

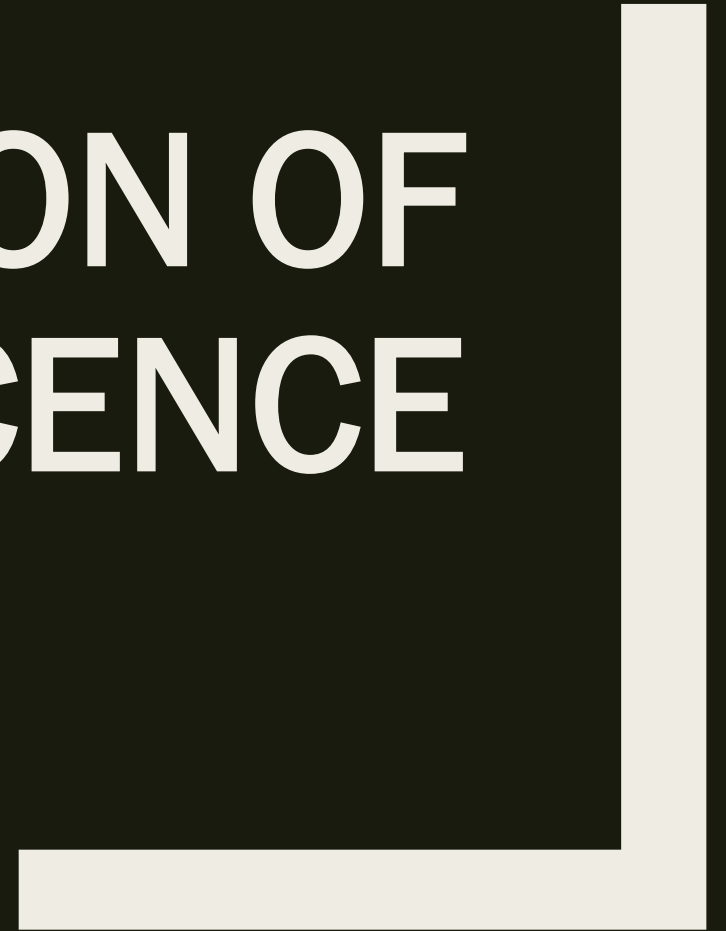


# MEDITATION RETREAT

Winnipeg, July 2017



# THE CULTIVATION OF QUIESCENCE



# *Balancing the Mind*



*a Tibetan Buddhist  
Approach to  
Refining Attention*

*B. Alan Wallace*

# *Small Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*

Tsongkhapa (1357 – 1419) founder of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism

Translation and commentary by B. Alan Wallace

*Balancing The Mind: A Tibetan Buddhist Approach To Refining Attention.* Snow Lion. ISBN-13: 978-1559392303

# Two wings of meditation

## Quiescence

- Calm abiding
- Peace
- Tranquility
- Serenity
- Śamatha

## Insight

- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Understanding of reality
- Direct intuition
- Vipāśyanā

Quiescence and insight are both products of meditation

# Meditation helps us see suchness

- Suchness: a non-conceptual, non-dualistic experience of reality
  - *Ineffable, can't be conceptualized*
  - *No subject, no object*
- To see suchness you need both quiescence and insight
  - *Quiescence: unwavering, sustained, voluntary attention on the object*
  - *Insight: understand the meaning of suchness, the way things are*
- Like an oil lamp — must be both steady and bright

# Quiescence

- Only the aspects of awareness, clarity and joy appear
- All other sense faculties are dormant
- Consciousness seems indivisible from space
- One lacks any sensation of having a body and when arising from this state it seems as if one's body is suddenly coming into being
- One's attention can effortlessly be maintained for hours, even days, on end with no interference by either laxity or excitement

# Training in how to pay attention

- Cultivation of quiescence = to train the mind in the cultivation of sustained voluntary attention
- Quiescence arises simply from sustaining the attention inwards without being distracted from the object

# Stability and clarity

- Quiescence requires stability and clarity
  - *Without stability there's no focus*
  - *Without clarity the mind is confused and sinks into slackness*
- Beginners work on stability before clarity
  - *Once stability is well maintained clarity arises with just a bit of effort*



# BENEFITS OF QUIESCENCE

Yes, it's worth it



# Insight

- Ultimate reality cannot be known unless the mind is established in quiescence
- This is the chief purpose of cultivating quiescence
- Quiescence and insight together prepare the mind for liberation

# Habituation

- Meditation can become a habit — effortless, natural samādhi
- No more effort and striving in meditation
- The natural balance of the mind can maintain itself without interruption

# The afflictions are reduced and controlled

## Three Poisons

1. Desire, attachment, greed, lust
2. Hatred, aversion, malice
3. Ignorance, delusion

## Six Afflictions

1. Sensuality
2. Anger
3. Pride
4. Ignorance
5. Skeptical doubt
6. Wrong views

# Vital energy and pliancy

- Vital energy (prāna, qi) — central channel
  - *Pliancy arises gradually*
  - *Just prior to the achievement of quiescence there is a breakthrough*
  - *A radical shift in one's nervous system*
- Pliancy
  - *Physical: buoyancy and lightness to one's actions*
  - *Mental: ability to direct attention without resistance*

# Joy

- “If quiescence is accomplished, pleasure fills the mind and joy saturates the body, so here and now you dwell in joy.”

# Powers

- Quiescence leads to extrasensory perception and paranormal abilities
  - *e.g. five clairvoyances*
- For your needs and the needs of others

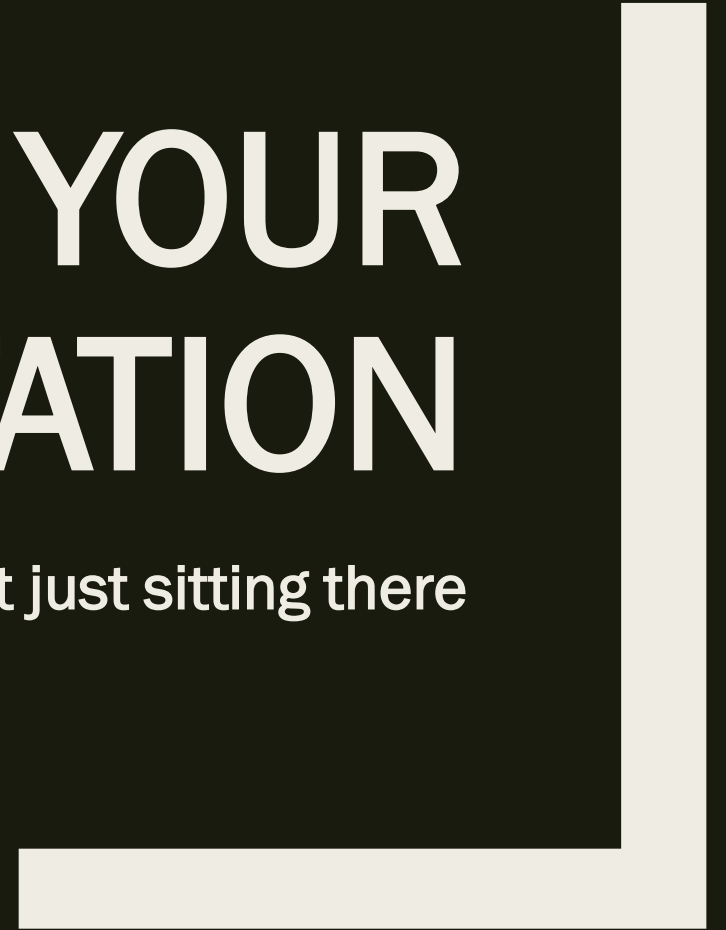
# Form realm – a higher dimension of reality

- There are three realms of existence:
  1. *Desire realm – material*
    - Dominated by sensual desire
    - Humans share much common experience with animals
  2. *Form realm – subtly material*
    - A more rarified dimension of existence beyond the physical senses
    - Humans (i.e. advanced contemplatives) share experience in common with devas who inhabit the form realm
    - Four meditative heavens – rebirth in samsara
  3. *Formless realm – immaterial*
    - Four immaterial spheres. Rebirth in these spheres depends on mastery of the four immaterial absorptions
    - Mental divinities
- With quiescence the meditator gains access to the form realm



# WORKING WITH YOUR MEDITATION

Not just sitting there



# Prerequisites for quiescence

- Supportive environment
- Few desires, cravings
- Contentment, being satisfied
- Dispensing with many activities, busyness
- Pure ethical discipline — not violating precepts
- Avoiding (excessive) ideation:
  - *Desires*
  - *Fear and anxiety*

# Laziness

## Fault

- Not wishing to engage in cultivating quiescence or unable to maintain your practice
- Types of laziness:
  - *Indolence*
  - *Feelings of inadequacy*
  - *Procrastination*
  - *Attachment to non-virtuous behaviour*

## Antidotes

- Faith in the qualities of meditation
- Aspiration for meditative stabilization
- Enthusiasm leading to effort
- Pliancy – with quiescence the mind becomes serviceable

# Obstacles to meditation

## Laxity

- An internal distraction – the ability to pay attention is decreased
- Attention can be stable but the mind lacks clarity
  - *Like darkness preventing your seeing the object*
- Lethargy and sleepiness can contribute to laxity
- Laxity obstructs mindfulness

## Excitement

- Distraction – the attention is scattered to objects of desire – the mind is noisy
- The object can be forgotten altogether (coarse excitement)
- The mind can maintain peripheral noise (subtle excitement)
  - *Waiting for a pleasant object to appear*
  - *Like water moving under frozen ice*
- Excitement obstructs introspection

# Analogy of training an untamed elephant

## Training an Elephant

1. The elephant
2. The tree or post
3. The rope
4. The sharp training hook

## Meditation

1. Attention
2. Object of meditation
3. Mindfulness
4. Introspection

# Mindfulness

- Purpose of mindfulness:

- *To prevent forgetfulness of the object*
- *To prevent the attention's being distracted to other objects*

- With mindfulness:

- *The object appears continuously to the mind*

- Method of mindfulness:

- *Hold the object in the mind*
- *Generate a powerful mode of apprehending it*
- *Maintain your awareness of it with your attention at a high pitch*
- *Settle on it without paying attention to anything else*

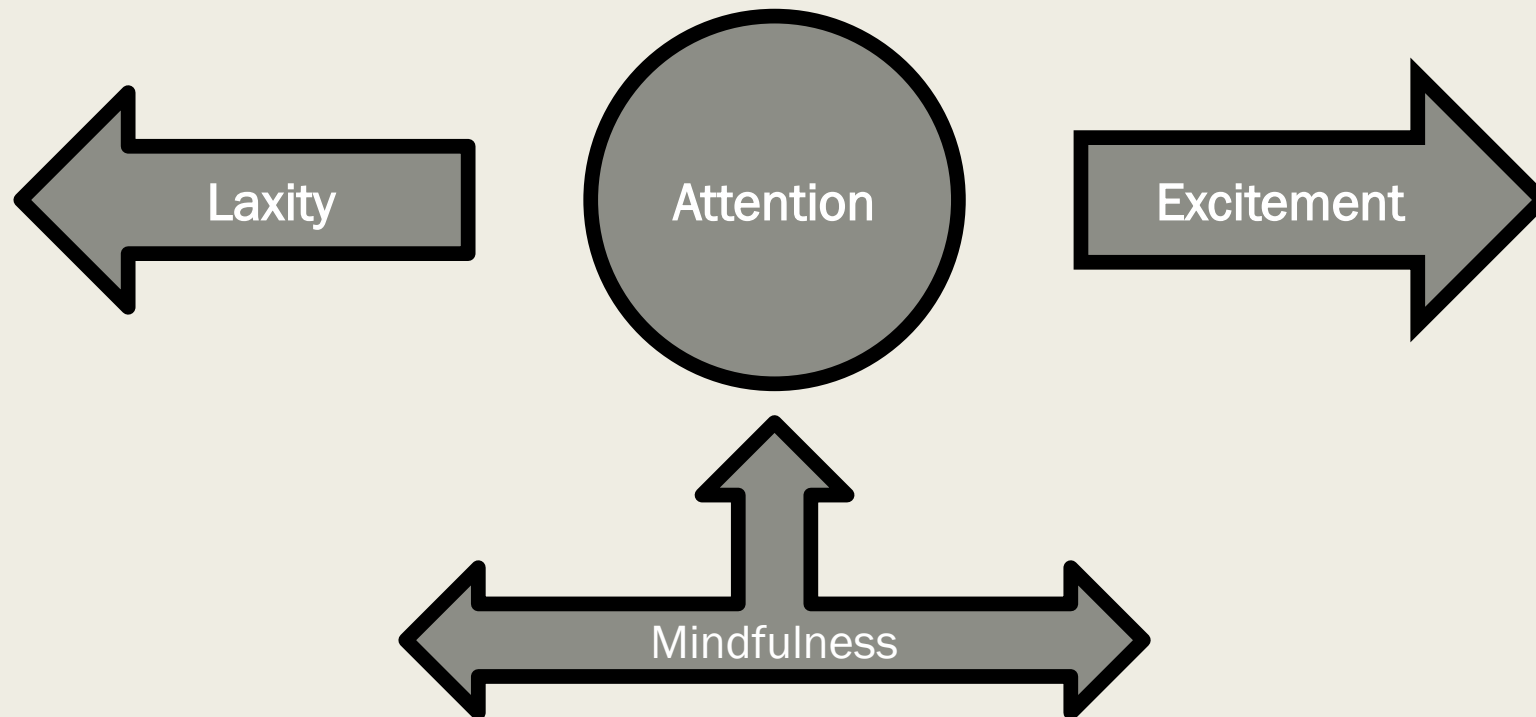
# Introspection

- The ability to recognize quickly whether laxity or excitement has arisen in meditation
- Not just after they have arisen but before they arise
- Introspection will lead to powerful and continual mindfulness
  - *Your ability to sustain samādhi grows*
- To develop introspection:
  - *Generate continual mindfulness*
  - *Observe whether your attention has veered towards laxity or excitement*
  - *Occasionally — neither too frequently nor too infrequently*

# Pay attention to your attention



Introspection





# Analogy of holding a tea cup

## Holding a Tea Cup

1. The hand holds the cup
2. Firm grip
3. The eye checks whether the cup is tilted

## Meditation

1. Mindfulness holds the object
2. Attention can be tightened
3. Introspection monitors whether laxity and excitement have arisen

# Will

- Mindfulness will increase and introspection will be able to detect even subtle laxity and excitement
- But we can become complacent
  - *Drowsy*
  - *Too relaxed*
  - *Not curious about insight*
  - *Letting the mind remain in darkness*
  - *Taking no pleasure in the object*
- What to do when you fail to exercise mindfulness and introspection?
  - *Use your will*
  - *Like a magnet to draw the mind*
  - *Intervene to eliminate laxity or excitement*
- Failure to intervene inhibits further progress

# Two problematic tendencies

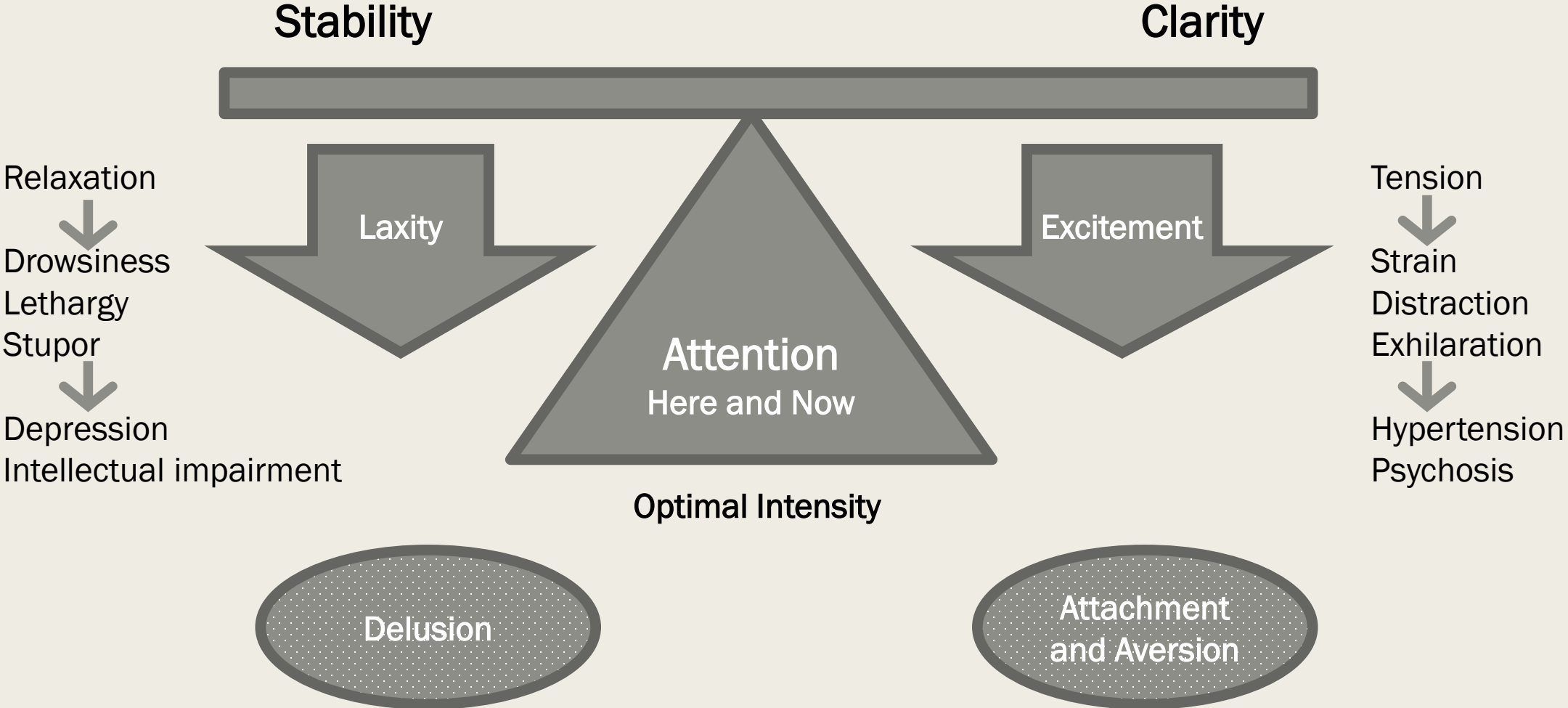
## Not Working Hard Enough

- Stability that depends on laxity
- But no clarity
  - *Potency does not emerge*
  - *No enthusiasm leads to depression*

## Working Too Hard

- Awareness empowered by excessive concentration leads to clarity
- But too much excitement and no stability
  - *Enthusiasm/effort leading to excitement*
  - *Distraction*

# Striking a balance



# STAGES OF MEDITATION

How am I progressing?



# Nine stages leading to quiescence

1. Placing the attention on an object
2. Continual placement
3. Resetting
4. Close placement
5. Disciplining
6. Pacifying
7. Complete pacification
8. Single-pointed attention
9. Balanced placement

Quiescence

# 1. Placing the attention on an object

## What You Do

- Act on teaching you have heard
- Withdraw the attention from all outside objects
- Fix the attention inwards upon the meditative object
- Forcing the mind to pay attention — striving

## What Happens

- Forced attention
- The mind is mainly distracted
- Thoughts are identified — there seems to be a lot of thoughts
- Laxity and excitement continuously arise

# 2. Continual placement

## What You Do

- Use thought to repeatedly place the attention on the meditative object
- Forcing the mind to pay attention — striving

## What Happens

- Forced attention
- The mind can remain longer on the object
- More distraction than attention
- Laxity and excitement continuously arise



# 3. Resetting

## What You Do

- Gain familiarity with the object
- Use mindfulness to realize you are distracted and immediately return to the object
  - *Like patching cloth*

## What Happens

- Interrupted attention
- Distraction is less frequent and shorter in duration
- There is more meditation than thinking

# 4. Close placement

## What You Do

- Use mindfulness to draw the attention in repeatedly
- Mindfulness becomes powerful and the object is never really lost

## What Happens

- Interrupted attention
- More stability of mind through sustained attention
- Thoughts calm down
- Less separation between awareness and object – less duality
- Powerful laxity and excitement still occur

# 5. Disciplining

## What You Do

- Use introspection to prevent the mind from scattering and to revivify it
- Introspection becomes powerful
- Experience the advantages and promise of meditation and appreciate them
- Samādhi becomes pleasurable
- Use introspection to avoid subtle laxity

## What Happens

- Interrupted attention
- Coarse laxity no longer arises
- The danger of subtle laxity arises
  - *Do not mistake this settled state for meditation*
  - *Leads to mental impairment and rebirth as an animal*

# 6. Pacifying

## What You Do

- Regard distraction as a fault
- Pacify any dislike for samādhi
- Use introspection to avoid subtle excitement

## What Happens

- Interrupted attention
- Subtle laxity is overcome but subtle excitement (peripheral noise) remains a problem

# 7. Complete pacification

## What You Do

- Generate effort to abandon all faults of laxity and excitement

## What Happens

- Interrupted attention
- Laxity and excitement are unlikely to arise
- One can remain in a stable state of meditation for a considerable time

# 8. Single-pointed attention

## What You Do

- At the beginning of a session exert a small effort to proceed effortlessly
- Continuous placement of the attention requiring only small effort

## What Happens

- Uninterrupted attention — one can meditate stably for an entire session
- Laxity and excitement are absent

# 9. Balanced placement

## What You Do

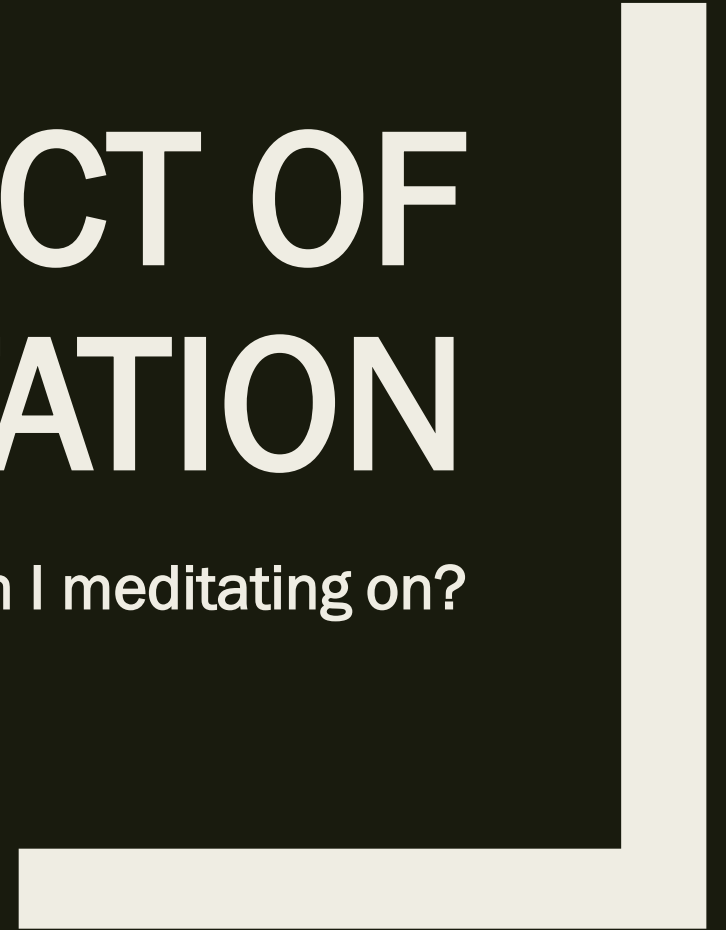
- Meditative stabilization shines forth
- Habitual mindfulness and introspection
- Effort is no longer needed — meditation becomes automatic

## What Happens

- Attention is spontaneous
- Equanimity occurs when the attention becomes balanced
- A one-pointed mind is achieved
  - *The mind has become clear*
  - *Just short of quiescence (still in the Desire Realm)*

# THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION

What am I meditating on?





# Objects of attention

- Qigong

- *Whole body*
- *Feet*
- *Hands etc.*

- Anchor

- *Behind on the chair*
- *Counting or following the breath*
- *Mantra*

- Qigong meditation

- *Light and flow*

# Meditation on sheer awareness

- It is possible “to focus the attention on the apprehending aspect of subjective experience”
  - *Meditate on “sheer awareness and sheer clarity of experience”*
  - *Consciousness*
- Doing this makes sheer awareness the object of meditation
- Devoid of conceptualization and distraction to the five sense fields
  - *Thoughts vanish and a vacuity appears without any difference between former and latter states*

# How to do it

- Turn inward
  - *Withdraw the attention from external distraction to any of the five sense fields*
- No thoughts
  - *Dispense with ideation*
- Be aware of just the lingering awareness and clarity of experience
- Mindfulness in this practice consists of maintaining the attention in that mode
- Introspection consists of monitoring whether the attention has:
  - *Been carried away by sensory distractions or ideation*
  - *Sunk into the vagueness of laxity*

# Meal Time Offering

We make offerings to the Buddhas.

We make offerings to the Dharma.

We make offerings to the Sangha.

We make offerings to all sentient beings.

I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.

I vow to cut off endless vexations.

I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma.

I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.

With this offering, we wish that all sentient beings

accomplish liberation and fulfill all Buddhadharma.