



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

NOTES | CLASS FIVE

Objects of Meditation

Generally any visualized image might be taken as a basis for developing concentration. However, it is important to rely on a single object for stabilizing the mind. If we change the object of meditation from day to day it is difficult to develop concentration.

It is also possible to rely upon an external object, like a stone or a piece of wood, to develop concentration. While some teachers do not approve of meditation based on external objects, according to Bodhibhadra it is possible. He explains two ways of developing concentration: inwardly and outwardly. In terms of outward concentration there are two kinds. In the first kind of outward concentration, you meditate on ordinary objects, like a flower or anything you place in front of yourself. In the second kind of outward concentration, you meditate on extraordinary objects, such as a sacred image or syllable.

Choosing an Object of Meditation

The form of the Buddha is considered to be one of the best objects for developing tranquility meditation since it is also a source for accumulating merit. This is recommended in texts such as the *Samādhirāja Sūtra* and the extensive *Bhāvanākrama*. However, for those prone to discursive thoughts, it is often suggested that meditating on the breath is best.

How to Maintain a Visualized Image

Maintaining a visualized image is important for being able to achieve meditative absorption. In order to maintain the visualized image, one employs two mental tools: mindfulness and introspection. In the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, Asaṅga gives an analogy to explain their functions. He says that the mind should be tamed like a wild elephant bound with the rope of mindfulness to the column of the meditation object, and prevented from wandering with the hook of introspection. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva explains that those wishing to guard their mind should develop mindfulness and introspection (V.23).

1. Mindfulness | *smṛti* | ස්ම්‍රිති

In this type of meditation, mindfulness refers to a continued focus on the object of meditation. According to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, mindfulness is the nonforgetting of the object of familiarization, and its function is to bring about undistracted concentration.

2. Introspection | *samprajanya* | පිශාස්නීය

Introspection functions to detect potential mental distraction and dullness. Śāntideva explains that introspection arises when mindfulness stands at the gate of the mind, and we may understand the role of introspection as repeatedly checking one's quality of meditation (V.33, 108).