

## VIEWS ON MEDITATION PROCESS IN THE "GRADES ON THE PATH TO BODHI" BY TSONKHAPA

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**Key words:** *Tranquillity, Extraordinary Vision, Intuition without Phenomenon, Entry to the Image, Feeling, Stoppage. Gelukpa is a Buddhist direction that has long tradition not only in Tibet, but also in Mongolia and continued to exert influence on the social life of these countries. Theoretical basis of this direction is presented by its founder, great Buddhist scholar, philosopher, reverend lama Tsonkhapa's main work "Grades on the Path to Bodhi". The author of the present article considered this work as the socio-philosophical basis of Gelukpa.*

**Товч утга:** Зохиогч богд лам Зонхавын "Бодь мөрийн зэрэг" зохиол дахь бясалгалын эрдмийг хураасан амарлин оршихуй хийгээд үлэмж үзэхүйн сургаалийн үндсэн дээр түүний үзэл санаан дахь даяан бясалгалын тухай ойлголтыг авч үзсэн болно. Зонхавын зохиол дахь даяан бясалгалын тухай ойлголт нь юмс үзэгдлийн мөн чанарыг таньж мэдэхэд чиглэгдсэн нийт хүнд байдаг сэтгэн бодох үйл ажиллагааг илэрхийлдэг хэмээн дүгнэж, онцлогийг нь өөрийн ойлголтоор гаргахыг хичээсэн. Энэ өгүүлэл монгол хэл дээр "Философи, шашин судлал" сэтгүүлд урьд нь хэвлэгдсэн ба англи хэл дээр олон улсын бага хуралд илтгэлийн хэлбэрээр тавигдсанаас гадна Энэтхэг улсын Делигийн Их сургуулийн Буддын судлалын тэнхмийн сэтгүүлд хэвлүүлэхээр шилжүүлээд байгаа болно. Англи хэл дээрхи хувилбарыг "Философи, шашин судлал" сэтгүүлд хэвлүүлэхийг редакцийн зүгээс дэмжиж буйн дээр өөрийн зүгээс ялангуяа мэргэжлийн ангийн оюутан сурагчдад англи хэл дээрхи судалгааны ном зохиол унших дадлага болно гэж үзэж байна.

One of the interesting parts of this work is meditation process, in which Tsonkhapa reflected his views on subject in opposition to some other views on this point.

Meditation process is considered in almost the whole of "Lamrim", but specially emphasized in the last parts of this work, that is dedicated to the last two paramitas, concentrative meditation and discriminative awareness. Meditation process is summarized as the teaching about tranquillity and extraordinary vision.

In the past, meditation process was associated with yogis and was realized as a supernatural process, being carried out in caves or any other solitary places. However, in

the last few decades, meditation is widespread as training, directed to relaxation, brain rest, forming of healthy state of body and mind.

According to Tsonkhapa, ideas on tranquillity and extraordinary vision represent meditation learning, first of all directed to realisation of the essence of Buddhist religion through categories and concepts of sutras, to real practice of suppressing of one's obstacles of mind. At the same time, in the authors of this article interpretation meditation process in the context of Tsonkhapa's ideas is the process of penetrating

into the essence of things inherent in all people but specially organised for effectiveness of the process and aimed at understanding of things' essence. (11) However, as a Buddhist philosopher, whose purpose was forming people's world outlook through the Buddhist teaching with its view on worldly life, meditation process in his teaching as a process of thinking over things also was aimed to understand the life experience and realization of the Buddha through his teaching and concepts of later day thinkers.

Significant part of the Buddhist philosophy literature is dedicated to the methods and succession of the process of thinking over things. Special consideration of the process of thinking over things as the main condition for comprehension the nature of things in the earliest of world religions, Buddhism, in which special experience in this field was achieved, except of long standing Indian tradition is connected with the own purpose of this religion to attain enlightenment.

On the other hand, those special activities of meditation process in Buddhism were aimed to comprehension of Shunyata, by which reason methods of meditation process in main cases were differentiated depending on concepts of Shunyata, thus sometimes making peculiarities of meditation process particular characteristics distinguishing one direction from another as it had been reflected in the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi" by Tsonkhapa.

As for the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi," ideas on the process of meditation in this sutra show us that it is aimed to comprehension of traditional Buddhist outlook basing on own experience. By the way, it should be mentioned that in Tsonkhapa's work diversity of views and concepts on meditation process, existed in his time, had been shown on some examples of Indian and Chinese thinkers' views. It could be noted that incidentally, within methods of meditation process, seen as the wrong by Tsonkhapa, those, which he mentioned as widespread in Chinese Buddhism, are evidently belonged to Ch'an-Buddhism.

A person, specially engaged in the process of meditation, yogi, is named in Tibetan *Naljorva* (*rnal a'byor pa*), and *Eguzer* in Mongolian, and defined in the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi": "so far Suchness is acted by meditator, it is preached as by yogi..." (1, 176b). Results and peculiarities of this cognitive process of thinking and analyzing in mind are expressed by Tsonkhapa as follows: "At incomparable intuition (*rnal a'byor bl med*)...from the "Prajna-Paramita's Counsel" (*sher phyin man ngag*): "Through analyzing one's own mind all dharmas will lodge in one's own mind"... As preached in the "Secret Abstract" (*gsang a'dus*): "This dharma lodges in the sky vajra. Dharma and dharma's nature are not" and in "Lankavatara" sutra: "Support just on mind and not analyze on outer sense" (1, 213a).

This process consists of three "stages", or "steps":

1. Aiming neither more than to mind
2. Aiming to Suchness
3. Intuition without phenomenon

If in that number "on first two steps tranquillity and extraordinary vision are created through containing meditation and analysing meditation", the third step, "intuition without phenomenon" (1, 212b – 213a) expresses the final result of the meditation process.

Although the "real tranquillity and extraordinary vision" is a concept, connected with the most holy, highest cognitive level, tranquillity and extraordinary vision express peculiarity of human process of thinking through meditation by analysing, based on meditation by containing, while concepts of "intuition without sign" and "intuition without phenomenon" express the final cognition at the peak of the meditation.

#### **Containing Meditation and Analyzing Meditation**

According to the ideas of the treatise, process of meditation is the process of containing the image of the aimed object in mind and analyzing or acting in mind with it and consists of two steps of containing meditation and analyzing meditation. "Containing meditation" is the name not for the process of looking and observing through eye knowledge, but for the process of creating its image in inner mind, while analyzing meditation for the process of decomposing analysis of the created image. As it is preached in "Commentary", "all world and world-beyond knowledge in Mahayana and Hinayana is the result of tranquillity and extraordinary vision" and is commented by Tsonkhapa as follows: "Tranquillity and extraordinary vision are not mind knowledge, found by meditation process. All those knowledges are the result of these two" (1, 136a).

So tranquillity and extraordinary vision is not knowledge, found at the end of meditation process, but all mind knowledge are born as the result of these two and tranquillity with extraordinary vision contain meditative knowledge as a whole. Since in general, meditation process as a whole is united in turn to tranquillity and extraordinary vision, although all knowledge in Mahayana and Hinayana are not considered as the result of tranquillity and extraordinary vision, all Samadhi higher than mind, single-pointed (unanimous) in a boon aim, is united in turn to tranquillity, while all the boons of discriminative awareness, which decomposes separately the essence of Suchness and of all empirical things, are united in turn to extraordinary vision. And in this sense there is no any contradiction to consider knowledge of the three chariots as the result of tranquillity and extraordinary vision (1, 136a-136b).

#### **Tranquillity**

The nature of tranquillity is defined by Tsonkhapa as follows: "real tranquillity as it is preached in "Commentary": "Sitting alone in solitude truly contain inside and act in mind (yid) those dharmas, performed in perception (bsams pa), constantly settle down inside mind (yid) that perceived performance (sems), which is acted in mind (yid). When that one's body, who had been entering that way and had been many times placing in it, became very learned, and that one's mind became very learned, this state is named tranquillity". Through constant settling down and acting over its sense without distracting to other objects, mind will become gradually

image of the object in inner mind, as it is shown by Tsonkhapa's words: "Samadhi is created not by eyes knowledge, but by mind knowledge". By the way, it could be mentioned that within some views, criticized by Tsonkhapa, he named views about comprehension of Shunyata through staring at "trees and stones".

As for the process of that thinking activities, it goes through creating of an image of the object of reflection, accompanied by the feeling of that object, which followed by the deepening of the object's feeling through analysis of its essence and by "entering into that image". Maitreya's words, cited by Tsonkhapa, in full are "as also it had been said by reverend Maitreya when even dharmas' name is tied up, it should be known as the path of tranquillity. The path of extraordinary vision should be known as analyzing in depth that's meaning and if perception is contained in mind, depending on truly lodging, and if dharmas are differed in very depth, there are tranquillity and extraordinary vision. So, as it is preached, containing mind, which depends on real Samadhi, is tranquillity and discriminative awareness, which distinguishes dharmas in very depth, is extraordinary vision (1,137a – 137b).

Concerning the succession, although at the beginning of the process tranquillity is searched, and consequently, extraordinary vision is meditated, these two are closely connected processes of creating an image of the object of thinking, settling down it in mind and all-round analyzing of the settled image, and the aims of them, which are reflected in the 'Grades on the Path to Bodhi' by Tsonkhapa as the four aims of yogi (rnal a'byor bai' dmigs pa bzhi) (1,143a), are also not differentiated. Such is the peculiarity of this process, that extraordinary vision is created on the base of tranquillity.

If so, Tsonkhapa is questioning in his treatise, how should it be understood, that "there is tranquillity with realization of Shunyata and extraordinary vision without realization of Shunyata" (1,137b) and "what was preached, that "some persons found extraordinary vision, but not found tranquillity. They should diligently act on tranquillity, depending on extraordinary vision?" (1,141a). Kernel of the question is that extraordinary vision, which appears "depending on tranquillity" is told here as the first in succession.

Answering to this question Tsonkhapa says, that here "tranquillity higher than the first real dhyana, is not differentiated. Tranquillity higher than the first dhyana, is created, depending on the realization of four truths" (1,141a-b).

So, although tranquillity, on the one hand, is the process of getting attached to the aim of mind through concentration and absorption, or the name for creating of an image and settling down it in mind, on the other hand, it seems also to be the tranquil state of mind in result of extraordinary vision, when the sense of the things has been already reached.

As for extraordinary vision, although it is the great realization, found as the result of analyzing the image, contained in mind, through the "view", it could be not only extraordinary vision of Shunyata, but could be realization of lower grade.

An argument to show this interpretation to be right, is seen in Tsonkhapa's idea "is this Samadhi and discriminative awareness, aimed to Shunyata, or not, should be found out from the point whether that mind has perceived or has not

percieved as its object the two Non-Ego-s" (1,138a). In other words, is it Samadhi and discriminative awareness, aimed to Shunyata, or not, depends on what is meditated.

If Samadhi and discriminative awareness aimed to Shunyata, it means meditating on Non-Ego-s. As for the succession, it is the same and extraordinary vision is created through meditation, based on tranquillity.

Otherwise, any realization, which is reached at the end of analyzing contemplation, depends on creating of an image of mind, or, just on tranquillity.

So, for the meditation process as a whole, it can be concluded, that although meditated concepts are deepening during the process, at any level it goes as a process of analyzing meditation, which depends on containing meditation, or, tranquillity is created the first, and extraordinary vision the next. As it is mentioned in the treatise, these meditation principles are preached in many sutras like "Bodhisattva's Stages", "Shravaka's Stages", "Prajna-Paramita's Counsel", in three grades by Shantideva and Kamalashila (1,211b).

#### **Intuition without Phenomenon**

Buddhist concepts of tranquillity and extraordinary vision, representing meditation skills in general, aim for Enlightenment. The concept of "intuition without phenomenon", the third stage, or step, implies the final result of meditation process.

The concept of incomparable intuition belongs to Tantras. In Tsonkhapa's "Grades on the Path to Bodhi" are mentioned mainly two differences of Tantras: grade of arising (bskyed rim) and grade of completing (rdzog rim). "Grades on the Path to Bodhi" belong to the grade of arising. As for Samadhi, at the end of his treatise Tsonkhapa emphasizes that his summing up of the grades on the path to Bodhi, based on many good teachings of sages, dedicated to finding clear Samadhi, common to all the grades of non-Buddhists and Buddhists, to Mahayana and Hinayana, to two kinds of Mahayana and especially to upper and low grades of the Tantras, to comprehension of mistakes on the path, which leads to mastering of intuition (1,222b).

"Intuition without phenomenon" is not specially considered in the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi". However, highest levels of the cognitive process of realizing the essence of all things are reflected in detail within the part of absolute truth. Grade, where absolute truth, or Suchness is attained, had been defined as follows: "When nothing is seen, Suchness is seen" (1, 203b), "When Suchness is percieved, containing is meant neither more than in sense of term knowledge. As for the transcendental realization of the Buddha, not containing is its meaning" (1,205b).

Otherwise, although the stage of realization of the all things nature is told in a manner of containing of all things in mind, truly it is the state, when nothing is contained.

At the stage of finding the absolute truth and becoming the Buddha, "knowledge" of this absolute truth is not manifested by any image, word or expression. At this stage all "is seen by seeing nothing". Citing the corresponding passage from the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi", we have the following: "When the absolute truth is found by transcendental knowledge of the Buddha, knowing Suchness, it is as in the "Commentary to "Entering..." ("Entering to the Deeds of Bodhisattva" by Shantideva): "Essence of this was not seen as an image, wasn't it? So, if to ask, in which way it is seen? It should be answered: "Truth is, nevertheless it is seen by no seeing, and nothing being seen, Suchness was seen, thus it was preached",... "at the Buddha's stage, mind and run, which proceeds from mind, transformed for ever",..."if all these, aimed by the power of ignorance darkness, are at Suchness, its should be aimed by intuitive, devoid of defilement transcendental knowledge of the Sublime one, but it was shown that through seeing nothing Suchness of all those was seen. Though, having been, hindrance could become aim, not having been aimed, hindrance prohibited means understanding - this way it should be contained. Sense of preaching, that no seeing is the highest of seeing, should be known by the same way. This was told in the "Abstract" (sdud pa): "The Buddha showed, that not seeing the image (gzugs), not seeing the knowledge, not seeing either senses (tshor ba), nor seeing perception (a'du she), nor seeing thinking process, which time cognition (rnam par she) and intellect (sems) don't see mind (yid), that time dharma has been seen" (1, 203a-203b).

In such way, the final result of meditation, clear realization of things nature through intuition was shown in the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi".

In time of meditating extraordinary vision, analytic contemplation has taken place on the basis of "view" through abstaining from the image of mind, and in time of completing of this process, dissolution in the image took place and whatever like an image vanishes. Names for that are "clear knowledge", clear realization, "making clear at body".

Judging from ideas in the part of Tsonkhapa's treatise, where he considered in detail two truths, relative and absolute, and also differences within absolute truth, it can be said, that the "real absolute truth" is not knowledge (in sense of accumulated knowledge of facts and data- Chimeg O.) (1,207b), otherwise, it is the state, inexpressible by words, it is the realization, when all thinking activities stopped, and in "absolute" sense it is a state, comparable to death. We can note, that in ordinary life somebody's death is told as "to have become the Buddha".

Moments of absolute truth, or of deep realization, seem to happen even in ordinary life, and the concept of "momentary appearances" in mind according to "Abhisamayalankara" by Mayitreya (3) and "Seventy Topics" by Gonchogjigmedvanbo seem to express the final moments of "mind intuition", which had been made "clear at body" (4, 3a-3b; 19b).

**Notes.**

*This article was published in Mongolian (Bibliography No.14), where in Summary (in English) I used a term "Yoga Practice" instead of "Meditation Process" and reported the same topic in English to international symposium "Buddhism and Nordland-2009 in Tallinn, Estonia (2009.10.06-10). Translation from Mongolian to English is made by me, the author, Chimeg Oyun. In translation of some terms from Tibetan text except of very important for me old Mongolian translation (manuscript-Bibliography No.2) I used Dictionary by Roerich Yu. N. (Bibliography No.9). For zhi gnas and lhag mthong I used translation as Tranquillity and Extraordinary Vision, used by Guenther Herbert V. in his translation of Gampopa's work (Bibliography No.8).*

*For publishing in English in Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, Journal I made some corrections in my translation especially of passages from the "Grades on the Path to Bodhi" by Tsonkhapa, added some transliterations of the main terms and passages from Tibetan and enriched Bibliography by books which were used in my previous publications in Mongolian, connected with the topic. For transliteration I used transliteration of Tibetan Alphabet, used in the "English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan", compiled by Melvyn C. Goldstein with Ngawangthondup Narkyid. Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Dharamsala. 2007.*

**Transliteration of the main terms and definitions from Tibetan.**

Containing meditation	ljog sgom
Analyzing meditation	dpyang sgom
Tranquillity	zhi gnas
Extraordinary vision	lhag mthong

**Definition of Tranquillity (zhi gnas)**

"Sitting alone in solitude truly contain inside and act in mind (yid) those dharmas, performed in perception (bsams pa), constantly settle down inside mind (yid) that perceived performance (sems), which is acted in mind (yid).. When that one's body, who had been entering that way and had been many times placing in it became very learned, and that one's mind became very learned, this state is named tranquillity (1, 136b) - **(de gcig pu dben par a'dug ste nang du yang dag bzhug nas ji ltar legs par bsams pai' chos de dag nyid yid la byed cing sems gang gis yid la byed paa' sems de nang du rgun chags su yid la byed pas yid la byed do)**

**Definition of Extraordinary Vision (lhag mthong)**

"when a state of body, which is very learned and a state of perception (sems), which is very learned, is attained, dwelling in that state, abstain from an image of perception (sems), catch and act those dharmas, performed in perception (bsams), in inner mind separately by the object (yul) and the image (gzugs brnyan) of

Samadhi action, and act with admiration. What distinguishes the essence of knowledge, presented by the object (yul) and the image (gzugs rnyan) in Samadhi action deeply and distinguishes very deeply, what rummages (rtog pa) utterly, what analyzes utterly, what is bearing, desiring and specially differing, viewing and rummaging, that is extraordinary vision." (1,137a) -

**(lhag mthong gin go bo mdo de nyid las de lus shin tu sbyangs ba dang sems shin tu sbyangs ba de thob nas de nyed la gnas te sems kyi rnam pa spangs nas ji ltar bsams pai' chos de dag nyid nang du ting nge a' dzin gyi spyod yul gzugs brnyan du so sor rtog par byed mos par byed do de ltar ting nge a' dzin gyi spyod yul gzugs brnyan de dag la shes byaa' don de rnam par a'byed pa dang rab tu rnam par a'byed pa dang yongs su rtog pa dang yongs su dpyod ba dang bzod pa dang a'dod pa dang bye brag a'byed pa dang lta ba dang rnam par rog pa gang yin pa de nil hag mtong zhes byas ste).**

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