

# Taming the Elephant Mind

## A Handbook on the Theory and Practice of Calm Abiding Meditation

By Lama Choedak Rinpoche

### Preface

Mindfulness and meditation are two aspects of the Eight Fold Noble Path taught by the Buddha in 500 BC. Buddhists have been practising these for many centuries and have made a valid contribution to create peace in people's lives. Today people think Buddhist teachings are scientific, logical, practical and sensible. Buddhism does not need science to prove the authenticity of its teachings. It only needs people to engage in meditation and promote it as such, without watering it down for the purposes of mere stress reduction and performance enhancement. A large number of people have taken on what is known as *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Therapy* and it has been promoted as if it was developed by someone in recent years, without giving credit to the teachings of the Buddha. Elsewhere, others try to promote the same by calling it *Compassion Based Stress Reduction Therapy*. The form of meditation the Buddha taught and practiced is called 'Calm Abiding Meditation' and it is the remedy for all 84,000 afflictions - not just stress. The teaching of the Buddha is *wisdom based* reduction and elimination of all afflictions and sufferings.

This handbook consists of notes compiled primarily to accompany the *8-Week Course on Calm Abiding Meditation* that I conduct for students of Buddhism and the general public. I have been conducting these courses for over 18 years. There are also many of my students who have been facilitating this course on a regular basis throughout Australia and New Zealand. Nowadays, a few Tibetan Buddhist centres are starting to offer classes on Calm Abiding Meditation, but they are usually taught as a philosophical explanation of the topic without devoting any time to sit in quietness and do the practice of meditation.

Over the years I have adapted these courses to provide practical techniques for the general public. It is not necessary to hold any religious beliefs in order to benefit from Meditation. Calm Abiding Meditation might also be useful for people of other faiths who wish to enrich their religious life.

You will gain the most benefit by practising every day, even for just a few minutes, rather than from longer occasional bursts of enthusiasm. Even when you are not meditating formally, you can carry the benefits into your daily life by doing everything with a sense of purpose and a gentle attitude. Enlightened experiences do not necessarily occur only on the meditation cushion. You may have such an experience walking to the shops, provided you walk along with a calm, clear and stable mind!

Calm Abiding Meditation tunes our minds to the wave length of spaciousness, freedom and happiness. If you desire these qualities, may you find them by following the practices contained in this booklet!

# Calmness is in our Nature

*Unruly beings are as unlimited as space  
They cannot possibly all be overcome.  
But if I overcome thoughts of anger alone  
This will be equivalent to vanquishing all enemies.*

*Where would I possibly find enough leather  
With which to cover the surface of the earth?  
But wearing leather just on the soles of my shoes  
Is equivalent to covering the earth with it.*

*Likewise, it is impossible for me  
To restrain the external course of things.  
But should I restrain this mind of mine  
What would be the need to restrain all else?*

Shantideva

We learn more about life by actual experience than through many years of theoretical study. Meditation is an ancient spiritual technique which enables people to discover true happiness for themselves. Happiness is not to be found in external things. Although we do feel pleasure when we obtain longed-for objects of desire, that pleasure is short-lived. Like children bored with our new toys, we soon tire of material things. Indeed, we may later spend as much energy in ridding ourselves of them as we once spent in acquiring them! Practicing meditation leads us to the fundamental realisation that all things are transitory.

Calm Abiding Meditation or *Shamatha* suits people of all walks of life. We all want calmness and stability, qualities which will serve as our best friends throughout life. This technique emphasises the importance of being gentle towards ourselves. If we are gentle with ourselves we will also be gentle with others. Once we learn to achieve calmness, we can transform our environment into a peaceful place. We rediscover our sense of harmony. We cultivate the inner wisdom eye, which enables us to see the beauty all around. With our new calmness and wisdom, we become empowered to solve our own problems. We can transform ourselves and our perceptions, rather than expecting others to change or to solve our problems.

We all have an instinct to be calm and to create calm. There is never a time when we do not wish to be calm. Calmness is in our nature; it is in the hearts and minds of every one of us. However, calmness should not be confused with inaction. It is not a fearful, timid or passive thing but rather it is active, innovative and transformational. We can only cultivate calmness through understanding the causes of agitation and by deliberately choosing to transform such agitation into a calmer state of mind. A person who is not calm does not have time to choose right from wrong or safety from danger. Calm abiding is the safest way of being. It is, in fact, active peace.

To learn Calm Abiding Meditation techniques we must understand that most of the time we are calm, but we have to learn to abide in that state without becoming distracted. Observing that the mind is calm and not being distracted by any external stimuli will allow us to dwell in a state of calmness.

Calm Abiding Meditation techniques help our minds to become relaxed, focused and peaceful. This enables us to recognise the causes of our unhappiness and to recover from stress, anxiety

and tension. Learning to have Calm Abiding as a way of being helps us to remove undesirable habits, improves our confidence and adds a touch of dignity and sacredness to our life.

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Extract from the book by Lama Choedak Rinpoche "Taming the Elephant Mind - A Handbook on the Theory and Practice of Calm Abiding Meditation".