

5. PERFECTION OF CONCENTRATION (DHYANA)

The fifth perfection is the perfection of concentration. Most of the difficulties we face stem from a lack of mental control, and the best method of controlling the mind is the practice of concentration. When we have succeeded in this, we shall be able to concentrate continuously and steadily on whatever object we choose, without getting distracted or agitated. This is like digging a water-channel. If done properly it will be a satisfactory canal through which water will flow on a predetermined path. This kind of concentration can only be developed with effort, it will not arise spontaneously within our minds by our merely wanting it to.

There are also ways of practicing concentration using external forms. Generally there are two types of meditation, concentrative and analytical. In the beginning, the former will be more difficult. This is because although we are used to using the mind to reason and investigate, we are not used to focusing it on an object for any sustained length of time. It seems as if the object leaves our field of attention, but in fact the object has not gone anywhere. What has actually happened is that the mind has wandered. Of course, it is hard to gain control of the mind at first, but if we persevere, this practice will eventually yield beneficial results. I have heard many beginners complain that they cannot sustain the clarity of the visualized object of their meditation. This is not absolutely necessary, what is most important is that although the object appears vague and unclear, the mind must nonetheless focus steadily on it. If we try to force the mind in order to gain clarity it will only result in additional mental agitation and we will completely lose the object. This is why in the beginning we need to bring our mind to the object of concentration and allow it to settle on it, even though it may still be only a vague mental image. When the mind starts to become restless and is distracted it may be helpful to imagine the object as being made of a very heavy substance. Whether it is an image of Buddha, or even a point of light, if we think of it as being very heavy and solid this may help our mind to concentrate on it more steadily.

As many of you are now practicing meditation and are liable to encounter such problems, it is good for you to know about these methods. But because the factors which cause mental agitation are so strong, even though you use these methods you may still be subject to other distractions. If, for example, we catch a wild animal and tether it, it will fight to free itself because it has been used to being free for so long. But as the animal becomes familiar with its new conditions, it settles down and eventually becomes more friendly and obedient towards its master. Our mind has been free to roam like such an untamed animal so when we try to bring it under control it is very difficult. But like the wild animal, eventually it will get used to the mental discipline

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that is necessary for a successful practice. When we find our mind wandering off too easily, if we imagine it attached to the object in some way, this may make things easier. In the same way as we tie an animal to a tree, we can tie our mind to the object with the rope of recollection.