



ZURMANG KAGYU | BUDDHIST STUDIES SERIES
COURSE ONE | MEDITATION IN THE MAHAMUDRA TRADITION I

NOTES | CLASS FOUR

Tranquillity Meditation (Śamathā | ཞིགནས)

Tranquillity meditation refers to a meditation that focuses on a given object single-pointedly without analyzing it.

It is common in Buddhist philosophical texts to summarize important concepts in terms of their causes, function, and also the obstacle to their functioning. Tranquillity meditation explained in this way is as follows:

Cause	Moral discipline (pratimokṣa, bodhisattva, and vajrayāna vows)
Function	To liberate the yogi from the bondage of the dualistic mind
Obstacles	Attachment, mental agitation, and dullness

Insight Meditation (Vipaśyanā | ལྷག་མཐོང་)

Insight meditation refers to analytical investigation, and this type of meditation provides the key to understanding the true nature of reality.

Insight meditation is explained as follows:

Cause	The wisdom acquired through listening and contemplating the teachings
Function	To liberate beings from harmful tendencies
Obstacles	Not appreciating the teachings and advices of realized persons

Tranquillity and Insight Meditation: The Sequence of Practice

You first practice tranquillity meditation by fixing your mind on an object. Then you practice maintaining your focus on this object without distraction. From this comes an uninterrupted flow of attention, and your mind becomes very stable.

Having settled in the state of tranquillity, you should then examine this state with discrimination, and it is this process of analysis based on tranquillity that is known as insight meditation. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* explains that having achieved tranquillity the yogi then analyzes the aspects of the mind.

Also, the *Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra* declares that the mind settled in its purity is the state of tranquillity, and analysis of this state is insight.

The *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* explains that dwelling in the state of tranquility is associated with the pliancy of body and mind. Tranquility and insight when not accompanied by pliancy are called simulated tranquility and insight.

The Union of Tranquillity and Insight

The two practices of tranquility and insight meditation need to be combined, and this is possible because they are actually the same in terms of their nature. They are like a single thing with two different names.

Someone might think that the union of tranquility and insight is impossible since they regard tranquility as non-conceptual and insight as conceptual. However, their union is possible since even when we have tranquility meditation on the visualized object of the Buddha, for example, there is discernment on some level since we know it as a form of the Buddha. Moreover, perfect insight is considered non-conceptual.

Different Students - Different Approaches

Generally, students are first taught tranquility meditation and later insight meditation. For most people it is necessary to first develop stability of mind in order to be successful in insight meditation. However, some students are given instructions on insight first. They are introduced to the real essence of the mind directly. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* states that there are some who achieve insight without first achieving tranquility, and instead achieve tranquility through insight.