy. At this point, the mind is not very light and airy—airy in the positive sense, not in the sense that it will drift away.

The Fourth through Ninth Stages

The fourth stage is close placement and the fifth is known as taming. It is called taming because finally we begin to know what a tamed mind feels like. At this stage there is a lot of joy in meditation. Because it is joyful, we look forward to practicing. We also begin to feel that we know how to meditate. The lingering doubts about whether meditation really works or not begin to dissipate. We truly see for ourselves how the practice of meditation is working.

The sixth stage is known as pacifying. The seventh stage is thoroughly pacifying. The eighth stage is known as one pointed—*acht!* [Laughter; *acht* is German word for “eight” or as *achtung*, “pay attention”] The ninth stage is known as equanimity or evenness.

The Five Analogies

In terms of our experiential analogies, the fourth stage of shamatha is the point where the waterfall becomes a very quickly moving stream or river. Our previous experience of the movement of the mind was known as a waterfall, because the sense of movement was the predominant feeling. At the fourth stage, the experience is known as attainment. It is linked with the image of a fast river. Why? Because at the fourth stage we have stability. The quality of meditation is that we have finally attained one of the most important things we set out to do: we have stabilized the mind. We have felt groundedness, the nonmoving quality of the mind. Experientially, the feeling is that we have actually attained a level of comfort in meditation. This notion of attainment and the fast flowing brook goes through the fourth and fifth stages of shamatha.

At the sixth stage, the analogy for our experience is a very slowly moving river. [Indicates slow, winding movement] If you were to step back and look at such a river, you couldn't tell if it was moving or not, but it is moving ever so slightly. This is known as familiarity because we have finally gotten to the level of synchronicity with the mind. We now have a very close connection with the mind and with the object of meditation. In the beginning, the quality of meditation was very unknown to us. Now the mind is becoming very familiar to us; we very much know it.

The next analogy is that our experience is that of a calm lake. This experience is known as stability. It takes place at the seventh and eighth stages. We talked about stability much earlier, but at this point stability means that our meditation is unwavering. First the quality of our meditation was movement; then we attained some groundedness or comfort; then we developed a familiarity with the whole experience; and now our meditation is completely unwavering.

At the ninth stage, the analogy is a mountain. So we have gone from a waterfall to a fast brook to a slow, meandering river to a calm lake, and now, the fifth experience is like a mountain. The meditator's mind and meditation are like a mountain. That experience is known as perfection.

Subtle Elation

At the sixth and seventh stages, the major obstacle is known as subtle elation. At this point, the mind and the meditation are very stable and clear. However, there is a feeling that ever so slightly a small amount of discursiveness is happening—tiny, little thoughts of pleasure, very minute. The analogy for subtle elation is a river of ice. The whole river is frozen, but underneath the ice there is still a trickle of water taking place. The mind is still playing around a little bit.

Obviously, we don't have enough time in this seminar to go through all the rest of the stages in detail. But we are beginning to get the idea. The first three or four stages are especially important. This is what we are dealing with now. In the beginning, what we must learn and understand is how to hold the mind.

Introspection: The Antidote to Laxity and Elation

The antidote to laxity and elation is introspection, which we also call awareness, or *sheshin*. Here we are talking a bit more about how to handle our mind in the context of meditation. With introspection, we now have the powers of mindfulness and awareness. We have already had a basic introduction to what mindfulness and awareness are—but they also have aspects that can be used as antidotes. For instance, with the obstacle of forgetting the instructions, we trigger or call upon the ability of the mind to remember. We call upon it to bring the meditation teachings into the continuum of the mindstream as an antidote. In the same way, here we are bringing in the notion of introspection, or presently-knowing awareness, as the antidote to deal with chingwa and göpa, laxity and elation.

Laxity and elation are problems in various ways. In a sense, we have gotten so used to these obstacles and the other obstacles that we may not even regard them as obstacles. We might not realize they are the rocks, boulders, and trees that need to be removed from the path of our meditation. But these obstacles are the stones that block our journey. At this point our meditation might feel fine. We may not even be aware that our mind is too tight or too loose, coming out of itself or sinking into itself. That is why introspection is important. Introspection is the ability to look at ourselves and reflect, to see what kind of meditation we are doing. It enables us to recognize what is happening.

In a similar way, the house we are living in could start out clean. But after a while our bed is undone, our clothes are on the floor, and the bedroom is a mess. Somehow we have gotten used to it; it feels fine. We live in it and it is not a problem for us. Then somebody comes over and says, "Your room is a mess! It's dirty." There is a moment when we are shocked and say, "What do you mean my room is dirty?" But at the same time, we realize that we've gotten used to it. We look around and see that it's true. "Oh yes, I have let things slide. I should clean it up." It is the same with our meditation. A person known as introspection comes in and has another point of view in terms of what is happening in our meditation. Introspection is presently knowing. It means to look for a moment at ourselves

meditating and see the quality of the meditation. How is it going? Have we gotten into a situation where we can truly meditate?

Practicing Without Engaging in Laxity and Elation

You could stabilize the mind in a kind of quick fix way. For example, if you are having many thoughts, one of the ways to deal with it is to pull in slightly. You pull your mind in a bit and things get slightly hazy, slightly distant. You sit down in your mind, in a sense. You put yourself in a position where you have slightly pulled back. Then thoughts are not bothering you, but the meditation is not sharp or precise. You have accomplished a level of stability, but the mind is slightly dull. You are still in the room meditating and it feels comfortable as you sit there very complacently in the meditation posture. By drawing back you are pushing a level of stability into your meditation practice.

That is one way of stabilizing. However, we should recognize that for what it is. We have to begin to recognize how we are holding our mind. We are *always* holding our mind in a certain way, in the context of meditation. Even when we do not seem to be holding our mind, it may be that instead we are engaged in laxity, holding our mind in such a way that it tends to sink in and drift off. Or we may be engaged in elation, holding our mind too tight so that it comes out of itself and begins to panic. We have experienced this in many ways. Introspection means that first we realize that we *are* meditating, learning to hold our mind. We are practicing so that we can learn how to hold our mind to the object of meditation without engaging in laxity or elation. Meditation is known as a *practice* for a reason.

Introspection, or presently knowing, begins to develop more and more. We are more able to see ourselves meditating. Initially, when we have introspection and awareness in our meditation, it feels slightly clumsy, or self-conscious, and awkward. However, at a certain point, our meditation becomes more subtle. We have more confidence, so when that awareness comes to us, it is not intrusive. Initially, it might be intrusive, because we are quite desperately trying to maintain the meditation practice, so we constantly need to watch. In the same way, as children grow up, parents can pay less attention. They can relax. Their parenting skills have become a little more developed. Similarly, the notion of self-awareness, or introspection, develops as we deepen our understanding and our practice.

Awareness Becoming More Subtle

What are we really discovering here? The point is that we have to determine all the aspects of our meditation practice and learn how to handle them. Once awareness has told us that we are in coarse laxity or coarse elation, that we are too loose or too tight, we have to learn how to adjust and then do it. We can gather instructions: someone says you should adjust in this way, another says adjust that way. That could be good advice. However, fundamentally, it is a process of trial and error. That is the practice aspect. We are learning how to hold our mind to meditation.

Over time we have developed various levels of discursiveness in the mind. The mind is split in many ways and has discursiveness upon discursiveness—discursiveness within thoughts and emotions, and various other intricacies. Conversely, our practice has also developed this kind of subtlety and intricacy. Now we can look at those subtleties of how we can keep our mind on the object of meditation. The way awareness comes in and looks at our meditation is becoming even more subtle. In the beginning it was very hard to see how

that level of subtlety in meditation might develop. But as time goes on, we are able to hold our mind without a big effort, and we have greater awareness to oversee our practice.

We talked yesterday about the notion of the watcher, or sheriff. You don't see the sheriff running around everywhere, you just know he is there. That is an interesting aspect of the mind, that ability to be there and know itself. When the mind gets stabilized and still, that ability to be cognizant and to recognize becomes stronger and more prevalent. Because of the natural radiance of the mind, we have more stability, clarity, and power. Along with those come increased aspects of mindfulness and awareness.

We said earlier that at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth stage, mindfulness reaches its full potential. It becomes mature. Mindfulness has developed to the point where it is completely able to hold the object of meditation; it never wavers from that. So that aspect of our mind has fully developed. However, awareness still has not developed completely. That happens as we go through the later stages. Nonetheless, we can look at our own meditation and say that even in the first stages, we are developing elements of mindfulness and awareness. With mindfulness and awareness, we can also see the strength and the purity of the mind demonstrating themselves. They too are becoming mature and expressing themselves in a natural way. So mindfulness and awareness take hold naturally. They are naturally cognizant of the meditation.

The Obstacles of Not Applying and Over Applying

The next two obstacles are “not applying the antidote,” and “over application of the antidote.” These two obstacles are related to the eighth and ninth stages, respectively. However, another way to look at it is that they are applicable from the first stage up to the ninth stage.

At the end of the eighth stage, entering into the ninth, we have reached perfection in terms of shamatha meditation. At that point there is no reason to have antidotes because there are no obstacles. There is a reason the ninth stage is known as perfection. Our meditation is perfect and balanced. The water has settled, the sediment has gone to the bottom, and the water is clear. Over application of the antidote would be like putting a stick into the water and again stirring up the mud. There is no reason to do that.

There is another way of seeing these two obstacles. As I talked about before, all nine stages relate to seeing clearly where our meditation is in any situation. We may be at a stage where our shamatha is not as precise as we would like—however, right now it is a good level of shamatha for us, so we need to leave it alone. If we begin to push too much and try too many antidotes, we are going to stir up our meditation and begin to drift away. That would be an example of over applying the antidotes. However, when there *are* things coming up and we don't apply the antidotes, we have to realize what is taking place—and the antidote for not applying the antidote is *applying* the antidote! [Laughter] I'll let you guess the next one. The antidote for over application of the antidote is known as resting in equanimity, simply resting. You don't have to do anything at this point. Things are fine.

We can also take these principles out of the circle of meditation and apply them to our lives. Sometimes antidotes are needed, and sometimes things are just fine. By doing something, we may make things more complicated, and we don't need to do that. One function of awareness is learning how to relate to what we are doing in our life in the context of meditation practice.

Working with Our Mind As It Is

The main point here is relating to how we are doing our meditation practice right now and seeing where our meditation practice really is. As soon as we sit down on our cushion, we can realize what is happening to our mind on the spot. Otherwise, the tendency is to say, "Okay, my mind is discursive. It is doing this and that, and I don't know what to do about it." Then we don't even try anything. Or we may simply try to sit still—and we start thinking. There are all kinds of variations. But we are saying, "Let's look at what is going on now. Let's see what part of this scenario we can actually work with and begin to make a path." We have to make an inroad somewhere. It is like an overgrown jungle—we have to look at our practice and see at what point we can start making a road into this jungle.

This kind of meditation has various levels of relativity. What we are using as an object of meditation right now is our breathing; we are breathing in the present moment. In that sense, being with the immediacy of what is happening in the present moment is also an object of our meditation. We can use that quality of being present in many ways. In the beginning, just being present is fine. It is more than enough. Rather than having our mind in the past or the future, the point is, what is our mind doing in the present situation? In the context of shamatha, the present moment and the breath are analogous. We are using the present moment as an anchor. That is a very important part of working with object of meditation. It stabilizes us.

The Present Moment as a Guide

When we look further, we realize that being in the present moment is just another technique. It is just a reference point for how we relate to the process of mind and overcome its wildness and discursiveness. One way to look at it is that the present moment and the breath are like beacons. Right now we are lost in a forest, so to speak. When we sit down to meditate, there are a lot of things going on in our mind, and it is very easy to get lost. We wander around in this forest not knowing where we are going. When we have an object of meditation, such as the breath, what we are doing is finding a hilltop in the jungle. We find a point that we can see, and we keep visual contact with it as we walk towards it. It is the same as when we are swimming and there is a buoy with a light. We need to get to that point before we can figure out where we are and go on to the next thing. To get to the buoy, we have to keep constant eye contact with it, the same as with the hill.

Using the present moment, we climb the hill; and once we get to the top, it is a point of reference. In the beginning it felt like our whole journey was just to get to the top of this hill. But once we are up there and we have reached the top—once we have accomplished a level of stability in our meditation and we are in the present moment—we realize this hill is just part of the landscape. It is just one more hill.

At the beginning, we can see the present moment in this way. However, when we look at it in terms of how time works and how the mind works, it is very difficult to be very precise with the present moment. That's what we find when we get down to a very, very subtle level of meditation. However, in the beginning there is a present moment and it is very concrete—just like there is a future and there is a past, which are also concrete situations. We don't go into a very subtle meditation and say, "There is no present moment. Therefore I don't have to stay there." Our first objective is to strengthen the mind by using

this guide. If we take the guide away, if we manipulate our object of meditation, saying we don't need it, it is very easy to get lost.

We are making contact and gaining familiarity with a reference point in meditation so that we are always on track and we know where we are going. That can be very difficult to know because in meditation practice it is very easy to get lost. Then, as we meditate, we start creating our own little scenarios. Working with a reference point is also how we learn to hold our mind. The ability to place the mind tightly or loosely comes in reference to an object of meditation. So having that object is very important. We learn by that.

We learn what it is to stabilize, we learn how to be mindful and aware. We use that object as an aid. It is similar to when we were children and had animals—a horse or a dog or something—that we had to feed and clean. Having a living creature to care for teaches us responsibility and how to be kind. We learn a lot from just having a pet. When we grow up, we can actually express what we have learned to others. In the same way, we are using the object of meditation as a vehicle. We are using it to learn how to work with our mind, how to hold it, and how to use it.

The Joy of the Ninth Stage

This comes back to what we said about the clarity and strength of the meditation. When we are at the ninth stage and the higher levels beyond that, our meditation is very strong. It doesn't feel as if we are just hoping for the best, simply trying to hold on to the moment, or push away the thoughts. The ninth stage is called perfection. There is a quality of evenness and a feeling of tremendous joy. Even at the eighth stage, our meditation is called one pointed. What happens with the technique is that when we sit down in formal meditation, as we begin, for a brief moment we have to be one pointed. After that, the meditation is very, very stable.

At the ninth stage, the meditation is considered to be perfect because the transition of entering into meditation is effortless. It is very even as we enter it, and it is considered to be very joyous. The Tibetan texts say that at the ninth stage our meditation feels like being bathed in warm milk, which is like the highest, most wonderful thing you can do in Tibet. [Laughter] That's because everybody there loves milk, it is the most precious thing. Usually you just do like this [indicates milking a cow] and you have a little bowl of it. But the luxury of bathing in a whole warm bath of milk would be something like what the gods must do. So this analogy means that the mind is in a very peaceful and joyous state. It is not totally blissed out, but it is strong. This is what is happening in the ninth stage.

What is this? Are we entering into a different dimension? Is this some other place we are trying to get into? No, it is simply that we are finally resting in the mind itself, in the clarity and the knowing aspect of the mind.

Refining Our Meditation Through Trial and Error

At the end of these nine stages, the technique in meditation is very, very subtle; however, in the beginning we need to have very concrete ways of going about it. One thing we can get out of this whole little drama of moving through the nine stages is to realize that a lot can take place. During meditation, we can begin to see how we approach it and how we are holding our mind. When we are practicing and we get a glimpse or an idea of how to do it, that comes from the ability to realize and feel how we *are* holding our mind. We realize that

we are already holding this mind in a certain way, unbeknownst to ourselves. Generally speaking, we are not aware of it, it just happens.

When we realize that we are holding our mind, there is a quality of learning how to be more balanced. Then, as we meditate more, we become more aware of that process, more aware of the mind and how we are holding it. In a sense, we are learning how to handle the tightness and looseness of the whole situation. We are beginning to find the magical middle ground—learning how to balance the mind.

Learning what it means to hold the mind takes trial and error. Sometimes we are meditating and not really experiencing how we are holding the mind. We just have a concept of how to do it. So the process of meditation is taking what is given to us and learning how to work with it. In this way, we can actually progress through the various levels.

Okay. Anyway, it is something like that. Any questions?

Shamatha and Bodywork

STUDENT: Yesterday, or maybe before that, someone asked how you deal with big emotions. From what is happening in my practice, and also what I know from working as a body worker, I have seen that part of our body can be sort of numb. This numbness is somewhere between emotional and physical. I was wondering about the technique of applying our attention to that, as you do with the inbreath. Is that good to do? I ask because my experience is that if that numbness melts, something in your mind is also relaxing. So I was wondering two things: is it good to work with that, and is this related to things such as the Yogas of Naropa?

SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE: You mean when you have a stiffness in the body, focusing on that, and trying to release that as a way of working with emotion?

S: Yes.

SMR: Oh, I think definitely. This has to do with the power of the mind and how the mind itself relates to things. This is very, very important in terms of how we regard our body. Of course we hold tension and emotion in our body. Everybody does that day in and day out. This is an example of what I talked about more generally, just being aware of yourself and noticing the tension. I think a lot of us don't really notice this. When we get some bodywork done—then we realize how much tension there is.

At the same time, bodywork is kind of like getting your car fixed. You notice one problem, and then there is another problem—it is an endless kind of thing. You do have to begin looking at the body and realize that if you can relax the body, that begins to alleviate the mind as well. But, generally speaking, you need the practice of meditation to go along with that. You need some kind of practice in which you work with the mind directly.

In working with a particular emotion, we can take the attention and place it on that emotion. We can begin to breathe, to deepen, to relax, to exhale. The breathing process is really important, simply in terms of basic healthiness.

S: Is this something you should do as part of your shamatha practice, or is it a separate chapter?

SMR: I think you could include this in your practice, if you want to sit down and you have certain areas of tension. It is like the standing meditation we did earlier, in which we were standing up and relaxing our bodies. I don't think there is a problem, but I do think it has to be balanced. If you have a lot of tension, you also have to ask if you are getting enough exercise or if you need some kind of physical discipline. Diet, stress, and many other factors are related to tension as well. So just simply sitting there relaxing the body may not ultimately be the answer.

But it certainly is useful to have some kind of awareness of what is going in our bodies and to realize, "My goodness, what am I doing with my life? This is what is happening. How can I counter it?" In that way, there can be a sane approach to working with the body. The reality is that the more stable our mind becomes, the more effective and helpful that kind of relaxation will be. That is, the more stable the mind is, the more we can apply it to certain parts of the body. Therefore, the more we will be able to relax. For example, if you are working with people, you could look at the bigger picture of calming the mind and calming the body. They are very, very related. This is the kind of situation where you can go deeper and deeper, as we have seen.

You had two questions—what was the second one?

Melting Energy Blockages

S: Maybe this is too far off, but the other thing I was wondering was if this melting of energy blockages is related to the energy practices that are done in the Six Yogas of Naropa, or other more advanced practices? Or is this something completely different?

SMR: Sure, it is connected. You have to have that level of practice. I think what is happening within the Six Yogas is something that might take too long a time to explain right now, but it is connected. All right?

S: Thank you very much.

SMR: Okay....kind of right planet, wrong side.

Pride

S: Sir, yesterday you named the mental state of pride as an obstacle, and I was waiting for you to go further with that. Can you tell me something about it?

SMR: Yes. If you want to look at it in terms of the nine stages, it is usually placed between the seventh and the eighth stages. Why? Because at a certain point we feel that we know how to meditate. There is a certain amount of pride that comes with just resting in our mind. It feels good and so forth. That could become an obstacle. Balance is needed, because as we try to gain a sense of solidity and stability, sometimes we solidify that. Stabilizing the mind all of a sudden becomes stabilizing the self. So there is a sense of pride and arrogance. Of course pride can happen at any level. We are meditating and all of a sudden we think, "Oh, I have done something good!"—and our mind puffs up. When we have pride, the mind has a false sense of itself. It expands and feels it is taking up more space than it

actually is. The notion of pride is that kind of false sense of who we are. It is not an accurate assessment of what is going on. As we are meditating, suddenly there is a quality of pride. We might feel there is strength and stability at that moment, but there is not as much as we think. The mind becomes slightly unstable in that way.

Pride is connected with desire and excitement. The mind swells out of itself. Obviously, as we meditate, we have many things to be watching. Especially with more subtle meditation, pride can be a problem, because it suddenly blocks the ability to see and to experience more clearly. From that point of view, pride happens later in the nine stages. However, a sense of pride can occur even at the first stage, although it is less of a problem at the beginning. Altogether, pride can be dealt with through the notion of awareness.

It is always a delicate balance. We have to see where we are and be honest with ourselves. Our meditation sometimes goes from one extreme to the other. One moment we become very depressed or disheartened, and we think we can't do it; the next moment, something else happens, and all of a sudden we have a lot of pride. It has gone to the other extreme. So it is a process of balancing that whole situation. When you are entering into meditation, it is also important to have a sense of confidence. At the beginning, that just means having a sense of "I can do this. It is very possible." That level of confidence is very important.

Elation and Laxity

S: Rinpoche, it is not so clear to me what elation is. It seems to happen at the stage when we have already attained some clarity, stability, and knowledge of the mind.

SMR: Elation is the mind coming out of itself. It can happen at a particular stage or any time the mind reaches out and becomes heightened. When we are meditating and we push beyond what is natural, that has the quality of the mind coming out. There is a level of excitement and energy, and we are not very stable. We are sitting there meditating, and the mind is going out.

Elation can come up when we are meditating and think the meditation should be a certain way, so we push ourselves. Sometimes people meditate like this [sits very stiffly], trying to force a state of mind. That is generally a state of elation. The mind is not rested—it is being forced. Elation can also be just simply thinking of pleasurable things. You are sitting there and the mind gets excited about something—and it comes out and it begins to chase after it. The mind almost literally leaves the tent when it is going after something.

S: And laxity—is that the mind drawing in or just being absent?

SMR: Laxity is drawing in. But the way we experience it is that things are not clear. Things are hazy, we feel distant.

S: At that moment, if you really experience that and it keeps coming back again, what would be the best thing to do?

SMR: First of all, you need to recognize that it is happening. You see that laxity is happening and recognize it as a product of the mind. You then have to look at yourself and ask: "How

am I holding on to my mind? This is the result, so there must be a cause. There is something that I did in order for laxity to happen—what did I do?” That is meditation, and it is up to you. I can’t meditate for you, you know. [Laughter]

S: Thank you.

Where Should We Ride?

S: Rinpoche, what happens once you have tamed the horse and you are there sitting on it? What are you going to do then? I mean, who’s to decide where to ride?

SMR: You! [Laughter]

S: Okay.

SMR: The self.

S: Sometimes we don’t know what to do. Maybe we think, “That is not a good way to go, this is a good way to go.” But sometimes it is hard to make a decision, because there is such a great big country before us.

SMR: That is true. It depends on what you want to do. If you want to talk in terms of Buddhism, that is where motivation comes in. You are motivated to achieve self-liberation or you are motivated to dedicate your life to the benefit of all sentient beings. That is the direction you are going, once you can stay on the horse as a practitioner of meditation. It comes along that way. We are talking about shamatha, here, but at the same time, why are we doing this? Why are we trying to have this mind of meditation? There is a reason—and usually it is for the benefit of others, somehow. Through that process, through the journey of riding, we gain more knowledge. I also think that as you tame the horse, things become clearer, in terms of which way you want to go. There is also a sense of pleasure and a lot of freedom, that you could go anywhere. Before you couldn’t, but now you can.

Transcending Duality

S: At what stage do you lose duality?

SMR: At each stage, as you go further, the meditator and the object of meditation become more and more unified. There is still a level of duality, but it becomes much more unified than it was in the beginning. But as we said in the very beginning, this is all still considered to be our mind. So from a Buddhist point of view, we are still in the realm of duality, even at the ninth stage of shamatha. If you want to transcend duality, then you have to practice vipashyana.

Working with Sense Perceptions

S: Rinpoche, in working with the instructions you’ve given us, I am confused about how we actually work with sense perceptions. The feeling of the breath going in and out seems to co-

exist with awareness of space and awareness of body on the cushion. So how do we consider those things in this practice?

SMR: It depends on what you are trying to do, I think. If you are trying to have a sense of bodily mindfulness and bodily awareness, then it is fine to have a sense of focusing on the breath and at the same time have an awareness of yourself and the sense perceptions. That is one level of shamatha. However, if you are truly to go to the depths of shamatha, at a certain point in the beginning stages you must lose the sense perceptions. You must let go of the notion of sight, sound, and so forth, and just continue to meditate on the sixth consciousness, the mind alone. That is what takes place, and in the context of shamatha practice, that is truly what meditation is. It is a stage where you remove yourself from the stimulation of the sensory environment. Further along, even though at the level of the first bhumi a bodhisattva gets up from the meditation and has sensory experiences, while that bodhisattva is meditating and experiencing emptiness, he is not experiencing sensory perceptions in the way we normally think of them.

S: Would that also involve a process of bringing ourselves into focus consciously—so that we could first sit ourselves down and sense our body and be aware of our sense perceptions, and *then* choose to go for that?

SMR: Yes, yes. It is understanding. From a meditative point of view, we are very stuck on the belief that there is a perceptual level and that it is very important for us to be aware of what is going on there. The reality is that when we actually look into the mechanics of it and understand how the mind really works, we understand that we do not truly see or hear anything. We just see aspects of things. (This is getting into the next program.) [Laughter] We never truly see anything. It is still a conceptualization. So we think this is really true [touches table]. If I am not paying attention to this, I must be daydreaming. However, this [points to the table] is an experience of the mind. The mind is cognizing this in a certain way. So it gets into what is reality, and what is going on.

At the first stages of shamatha, we have to stabilize the mind long enough so we actually can see what is going on. In the beginning, if we are crazy and confused, the first thing we do is just relate to our body and to the senses. We are just realizing we *have* senses. But later, we are getting more subtle. We have the feeling that, okay, now we are going to get into the mind. So from the fourth stage on, this meditation is a meditation on the mind. The reality is that sense perceptions are unstable. [Snaps fingers several times quickly] They're constantly coming and going, 365 times within a snap. It is very difficult to remain mindful of that.

S: Thank you very much, sir.

Gaining a Perspective on the Emotions

S: Rinpoche, can you please explain...*je vais parler en francais*...[Question translated from French] When you spoke about emotions, I understood that if you are able to look at them, it is possible not to be troubled any more, because you are not so engaged. Is it like watching a picture, where you see things, but you are not really engaging in them?

SMR: We have to realize that the word *emotion* means many things. In Sanskrit, we call emotions *kleshas*, and in Tibetan we call them *nyönmong*. Generally speaking, an emotion is a state in which the mind is not really content, it is very agitated. It is an unpleasant experience. However, many emotions are very positive—emotions such as love, compassion, understanding, and so forth.

Are we saying that we are going to eradicate those negative emotions? No. Instead we have to understand what is happening to us when they take place. So, at this level, it is a matter of looking at how the mind is engaging, how the mind is dealing with the environment. When an emotion begins to overtake us, what is actually going on? We can reduce the reasons for emotions down to two: wanting to destroy or wanting to consume. In our meditation practice we are basically just trying to get a sense of the emotions, because a lot of times we are overwhelmed by an emotion before we even know what happens. In the process of meditation, is it possible for us to get a little bit of perspective on what is happening? When you sit there and meditate, yes, you can say it is like watching a movie. You are observing. So watching a movie is a good way to see it. As in watching a movie, you are going to get sucked into a make-believe situation—and it is really up to you how much you engage, what is real and unreal, and whether you create a lot of emotion and unnecessary pain. It depends on how you handle it. You could enjoy it too. There could be a sense of appreciation.

Another thing, in terms of meditation practice, is that we are beginning to develop a sense of appropriate response. Sometimes we see something and it is wrong. We see injustice. Someone is being hurt. We can't just sit there and meditate and pretend that nothing is happening. We see the injustice and we want to do something about it. But does that mean that we have to get to the point where we want to kill and destroy, and we become tormented? We are learning how to handle our mind.

Another aspect we sometimes talk about in shamatha practice is diminishing the emotion. In Tibetan this is called *gonön*, "pushing the head down." We push it down because otherwise the emotion takes us out of ourselves. So *gonön* means that we suppress the *kleshas*. If you look at it mathematically, the percentages that our emotional responses will work out well are not very good. However, we are not trying to become robots. That is not the point here. So we also need to develop the ability to know when we do need to respond and deal with things, when it is appropriate to be upset. And when we *are* upset, did that upsetness come from a conscious decision, where we saw what was happening, or are we just being used by the emotion?

I think I'll stop now. But before I do, I am going to answer a couple of questions from the discussion groups.

Enlightenment in One Lifetime

[Reads from list of questions] "Can Western students really become enlightened in one lifetime?" [Much laughter] That's one question...I have come here to bring you the bad news. [Laughter] No, I am just kidding. Does this say one lifetime or *this* lifetime?

STUDENTS: This one. This life.

SMR: Okay, this lifetime.

When we look at these nine stages of shamatha, the path becomes monumental. What we have to do becomes very, very big. At the same time, it is also interesting that there is no doubt that any individual, any sentient being, can achieve enlightenment. But my feeling is that if you talk about enlightenment in the Buddhist context, what you are dealing with is not just about doing the practices—there is an element of entering into a whole new way of looking at things.

When you enter into Buddhism, you have to realize that it is an educational process of seeing how the world is. That can be very hard to understand. I think sometimes in the West, people will stand back from it. They walk this way, but in the back of their mind they say, “Just in case it doesn’t work out, I am going to do something else.” But at a certain point, you can’t do that anymore. You either have to go in and say, okay, or not. You can only gain so much knowledge. You have to go through the process of learning if the dharma is right, if it is true, and if the Buddhist path is correct. This doesn’t mean becoming blindly faithful and jumping in—but it does mean being willing to change as individuals.

This also means we have to look at our conceptual idea of enlightenment. We think enlightenment is this way or that way, and that we have to embody that. However, there is also the notion that if you really want to achieve enlightenment, then you *truly* have to give up the notion of achieving enlightenment. Giving up is the attitude that’s needed. In terms of achieving enlightenment, you have to say, “I am willing to wait for all sentient beings, not just on this planet but on every planet that ever existed, to achieve liberation before me. I am so concerned about the suffering and the lives of sentient beings that this is what I am doing.” That is the bodhisattva vow. If one is to achieve enlightenment, one has to take this vow.

It is a huge undertaking. Even if you want to achieve enlightenment in *this* lifetime, you have to say, “Even if it took me billions of lifetimes, I would be willing to do it for that long.” You can’t say, “I am slightly impatient [taps on his watch], I’ve got to have it now. [Laughter] And if it doesn’t work out now, it is useless to me.” That approach is small minded. Within Buddhism, you have to talk about many lifetimes. Is this process going to take one lifetime or two lifetimes or many more? It is not even a matter of whether you *believe* in lifetimes or not, it is the ability to understand that this actually *could* take place. We realize how conceptual we are about our lifetime.

The most important thing, whether we believe in lifetimes or not, is that we believe in the reality of our selves: we believe we are real, that we have the real thing. We think this is a single individual that really exists, and, “How could anything else exist that I don’t see, touch, or smell?” However, at a certain point we have to begin to entertain the notion that maybe we *don’t* know everything and there are other things going on. [Laughter] You know, *maybe*. If you have this kind of approach, your mind becomes looser—then you can have transmission. But if you say, “This lifetime, this day, between nine and five, that’s when I want it,” it’s not going to work. If you asked for transmission, the answer would be, “No!”

Inbreath, Outbreath

[Sakyong reads next question] “In relationship with the old instructions, the inbreath-outbreath business...”

If you look at what I have been talking about and the approach we’ve been taking, it is completely compatible with the teachings the Vidyadhara has given. It is the same lineage!

[Laughter] Sometimes I joke with people, because if you look in the meditation texts—and I look at the same texts that he studied—on one line it says, “By the way, if you have students who are slightly tight, have them follow the outbreath,” and on the next line it says, “If you have students who are like this, have them follow that.” He just didn’t read the next line! [Laughter] So to say that this approach is wrong is like saying, “Except for this one phrase in the text, the rest of the text is wrong.” Instead, you have to say there are many ways.

The way a lot of these texts are written, the specific meditation instructions depend on the students and what they need. I have talked to a lot of people who received instructions from the Vidyadhara in earlier times. Some of them said he told them to follow the inbreath; some of them, the outbreath; some of them, both. Some of them this, some of them that. However, when they held the first dathün, they said, “Rinpoche, we have to make everything a little more tidy. We can’t do out, in, both, neither, and all that, okay?” [Laughter] So the Vidyadhara said, “Okay, let’s do the outbreath.” That is a little history.

Now what we are saying is that it is kosher either way: out or in doesn’t really make a big difference. Now we are learning, it is not so much following orders. What I am trying to give you, to give everybody, is a sense of confidence that you know what meditation is, so you can instruct yourself. “Am I a little tight? Maybe I should emphasize the outbreath more. Am I getting a little too loose? Maybe I should focus on the inbreath a little more.” In the same way, we can actually learn how to do the meditation without just following orders.

75% Environment; 25% Breath

[Sakyong reads next question] “Seventy-five percent environment, twenty-five percent breath...”

That sounds fine to me. I mean, that is one approach. It works for some, and maybe it doesn’t work for others. You could flip it. You could make it the other way around: twenty-five percent environment, seventy-five percent breath. It is just the mind. It depends on what mind you have and what environment you are in. There is no set way. The mind doesn’t have to be trained exactly seventy-five percent, twenty-five percent. Those are just general guidelines.

We are inheriting meditation and Buddhism, and I feel now we have to learn about it and understand what it is—because when we pass it on to the next generation, they have to feel confident that they own it. If they feel, “The previous people don’t know really why they did it, they were just told seventy-five percent, twenty-five percent, just that,”—in a few hundred years, there is not going to be much left. There will just be some mystery, some myth. That is not really how you transmit dharma.

Buddhism has to be transplanted properly. When you study the Tibetan system, you don’t find that they say, “The Indians told us to do this, we have no idea why; but we do it because they told us to do it.” It is the same thing with us: we have to go through it properly. It took the Tibetans 300-400 years before all the texts were thoroughly integrated. It took a long time. We are here thirty years, and it sometimes seems that we think we know everything. But we are engaged in a long process. We have to realize one thing, then the next thing, then the next. We are learning and we will make mistakes. We need to say, “Okay, that is that, and this is this.” *Comprez?*

Okay, I think that is it. Thank you. I enjoyed myself and I hope you had a reasonable time here. I hope that it has been interesting and helpful. Certainly it is an offering from me

to you in terms of something about meditation. Please work with it a bit at a time, and certainly give it a go. See how it is. Thank you.

[Dedication of merit]

S: Rinpoche, first of all, I would like to thank you for coming back. Your being here with us is wonderful. It is easier to trust, or even feel, that we have basic goodness when you are here. But as you said clearly, we can't rely on anybody else to find out, not even on you—we have to do it ourselves. Thank you for these most practical and necessary teachings. In terms of the old students, many of us have practiced many years. We feel that this is a chance for a fresh start, which is really important and necessary. Now that we are here, we realize we have to do it and we can do it. Thank you very much that you made the teachings so clear.

As for the new students, I feel that so many of them want to connect with the dharma. Europe is full of people who want and need the dharma. Now, when they go home, they really have something in their hands they can work with.

I also feel gratitude to the Vidyadhara, who, if I may say so, raised you in a way that enabled you to give this to us. Thank you.

SMR: Okay. We will now do a blessing for those of you who are interested and who will be leaving. You will receive a blessing cord, with a knot tied in the shape of a vajra. It is a protection cord. You can look at it to remind yourselves of what we have been doing. You could also do some practice. The cord is protects us—but what really protects us is the dharma.

Thank you very much.