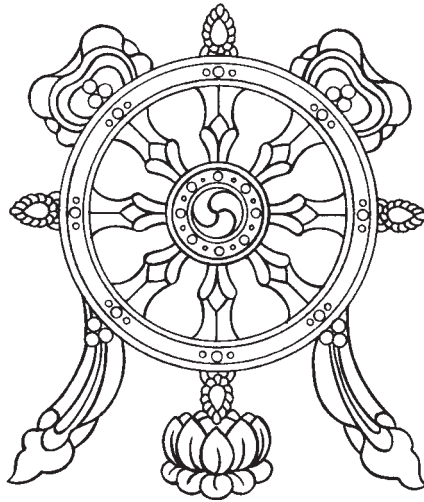


# Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

*Awakening the limitless potential of your mind,  
achieving all peace and happiness*



SUBJECT AREA 2  
How to Meditate

*Readings*



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*Further required reading includes the following texts:*

*The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 39–43)

*How to Meditate*, by Kathleen MacDonald

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# The Purpose of Meditation

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

I would like to say a few words in introduction about the practice of meditation. Many people throughout the world, in the West as well as the East, are very interested in meditating. They are attracted to this practice and express great interest in it. Yet, of all the many people who engage in meditation, only a few really understand its purpose.

Each of us here possesses a physical body made up of bones, flesh, blood and such things. At present we are not able to exert complete control over this body and as a result we always experience problems. There might be a rich man whose wealth is equal to that of the entire world yet despite his enormous fortune, if his mind is tied up in an uncontrolled body, he will live in continual suffering. Rich or poor, none of us escape this problem. Try as we may, we never seem to find an end to our difficulties. If we solve one, another immediately takes its place. The conflicts and suffering involved in maintaining our physical body are the same no matter where we may be. If we have the wisdom to penetrate deeply into the heart of this matter and check the actual way things are, we quickly perceive the universality of this unsatisfactory situation. It also becomes clear that if we did not have such an uncontrolled body, there would be no way for us to experience the sufferings related to it.

The main problem we all have is the suffering of not achieving our various desires. These include the obvious physical necessities of food and clothing as well as such enjoyable things as a good reputation, the sound of pleasant and comforting words and the like. Some forms of suffering, such as the hunger of an extremely impoverished person, are more obvious than others. But in one way or another, we all hunger uncontrollably for things we do not possess.

Take the example of someone who was fortunate enough to be born into a wealthy family. During his lifetime he may never experience material want. He can afford to buy anything that arouses his desire and is free to travel wherever he pleases, experiencing the various delights and excitement offered by different cultures. When he finally reaches the point where there is nothing left to possess, no place left to visit and no pleasure left to experience, he still suffers from an acute feeling of dissatisfaction. In such a restless, dissatisfied state of mind many people go insane, unable to cope with this intense and pervasive suffering.

Thus even when there is no lack of material comfort there is still suffering. In fact it often happens that possession of material wealth increases dissatisfaction, because it then becomes even more obvious that such possessions have no ability whatsoever to affect or cut through the root of suffering. There is still the continuity of dissatisfaction, confusion, worry and the rest. If an accumulation of external comforts really were able to cut through and eliminate suffering, then at some stage of physical well-being this continuity of suffering would be severed and all dissatisfaction would cease. But as long as

our mind is tied up with an uncontrolled body, suffering continues.

For instance, in order to protect our feet from rough ground and sharp thorns, we wear shoes. Yet this does not really eliminate the problem. The shoes themselves often hurt. They can pinch our toes, produce sores and generally cause discomfort. This is not primarily the shoemaker's fault. If our feet were not so long, wide, or sensitive in the first place, it would be possible to fashion totally comfortable shoes for them. Thus if we look deeply into the matter we see that the source of this discomfort is not external, but rather lies within our own physical and mental make-up.

This is merely one example of the suffering experienced because of our physical body. From the time we are born until the time we must die, we expend a tremendous amount of energy trying to protect this body of ours from suffering. In fact, most people spend all their time caring for their body in precisely this fruitless, self-defeating manner.

But the purpose of meditation is not merely to take care of the physical body. We should not think of using meditation in this way. It should have a higher, more valuable purpose. To use meditation as yet another external method to benefit our body is senseless. This would involve wasting a technique of true, ultimate value on a vain attempt to gain relief that is at best temporary. Meditation would then be like the aspirin we take to be rid of a headache. The pain may go away, but that does not mean we are cured. After some time it will return because the method of treatment was unrelated to the real cause of the difficulty and thus any relief gained will necessarily be short-lived. As temporary pleasure and alleviation of pain are available through many external means, there is no need to use either meditation or any other spiritual practice for such a purpose. We should not squander the power of meditation on such limited aims.

**M**editation is primarily concerned with caring for the mind. Although our body and mind are intimately related and interconnected, they are quite different types of phenomena. Our body is an object we can see with our eyes, but not so the mind. The members of a particular family may share many similar physical traits, but each child will instinctively have a different personality, mental attitude, set of interests and the like. Though they attend the same schools, their intelligence and learning will differ not only from each other's but from their parents' and grandparents' as well. Such differences of mind cannot be adequately explained in physical terms.

It should also be noted that there are children who have accurate memories of previous lives. They can tell where they were born, how they lived and so forth, and can recognize people and objects from these previous lives. Such accounts are verifiable and provide intriguing evidence for any investigator prepared to study this matter with an unbiased mind.

In any event, the underlying reason for different mental aptitudes among members of the same family, and for certain children's memory of previous lifetimes, is the fact that mind is beginningless. Past lives do exist. While we cannot go into a subtle analysis here of what does and what does not provide the continuity between one life and the next, the important thing to keep in mind is this: just as our mind has continued from a past life into the present, so will it pass on from the present into the future. The circumstances of our present life result from actions, both mental and physical, performed in these previous lives. Similarly, our present actions will determine the circumstances of our future lives. Thus, the responsibility lies in our own hands for shaping the remainder of this life and those to come. It is

very important to recognize this if we are to find effective means for cutting through both mental and physical suffering permanently.

Each of us has been born as a human being. As such we have the potential to give meaning and purpose to our life. But to take full advantage of it, we must go beyond what the lower animals can do. By utilizing such a human rebirth properly and gaining control over our mind, we can sever the root of all suffering completely. Within the space of one or more lives we can escape from the compulsive cycle of death and rebirth. As it is, we have to be reborn again and again without any choice or control, experiencing all the sufferings of an uncontrolled physical body. But with the proper application this involuntary cycle can be broken. We can escape from all suffering and dissatisfaction permanently.

But to escape from the circle of death and rebirth ourselves is not enough. This is still not an appropriate way of using our human capabilities to the utmost. We are not the only ones who experience suffering and dissatisfaction; all other living beings share in the same predicament. And most other beings lack the wisdom—the Dharma eye of wisdom—to find the correct path to the cessation of their suffering. All creatures on earth, without exception, spend their whole life, day and night, searching for a way to overcome suffering and experience pleasure and happiness. But because their minds are clouded in ignorance, this search is in vain. Instead of leading to the intended goal, it brings them only further frustration and pain. They try to remove the cause of their suffering but instead only remove themselves further and further from nirvana, the true cessation of suffering.

All living beings suffer and desire release in the same way we do. If we realize this, it becomes apparent that it is selfish to work solely towards our own liberation, our own experience of nirvana. Rather we must strive to free all others as well. But in order to enlighten others as to the correct paths leading to a true cessation of suffering, we ourselves must first become fully enlightened beings. In other words, we must achieve buddhahood in order to help liberate others.

The situation can be explained like this. Suppose we want to bring a friend to a beautiful park so that she can enjoy it. If we are blind there is no way for us to lead her there no matter how much we may so desire. It is necessary for us to have good vision and to be well acquainted with the road leading to the park before we can even think of bringing her there. In the same way, we must have a complete experience of full enlightenment before we can discern the best paths whereby all beings, with their varying mental aptitudes and temperaments, can be led to their own liberation from suffering.

Thus when we talk about the true purpose of meditation we are talking about the attainment of enlightenment, an attainment that enables us to fulfill not only our own aims but also those of all others. This is the entire purpose of and the only reason for engaging in meditation. All the great yogis and meditation masters of the past have practiced the Dharma with just this purpose in mind. Likewise, when we meditate—and in Buddha's teachings there are literally hundreds of different meditations to choose from depending on our level of realization—we should do so with this same motivation.

Thus spiritual practices are very necessary. We are not compelled to meditate by some outside agent, by other people, or by God. Rather, just as we are responsible for our own suffering, so are we solely responsible for our own cure. We have created the situation in which we find ourselves, and it is up to us to create the circumstances for our release. Therefore, as suffering permeates our life, we have to do

something in addition to our regular daily routine. This “something” is spiritual practice or, in other words, meditation. If we do not turn inwards and train our mind, but instead expend all our energy on arranging and rearranging the external aspects of our existence, then our suffering will continue. Our suffering has had no beginning, and if we do not adopt an effective spiritual practice, neither will it have an end.

Generally speaking, it is difficult to practice the Dharma in an environment of great material abundance. This is because there are many distractions to interfere with our meditation. However, the actual root of these distractions is not in the environment itself. It is not in the machines of industry, our food, or anything like that. It is within our own mind. It has been a pleasant surprise for me during this, my first visit to the West, to see that along with material progress there is substantial interest here in Dharma practice and in meditation of various types. Many people are sincerely searching for the higher meaning of human life, trying to transcend the everyday, animal concerns of their existence. In this respect I think it is very wise that people are trying to combine a spiritual with a practical way of life, one that provides deep mental as well as physical comfort. For such people life will certainly not be an empty promise.

Food prepared from many different ingredients can be truly delicious. In the same way, if we have a job or some such daily activity and also try to work as much as possible on perfecting a spiritual path and following the Dharma, our life can become very rich. The benefits we experience by combining these two approaches to life are far reaching.

There is a great difference between the mind, feelings and experiences of someone who adds an understanding of Dharma to his or her daily life and one who does not. The former meets with far less confusion and experiences far less suffering when encountering difficulties in the material world. He has a controlled mind and a meaningful framework within which he can handle his problems skillfully. This will apply not only to his everyday experiences but especially to those encountered when he dies.

If we have never engaged in any spiritual practice, have never trained our mind through the discipline of meditation, then the experiences surrounding our death can be very frightening indeed. For the most advanced Dharma practitioner, however, death is like a pleasant journey back home. It is almost like going to a beautiful park for a picnic. And even for someone who has not achieved the highest realizations afforded by meditation, death can be a comfortable, not horrible, experience. Such a person can face his death—something we must all eventually do—with his mind at ease. He is not overwhelmed by fear or worry about what he will experience, or about the loved ones, possessions or body he will leave behind. In this life we have already experienced birth and are now in the process of growing old. The one thing we all have left to look forward to is our death. Thus if our spiritual practice can help us face the inevitable with peace of mind, then our meditations have been very useful, although there are much higher purposes to which our practices can be put.

**T**o summarize, it is not the external appearance of our meditation that is important. Whether we sit with our arms folded this way and our legs crossed that way is of little consequence. But it is extremely important to check and see if whatever meditation we do is an actual remedy for our suffering. Does it effectively eliminate the delusions obscuring our mind? Does it combat our ignorance, hatred and greed! If it does reduce these negativities of mind, then it is a perfect meditation, truly practical and greatly worthwhile. If on the other hand it merely serves to generate and increase our

negativities, such as pride, then it is only another cause of suffering. In such a case, even though we may say we are meditating, we are not actually following a spiritual path or practicing Dharma at all.

**D**harma is a guide away from suffering, away from problems. If our practice does not guide us in this direction then something is wrong and we must investigate what it might be. In fact, the fundamental practice of all true yogis is to discover which of their actions bring suffering and which happiness. They then work to avoid the former and follow the latter as much as possible. This is the essential practice of Dharma.

One final word. All of us who are beginning our practice of Dharma, starting to meditate and gain control of our mind need to rely on proper sources of information. We should read books of sound authority and, when doubts arise, we should consult teachers who have mastered their study and practice. This is very important. If we are guided by books written without a proper understanding, there is the great danger that our life will be spent following an incorrect path. Even more important is choosing the correct teacher, guru or lama. He or she must have correct realizations and must actually live the practice of the Dharma.

Our practice of meditation, of mental cultivation, should not be passive. We shall not be able to break the bonds of suffering by blindly accepting what someone, even a great master, tells us to do. Rather we should use our innate intelligence to check and see if a suggested course of action is effective. If we have good reason to believe that a teaching is valid and will be helpful, then by all means we should follow it. As with medicine, once we have found some that can reasonably be expected to cure us, we should take it. Otherwise, if we swallow anything that happens to come into our hands, we run the great risk of aggravating rather than curing our illness.

This is my final suggestion for those beginners who have an interest in studying Dharma and meditating. Spiritual pursuits can be very worthwhile. Yet even if you cannot practice Dharma, a mere understanding of it can enrich your life and give it meaning. I think that is all. Thank you very much.

*Colophon:* Extracted from *Wisdom Energy*, edited by Jon Landaw.  
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# Meditation on the Mind Itself

*by Lama Thubten Yeshe*

Now, we try to concentrate on one's own consciousness. This approach to concentration we call sometimes non-conceptualization, non-conception, non-superstition. In Tibetan, *me.togpa*.

At this point the great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa in his Lam-rim says that one should contemplate on the clarity of one's own consciousness and not follow any other kind of phenomena, any other object, like some deity or form, or color or sound, or seed syllable or mantra. Lama Tsongkhapa said we should abandon these. So when we meditate and a special vision, a fantastic vision comes, even if the Buddha is coming or some other image comes, do not follow it.

The great yogi Tilopa said, "Leave the mind on consciousness alone without any color or any clothes added. Thereby the muddy superstition becomes clear. Contemplate on the consciousness only."

Fundamentally there are two things: the subject – consciousness, and the object – you can say the sensory world of phenomena. Lama Tsongkhapa said that when we contemplate on the consciousness mind we should never allow any kind of object, like form, color, or deity to come.

I think it is very sensible and very logical. Normally we are distracted by superstition thoughts of the sensory objects, aren't we? The five sense objects. This is our experience isn't it? So the superstition is most of the time linked with the sensory object. In conception, normally, our habit is a sensory object. So this habit we have to throw out. For that reason, contemplate on the clarity of one's own consciousness. It is so powerful.

Of course, in the beginning we have such a strong habit that the superstition of the sound, smell, color – all these things, comes out. But we use skill – we talked about that – we keep our memory strongly on our consciousness. Without disturbing this memory or consciousness concentration we use the skillful fish, remember, our mindfulness or awareness fish to examine or to watch the essence of superstition when that distracts and also sometimes watch how superstition manifests, how we conceive the superstition. So you are sort of mindful. Those are techniques. Remember yesterday we discussed this, that we need to eliminate distraction and also we have to abandon expectation: expecting something to happen, some kind of higher realization to come out. This kind of expectation, any kind of expectation becomes superstition. Just let go.

So the memory, concentration memory is strong and when enough satisfaction, clear, at that time let go.

The “let go” has many meanings. In other words, be a little bit loose rather than tight – putting tremendous effort. Sometimes we put too much effort and too much discipline. That also is not good because there is not enough letting go. Like when you are driving a car, you know, the speed, the situation, everything. Every situation is sort of the middle way: then you have to let go. But the new driver, he cannot let go. He also somehow wants change, busy, you know. New meditators have to learn how to let go. If you know how to let go, the root text of Mahamudra says, without doubt you will be liberated from superstition.

If you don’t know how to let go then you can never experience bliss. Like a car, at a certain point you let go, you enjoy, at a certain point is almost like flying, like an aeroplane you know, blissful car. But the new driver he doesn’t know how to let go. So he can’t feel blissful. It is similar with a meditator. So when you try too much, too much tight, not knowing how to let go, then at some point you hate meditation isn’t it? Even if you see a temple or your meditation cushion you don’t want to go near there. But when you know how to let go you taste blissful chocolate cake of meditation, so each time you do meditation you enjoy, blissful.

Also, when we say “let go”, that means the memory is kept going continuously. And also when we are distracted we use the awareness, the mindfulness and watching. We have a way to watch the essence of the superstition. That also is without losing (the object) At some point you reach, it’s difficult to eliminate the superstition, distraction, then you can stop again. Then better to stop meditation on the consciousness and just do breathing. Technical breathing concentration, just let go breathing, only just breath watching, that quickly cuts the gross levels of superstition. When the mind is neutralized, then go back again. Neutralized mind is already clean clear, isn’t it. So then you go back to concentration on the clarity of one’s own consciousness.

Also Lama Tsongkhapa emphasized much that the first time you get some experience of the clarity, you should be satisfied. You should not intellectualize, saying “Oh this is not enough, this is not clarity as my lama says”. That means just too much intellect is going, you know. It’s through your experience, not the words, intellectual words. So one should be satisfied. The clarity is infinite—now we have clarity.

Lama Tsongkhapa, in his experience, he said that when you contemplate on your own consciousness, at a certain point you develop such clarity that almost you have crazy thoughts. “I could count all the universal atoms”—you get this kind of experience. You can see clean clear because the subject consciousness develops such clarity and is sort of so sharp to discriminate all the subtle physical energy. You get that kind of experience. And also, because of developing clarity you can experience bliss: ecstatic bliss.

First you feel blissful physically, this is sort of the gross blanket; take that blanket off somehow and you only experience the consciousness level and feel the consciousness is experiencing universal space, a sort of unified experience. You feel you are no longer living in the physical world, no longer involved in the physical world, so that eliminates superstition because when we feel we are in the physical world, the superstition populations of form, sound, smell are busy complicating. For that reason non-conceptualize, because it is such a sensitive way to cut the conception of the sensory world. You can experience by developing concentration at a certain point, the ecstatic state of meditation; you can experience no form, no smell, no five sense objects that’s why it becomes so powerful.

Of course, when you stop meditation, again you feel sort of a new body, because in the meditation there is no body. So when you stop meditation you feel a new sort of body.

Because it's a new body even superstition has to come out, it's sort of a new thing isn't it? So easily we can kill superstition. Very light. Because we develop such clarity of concentration, even in dreams the conception for superstition, the five sense objects are much lighter. So even if you are sleeping, your sleep becomes meditation. Normally when we sleep, we have a heavy, impure projection: the dream coming. Remember? This is eliminated and also the dreams are sort of pure visions coming.

Lama Tsongkhapa said that we develop that way. If we change concentration many times, it is not so good because here we try to develop *samadhi* meditation, which means we should keep the same meditation object.

Samadhi meditation is the source of liberation and the source of telepathic power, this is only sensible isn't it? This we talked about. Lama Tsongkhapa said that if you develop such clarity of your own consciousness, you reach the ability of being able to count atoms or neutrons, such subtle energy you can count. It's almost telepathic isn't it? The scientific people, even if they use scientific equipment, they can't count them, but Lama Tsongkhapa can, isn't it. So now I have to be proud of Buddhism, OK.

This way the mental telepathic ability comes, from mind training. According to Abhidharma there are two things: through training you develop telepathic power, and also intuition.

Intuition I think maybe everybody has to some extent. Like you are here but somehow in your deepest heart you feel that something has happened to your dear friend in Melbourne; you know without superficial logic. Those are intuition, intuitive, telepathic. To gain the perfect samadhi and such telepathy is so essential. There is no way you can become liberated, no way you will become enlightened without this realization. That has no exception whether you are Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian, whatever. From the Buddhist point of view, everybody who wants to become enlightened has to have this kind of realization.

Also it is possible, due to the power of habit, repeated habit. So in consciousness meditation, when done repeatedly in such a skillful way, we eliminate the sluggishness and distraction, it becomes a sort of habit.

The gross levels of superstition are like these clothes. Each time you go deeper, deeper, you take off a layer. You reach more subtle, subtle states. When your mind reaches the subtle point, maybe deepest unconscious according to the western psychological view, so subtle that you touch reality, it is super powerful. Because subjectively your wisdom is so unbelievably subtle, so sharp—to touch reality is more powerful than a nuclear bomb. That is the feature. When you are developing deeper concentration, the superstition, gross levels of mind, you sort of keep taking out.

For that reason the tantric approach to Mahamudra is to eliminate the gross levels of consciousness and try to touch the subtle consciousness. This subtle consciousness will come out, then there is some automatic experience of non-duality or the great mahamudra. It seems like the subtle consciousness is at the moment neglected, is no longer functioning because gross superstition is overwhelming. Of

course if somebody intellectually debates, they say how can one stop this superstition? This superstition mind is, sort of scientifically speaking, present until we reach the tenth bodhisattva bhumi, almost difficult to stop isn't it. Then you say, if you reach a point of concentration, maybe four hours concentration on your consciousness without distraction or sluggishness then do you reach non-superstition? You can debate like that.

You can debate yes, but now we are talking about experience. The superstition is almost like the number of creatures in the ocean. From the Buddhist point of view, there are so many aspects of superstition in the ocean of our consciousness. So we have slowly, slowly, organically to remove them. Each time you get rid of a gross whale or a gross crocodile, you banish the gross animal mind. You experience no superstition. That's why I remember when I received the Mahamudra teaching from my guru, he exactly said "At a certain point of the Buddhist philosophical way of understanding, debate and these things, at a certain point you have to abandon. Don't bring this argument, go beyond this argument". I remember exactly because for me my conception was so strong because I trained in philosophy, so I have preconceptions, always trying to add strong concepts you know. If he says this, I try to make it this way. If he is this way, I try to make this way. I remember. So these preconceptions sometimes eliminate such a powerful experience.

Now, the experience of non-conceptualization or non-superstition doesn't mean suddenly you reach beyond dualistic concepts. No. Dualistic conception is like blankets, you know. So many. That's why, I'm sure, some of you know already from the first bodhisattva bhumi to the tenth there are something like nine different obstacles. Each stage eliminates certain of the dualistic obstacles. OK? So you understand how this experience comes, this is possible if we go in the right direction.

I think sometimes I experience that if I'm looking someplace strongly my mind is totally involved in maybe a flower or something like that, I can't even hear a loud sound. I think this is a normal experience, everybody has experienced this. So simple, a normal example. It's possible, that when we contemplate and continuously stop perceiving form, color, sound, smell all these things, these things stop, so the superstition door is sort of closed. Then tremendous ecstatic bliss energy comes, it intuitively comes. This is very powerful to eliminate the dualistic thinking. By contemplating one's own consciousness, when you reach a certain point the two things, object and subject, are no longer existent in a certain way, just because you are in such a unified state. The longer you stay in that state, the more powerful to eliminate such complex dualistic thought.

I feel it is so simple, the clarity energy is always existent within us. What matters is that we penetrate and concentrate. Such bliss, universal reality, is within us: we have to sort of switch it on.

The more you experience an internal state of bliss, the more you develop concentration, the more you will be happy to meditate. In other words, as the result of your meditation you will experience this.

Our consciousness is like Australian land. Before there was no wire, no fences, now so many people put wire: the superstition is like wire, as long as each of us feels individualistic. When we remove this wire it's one land, one Australia land. This is similar. The one state of omnipresent wisdom, eternal peace, eternal bliss state. If you understand this you understand that we human beings are capable of communication with each other. I think that's also good psychological understanding. Sometimes we think, impossible. I can't communicate with you. No way. No point in trying. Normally we think that

way. Wrong conception, wrong conception. The Buddhist point of view is every being, male or female, chicken or insect, everybody can reach the certain point, total state, without any distinction.

Lama Tsongkhapa says that when we contemplate on our own consciousness we should not think concerning time: past, present future. It becomes a distraction.

Our habit is so concerned with time, and our habit, which has actually very little value, has to be broken. Only when you contemplate, only when the clean clear state is existent, is the energy of consciousness not concerned with time and space – not concerned with color or whatever it is, sensory objects. At this stage any concept, even how wonderful that all living beings reach Buddhahood, at that time is not valid. It's only this experience. Even if you remember your previous life, fantastic yogi in the Himalayan mountains, you understand, all the memory in this kind of meditation should be stopped.

You should not be scared – “Wow, I have to stop all my normal memory, that means maybe I have to become unconscious, you know. This monk tries to teach me totally to go to sleep, to have sleepy mind.” No. No. Why? Because normally our memory is on, off, on, off; and on, off, on, off...it is an interference to develop mindfulness. The continuous non-stopping memory is the resource of mindfulness or awareness.

I think good enough. So now somehow you know how to deal better. Maybe two questions, then we stop.

**Q:** Lama, you have given us the idea of contemplating clear awareness. How can we do this if we have never experienced it?

**Lama:** OK. Good question. I understand that sometimes the concept of clarity of consciousness is difficult for the western mind, but I say the way to bring comprehension of clarity of consciousness is by observing, contemplating, sticking to the vision of thought. Through the vision of the rays of thought you can go into the clarity of thought. The example is, through the rays of the sun you can discover the sun.

I think he (Kelsang) is shocked. He knows I went beyond Tibetan culture. Tibetan lamas when they give Mahamudra teaching, I'm sure, never teach like that. Not like that. I think it's historically non-existent. Sorry but only in Australia!

Also remember I made the example, when the mirror is clear the reflection is taken. When the water is clear, the reflection of the moon is there, clean clear. Similar: we do have such clean clear energy within us, that's why we can take all the sensory perceptions, and that's the beauty of the human quality. OK.

**Q:** When I try to realize the non existence of anything, I choose the sun and pull it apart into pieces until I have broken the atoms up and there's nothing there that I can see. Is it only my delusion that brings it together?

**Lama:** I think so. That's a good example isn't it? I think normally the dualistic mind is putting things together, that is its function. When this disappears then we can experience non-duality. For example sometimes in my mind I completely chop my body into pieces, like it becomes atoms. Sometimes that

is helpful to quickly experience non-duality.

**Q:** Also, does that mean that if everybody believes the world is flat then it will become flat?

**Lama:** If you believe it, you see the world as flat. If you believe it round it becomes round.

**Q:** If I believed snow was purple and everybody else believed it was purple, would it still be white?

**Lama:** Everybody who? Shakyamuni, his eye could not believe it as you see. Everybody means who? Everybody means Buddha also is there. OK. So if you see white as purple, it could be in a certain environment, a certain energy involved to see this white as purple, but those who don't have such a condition obstacle don't see that. They just see white as it is.

**Q:** Then if Buddha looked at the earth would he see it as round or flat?

**Lama:** Buddha sees the earth round according to your mind. Buddha sees the earth flat according to my mind. Not for him. OK. Maybe twelve o'clock. Better we stop.

*Colophon:* Excerpt from *Mahamudra*, "Fourth Discourse" by Lama Thubten Yeshe, transcript reprinted here for the "Discovering Buddhism" program with permission from Wisdom Publications. Lightly edited by Kendall Magnussen, FPMT Education Department.

# Simple Meditations

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

## *Breathing meditation for purification*

Visualize Compassion Buddha, Tara, or Medicine Buddha, etc. As you inhale, light from the deity's heart, which is in the nature of great compassion, blesses all sentient beings. It fills the whole body and mind with great compassion, in the heart. Keep the mind in that state for awhile, in that feeling of great compassion towards every sentient being, without discrimination, feeling their suffering and generating the thought to free them all from the sufferings and problems, by oneself.

Then exhale all the defilements, all the delusions, negative karma, negative imprints and particularly the ego. It comes out as you exhale in the form of smoke or pollution. It goes beyond this world. This is using the breathing meditation for purification.

Then again, as you inhale slowly, again light comes from the heart of Compassion Buddha. Think that it is the essence of wisdom, the fully awakened mind, the omniscient mind, in the form of white light. It fills the whole body and mind. Keep the mind in that state.

Then exhale all the defilements, negative karma, and negative imprints, particularly ignorance. It comes out in the form of smoke or pollution, like pollution comes from a chimney. It goes away from beyond the world. Think you are completely purified.

Then inhale, again light comes from the heart of Compassion Buddha, think that it is the essence of power, power to be able to help everyone, to free them immediately, to be able to free them from all the problems, the sufferings and the causes of sufferings. This thought is the highest thought: to free them from negative imprints and for them to achieve perfect happiness immediately, to free them from the suffering and the causes of sufferings. Think that the light is perfect power to give temporal and ultimate happiness all the way up to enlightenment. Receive this in the form of white light, the whole body and mind is filled with white light in the nature of perfect power to do perfect works for all sentient beings, like the Buddha.

[For example, some doctors are able to know exactly the person's sickness and able to give the right medicine and able to heal immediately. So, to be able to realize that perfect power for all the activities you are doing for others.

If you are a schoolteacher, then being able to awaken the children's minds from ignorance immediately and be able to eliminate their ignorance by teaching.



If someone is doing consultation, then to realize perfect power and be particularly able to solve that person's problems. By seeing and talking to that person, you are able to solve immediately their problems and able to fill that person's mind with great peace and happiness. Also all the person's anger – immediately you are able to purify and generate open heart and the thought of love and compassion towards others, including the person with whom that person has problems.]

First, you do breathing meditation. Then, you watch the mind.

### *Meditation on the Mind*

The mind is looking at the mind that is concentrating. You are watching that mind, that is doing the breathing meditation. You are paying attention to that mind that is watching the mind.

**There are two things.** Mind watching the mind: thoughts passing through, but at the same time you are aware, like the police watching people go out and come in. The other is the mind looking at the nature of the mind, that which is formless, colorless, and shapeless, but clearly perceives the object. Some may find it difficult, but some able. I think that especially for western people these things are difficult so you can do the meditation (above) for beginners, which brings quietness and peace. After that, then one can also have discussion about Buddhist philosophy, reincarnation, the meaning of life, why people suffer. Start with some analysis.

Use Tara or Medicine Buddha, something nice that just by seeing or visualizing there is peace in the heart. Then chant the mantras.

### *Meditation on the Four Immeasurables*

*[Please see Ven. Sangye Khadro's explanation on "The Practice of the Four Immeasurables" in Awakening a Kind Heart (Amitabha Buddhist Centre, Singapore, or online at: [www.fpmtabc.org.sg](http://www.fpmtabc.org.sg).) The prayer of the four immeasurable thoughts can also be found in How to Meditate, by Kathleen McDonald, pp. 145 & 149]*

*This is very good for beginners; it is very good to make the life very meaningful. The meditation for generating the four immeasurable thoughts is very good. You can do it like this:*

First is generating the immeasurable thought of equanimity. You can do it over and over again. You can do it 3 times, 4 times, 5 times, 6 times, etc.

Then, generating the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, over and over again.

Then, generating the immeasurable thought of compassion over and over again.

Then generating the immeasurable thought of joyfulness.

It depends on the students, one can repeat many times and do the meditation because with each practice you collect merit like limitless sky. With the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, each time you meditate you create the cause to be born as a wheel-turning king because you create incredible merit.



I think the result of being born a wheel-turning king is collected with each of the practices. Each time you generate these thoughts, you create limitless skies of merit, especially if one does it with *tong-len*, generating the thought of taking on all the sentient beings sufferings within ourselves within one's own heart, the ego, and then it destroys the ego.

With the immeasurable thought of equanimity, take on other sentient beings sufferings and the cause of sufferings, also the cause of sufferings from wars and global pollution.

When you practice the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, at that time you give your body, a wish-fulfilling jewel, and all the merit up to enlightenment, and all the causes.

With the immeasurable thought of joyfulness, you give to sentient beings.

### *About dedication*

It is very good if someone is very sick or has large problems, maybe who is dying or has died, for the group to dedicate. Even if you are only a few people, when you dedicate to Buddha and purify together and include those people who are dying, or have problems, etc., sometimes due to the power of people's minds, it can cure. It can have success.

*Colophon:* From Lama Zopa Rinpoche's advice to Jhamba Drolkar on how to start a study group in Amherst, MA, USA. Scribed by Ven. Holly Ansett, 13 November 2000, Aptos, CA, USA. Edited by Kendall Magnussen, FPMT Education Department.

# A Short Teaching on Calm Abiding

*Extracted from the Discovering Buddhism Video Series, 2, “How to Meditate.”*

## *Introduction*

Meditation is an essential step to develop on the path to enlightenment. Even in our daily lives we can see that with good concentration we accomplish much more work of better quality. Without a stable mind, we are like a candle sitting in the wind: we are vulnerable to negative influences and don't have much power to progress on the spiritual path.

All Buddhist masters have relied on meditation to gain realizations, and if we look at the benefits, it's easy to see why: we feel happier, balanced and focused, and we experience a sense of inner peace. But meditation is much more than a way to relax and feel happy; it's a proven method for us to experience the true nature of reality, the true nature of our minds.

## *Teaching*

*His Holiness the Dalai Lama:* When we speak about meditation, what do we mean by meditation? Meditation is a discipline where you cultivate certain familiarity with a chosen object of meditation. Generally, the problem is that in our normal day-to-day life, in our unreflective states of mind, generally we let ourselves to be under the control and domination of our mind and our mind comes under the domination of afflictive emotions and thoughts. And because of this, then it leads to influencing our states of mind on the whole to be overwhelmed by destructive and negative emotions and thoughts, which then perpetuates the whole cycle of problems, confusion, suffering, and so on.

What we are seeking in our spiritual practice is to try to reverse that cycle, so that gradually we will be in a position to take charge of our mind and prevent the mind from coming under the domination and influence of our negative impulses and thoughts. The way in which we do this is to engage in a constant discipline of cultivation of this familiarity with a chosen object so that we will be able to gain a certain stability of mind where we have the capacity to place our mind and allow it to abide single-pointedly with a degree of stability upon a certain chosen object. Here, when we speak about a chosen object, we are, of course, talking about a positive object upon which we direct our thoughts and then cultivate familiarity with it so that, in this way, gradually we'll be able to reverse the cycle. And this is the actual meaning and purpose of meditation in the Buddhist context.

*Venerable Rene Feusi:* To have a mind where you can control your thoughts and your emotions is incredible, without speaking about getting spiritual realizations. Just to be able to say, “Stop!” to the thought when you want, to say, “Stop!” to the emotions when you want; to have that capacity to be master of your own mind is a source of well-being.

To be able to say to all these thoughts: “Stop!” to these emotions: “Stop! I’ve had enough of you!” whenever you want to and stay still. To have this capacity is an incredible peace of mind, a great advantage. Suddenly, you become master of your own mind. If you want to develop any qualities of mind you need some mindfulness, some continuity in what meditation you do. For example, you meditate on love. If your meditation on love is constantly interrupted by other thoughts, there is no way you have the ability to develop strong love.

It is the same thing if you meditate about the nature of reality, how things really exist. If you have this inquiring mind which follows a stream of thought and wants to reach a conclusion and stay on that, you have to have a focused mind, which is able to follow the analysis without being distracted. And once you reach a conclusion to be able to look at it and see what it implies. You must be able to stay on the conclusion of your analysis and see what it implies; how to change your whole worldview based on that conclusion you have reached. So, in order to be able to do that, again you need to have a calm mind.

The more we have control of our own minds, what happens is that instead of going constantly up and down like a yo-yo being overly excited when something good happens and completely depressed when things goes wrong - our usual mind - with concentration your mind becomes much more even.

That evenness of mind is, actually, a type of joy, a type of peace which is so pleasant – much more pleasant actually than even the excitement of pleasure. To have this stillness inside is much more pleasant than having good news and good things happening out there.

We see that what we call pleasure, excitement, actually is a form of suffering, it’s not real happiness, it’s excitement. It’s like boiling water. There is no peace, no serenity in what we call pleasure. But this we see by practicing. So, that’s why I think it is very important to put effort into concentration, into developing calm abiding.

We can do this in everyday life. We don’t necessarily need to go into retreat to do that. Just know how to go about it and how to integrate it into your everyday life. In order to develop calm abiding, there are certain conditions that help.

### *Gathering Supportive Conditions*

All these conditions we can gather in our every day life, we don’t need necessarily to go to a completely isolated place. It just means having little desire, being content with one’s life situation, and having a little bit of a peaceful environment. Even though one might have a family life, still we can wake up a little earlier than everybody else and do some calm abiding then; or in the evening when everybody is in bed, or when the children are at school, or something like that. One can find a time in the day, if one wants it, for a peaceful meditation.

The first point is developing the wish to do calm abiding meditation by **thinking of its advantages** like mentioned above. The second point is **making a determination**, “I am going to do it now, I will rest my mind on, for example, the movement of the breath or a Buddha’s image for, let’s say, ten minutes and I am not going to lose the object.” Then, third point, you develop gradually the force of your **mindfulness**, which in this context means being able to hold onto your object without losing it.

You try to extend the duration of not forgetting the object, until you are able to hold it continuously for the whole duration of the session. Once you are able to do that, the fourth point is to use **introspection** to check the quality of your concentration to make it more precise. The fifth point is **applying antidotes**, which means; if you are prone to dullness, then you hold the object more intensely and if you have excitement, you relax a little bit the grip on your object. Then, the sixth and last point, is **not to over-apply antidotes**, when your meditation is going well and you are fully on the object of focus without excitement and dullness, then at that point to tighten or loosen the grip of your object becomes a distraction. So slowly, like that, you find the middle way and you have to hold on to it. At the beginning a lot of effort is needed, but as your mind becomes more supple and acute the process becomes easier until you are able to hold the object effortlessly with clarity and intensity for any duration. At that point, many positive experiences start dawning in your mind, like progressive levels of inner bliss, peace, and clarity of mind. The mind gradually develops its ability to abide calmly through nine stages.

### *The Nine Stages of Calm Abiding*

Just in brief, I will go a little bit over that. When one starts meditating on calm abiding – sits down and says, “Okay, I’m going to meditate for ten minutes. For ten minutes, I will hold this Buddha image or watch the breath.” At the first stage, one says, “Wow, what a mess.” One realizes that one hardly ever finds the object. During the whole session, we say “Oh yes, I am supposed to watch the breath,” and then the mind goes all over the place. Only from time to time, you remember that you are supposed to watch the breath but your mind most of the time is going all over the place. This is the first stage of meditating on calm abiding. It’s called **“placing the mind.”** It’s actually trying to bring the mind onto the object in the first place. The whole session is spent bringing the mind on the object because most of the time it’s away.

Then, the second stage is called **“placement with continuity.”** There, one is able to bring the mind on the object and stay for a little while before losing it again. There is continuity. Before, there was no continuity at all; you just bring it there and “poof,” it goes off; you bring it there and it goes off. Here, there is continuity.

The third stage is called **“patch-like placement.”** There, you are able to stay on the object for quite a while. You stay on the object and from time to time you lose it, but then as soon as you lose it, you are aware that you are losing it and you are able to bring the mind back.

The fourth stage is called **“close placement.”** At the fourth stage, from the beginning to the end of your session, you don’t lose the object at all. During the whole session, you are able to hold on to the object. There still is distraction and dullness, but one part of your mind never loses the object any more.

Then, the fifth stage is called **“controlling.”** Because on the fourth level, you are able to stay for the whole session on the object, the gross aspect of excitement and laxity has subsided. Because the object is there, stable and clear there is danger now of relaxing ones effort and being prone to subtle laxity.

By familiarizing yourself with the object, you reach a state of inner peace you have never experienced before. It’s like your mind was always like boiling water. Suddenly, the boiling water has subsided and you find that your mind experiences a kind of tranquility that you never had before and you realize,

“Wow, that’s quite pleasant!”

The difference between the fifth and the fourth levels is that at the fifth there is no more gross laxity and gross excitement.

The sixth stage is called **“pacifying.”** Here one is able to recognize with introspection even subtle excitement and laxity as a fault. What is missing is the *intensity* of holding on to the object. In general, when one reaches that stage, it is better to lean towards the side of subtle excitement than to lean toward the side of subtle laxity because subtle excitement is easier to recognize.

At the seventh stage, **“thorough pacifying”** you can stay on the object continuously and when subtle excitement and laxity arise you can easily stop them. However you still need strong effort. You sit there and you stay on the object and from time to time you have to check if excitement or laxity has come about but the main bulk of your sitting, you are constantly aware of the object, the excitement and dullness is not so strong anymore. It doesn’t happen often and even if it arises, you just have to “poof, poof, poof,” and the subtle thought will stop or the subtle emotion will stop.

Actually, it is a process of going from your ordinary mind, which has distortions and things like that, to go into your mind of calm abiding. It is like entering into a tunnel or entering into something. You focus your mind on the object and you go through certain stages to go into the mind of calm abiding.

The eighth stage is called **“making one-pointed.”** Here one just needs a little effort at the beginning of the session to control subtle excitement and laxity, but then it becomes a free ride. The whole session of meditation happens without interruptions from them.

Then the ninth stage is called **“placement with equanimity.”** So here, there is no more effort. As soon as you sit down, you are so familiarized with that state of meditation, you just sit down and you are in that state for the whole session. No matter how long, you can stay on the object without any excitement or any dullness. That’s a fantastic state of mind.

This is the ninth stage of calm abiding; it is not the fully qualified calm abiding yet. You have to cultivate that for a certain period of time and if you cultivate that, there is a transformation of your body and mind that happens. There is a kind of physical bliss, which arises, and a mental bliss. This physical and mental bliss gives rise to a special physical suppleness or pliancy, or lightness about your body and a lightness about your mind: a sharpness, a suppleness about the mind, a pliancy where you can apply your mind for anything virtuous you want, whenever you want. The mind always has great enthusiasm; you never lose enthusiasm for doing something positive. Also, many pure forms are seen in dreams and one does not lose awareness during sleep anymore.

When this process has happened – this physical and mental bliss has arisen and then the physical suppleness and mental suppleness has arisen and gets stabilized – then this is called **“calm abiding.”**

It is a very clear path, it is very well put down so you know exactly where you are, what your problem is, and how to face it to go to the next stage. This you will find in the lam-rim tradition in the section on calm abiding. There is a detailed explanation on this there. So, good luck.

*Biographies:*

*His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama*, Tenzin Gyatso, has lived in India as the exiled Head of State and Spiritual Leader of the Tibetan people since the Chinese occupation in 1959. His Holiness, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is one of the most renowned and beloved spiritual leaders in the world and has traveled to over 46 nations as a major proponent of human rights and world peace.

*Venerable Rene Feusi* is a fully ordained monk in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition with 20 years of experience in teaching and practicing Dharma. Venerable Rene is originally from Geneva, Switzerland and spent several years studying at Nalanda monastery in the south of France. He has spent a great deal of time doing long meditation retreats throughout Europe, India and Nepal. Venerable Rene is very skilled in leading meditations on calm abiding and emptiness.

*Colophon:*

Extracted from Discovering BUDDHISM Video Series, 2, “How to Meditate.” Lightly edited by Ven. Rene Feusi and Kendall Magnussen, May 2004.

# Listening, Thinking and Meditating

*by Geshe Jampa Tegchok*

The first verse says that listening, thinking, and meditating are practices of a Bodhisattva. Having attained a precious human life with the eighteen characteristics, we should listen, think and meditate upon the Buddha's teachings to bring to fruition our Dharma aims. From these three activities, we gain three wisdoms. First we develop the wisdom of listening. In dependence upon that, we generate the wisdom of thinking, and following that, the wisdom of meditating. The three wisdoms are produced gradually, in this order.

Here, listening does not simply mean letting a sound enter our ears. It involves a certain level of understanding. Suppose, for example, we hear a teaching stating that the aggregates—our body and mind—are impermanent, that is, that they change moment by moment. If we assent to that, thinking, “Yes, the aggregates are impermanent,” the wisdom occurring simultaneously with that thought is the wisdom of listening.

Thinking is the process of analyzing. Here, we check to discover whether the aggregates are impermanent or not. The wisdom resulting from that analysis, an understanding that knows that the aggregates are definitely impermanent, is the wisdom of thinking.

Meditation is placing the mind single-pointedly upon the fact that has been decisively ascertained through the process of thinking. The wisdom of meditation is the wisdom occurring with that concentration. In this example, it would be wisdom focused single-pointedly on the aggregates being impermanent.

In a slightly wider context, scripture states that first we need to abide in the ethical discipline of avoiding the ten destructive actions. On that basis, we listen to Dharma teachings and generate the wisdom of hearing. Then we think, check, and analyze to generate the wisdom of thinking. Finally, we meditate, by placing the mind single-pointedly on that meaning and thus generate the wisdom of meditation.

We need to listen well, and we must listen a lot. It is necessary to listen to teachings on a topic several times, not only once. Each time we hear, study, or read the teachings, we understand a little more and gain a broader view of them. We see the example of great lamas who are alive today: they continuously listen to the teachings of their spiritual guides and read the scriptures. Without adequate hearing, we will not be able to think very well, and of course then we will not be able to meditate well and it will be difficult to realize the Dharma and transform our mind.



Let us look at how one person can practice hearing, thinking, and meditating along an entire path. On the basis of avoiding the ten destructive actions, first she listens to the subjects that are common to all vehicles. They include the precious human life, death, refuge, and karma. Having listened well to those subjects, she thinks and meditates on them. Then should she wish for a more vast practice, she can take the Bodhisattva ordination, keep the Bodhisattva precepts, and again listen to, think about, and meditate upon the subjects connected with the Bodhisattva path, such as loving-kindness, compassion, bodhicitta, and the six far-reaching attitudes. Then, if she has an interest in the profound side, she will take the tantric ordination, keep those commitments, and listen, think, and meditate on the tantric path—the generation and completion stages. This, in general, is the order to be followed.

If it were only necessary to listen a little, why did the Buddha give eighty-four thousand teachings? Why did later Indian sages compose so many commentaries? The fact is that the more teachings we can listen to the better. If we try to climb a mountain, without hands, we cannot grab hold of anything. Trying to meditate without hearing is like that. We cannot catch hold of any grounds or paths.

Having listened to the teachings well, we will become familiar with everything that is to be practiced and we will gradually give up all faults. For example, by listening to teachings on the initial level of practice, we will understand the subjects at that level and will be free of the ignorance of not understanding them. By practicing what we learn, we will abandon the faults related to this stage.

It is said, “Through hearing, one attains liberation.” From good hearing comes good thinking and good meditation. Through these we can abandon negativities, purify ourselves, and finally attain a state in which all karma has been exhausted.

What we call analytical or checking meditation is, in general, meditation. But within the three—hearing, thinking, and meditating—it is not termed meditation but thinking. In the three, meditation refers to putting the mind on a subject that has been clearly ascertained through contemplation. It is best to put the mind on the object single-pointedly, but that is not necessary. In the three, analytical meditation is included in thinking because it is here that we decisively ascertain the meaning of a particular teaching and how to practice it.

Hearing, thinking, and meditating are to be practiced in union. That is, we should apply ourselves to all three practices of hearing, thinking, and meditating with regard to all of the essential topics, including impermanence, suffering, emptiness, selflessness, love, and compassion.

### *Analytical meditation*

How do we know that we have gained the intended result from a given meditation? How much time should we spend on each meditation? How do we prevent the experiences we gain from deteriorating? We shall then cover the general points regarding this now, and points related to specific meditation topics will be dealt with as they arise in the root text. Analytical meditation was briefly mentioned above. We shall spend some time explaining it, since it is vital for us to understand.

Although we have heard many teachings and may be enthusiastic to teach them to others, our mind is not subdued and our qualities are not developed. What is the difficulty? We have not gained



experience from meditation and have not integrated our knowledge into our experience. In other words, we know a lot, but have not meditated on it properly. Merely knowing the teachings does not constitute analytical meditation. This does not produce the internal transformation that analytical meditation does. Analytical meditation is real meditation, important meditation. It is indispensable for generating realizations.

Occasionally, strong determination to be free from cyclic existence or strong faith in the Three Jewels may arise without having meditated a lot. This is not analytical meditation. From time to time we might think, “Cyclic existence is awful. I’m off to a cave in the mountains to meditate.” Or we may suddenly have a strong feeling of love for all sentient beings, but then it vanishes and we feel as we did before. Sometimes we may have a sense of the emptiness of inherent existence and think, “Now I’ve realized emptiness. This is fantastic!” But then the experience fades away and we think, “Oh no, I’ve lost the realization!” That also is not an experience arising from analytical meditation. What are these experiences then? They are a form of belief or correct assumption. They are positive, but unstable. If they were inferential valid cognitions arising from thinking, they would not deteriorate quickly. When they go, do not be unhappy. They arose due to the blessing of the spiritual teacher, the Three Jewels, or from good imprints from past lives. We should try to make them firm. To do this, we should inspect the conditions which brought them about and try to reconstruct and maintain those conditions. We should keep going and not allow them to degenerate. The way to make these sudden flashes of understanding stable is by familiarizing ourselves with them through analytical meditation. An experience that arises from analytical meditation is valid and stable. It comes from having thought about something at length so that we understand it deeply. Analytical meditation does not mean repeating the words of the teachings to ourselves or going over the points of the teachings in a dry, academic way. It means thinking deeply about the Dharma and applying it to our own lives. It involves checking the teaching to see if it is logically consistent, if it describes our experience, if it is more realistic and beneficial than our usual way of thinking.

For example, a person new to the Dharma might hear about the precious human life. She may have a strong experience regarding this, but subsequently it disappears. That strong feeling was an experience which arose from hearing and was easily lost. To make it stable, she should do analytical meditation to gain experience that arises from thinking and contemplating. Then it will be more firm and transformative.

If we have heard many teachings and have a lot to explain to others, but do not familiarize ourselves with them and experience them, we might become immune or thick-skinned towards the Dharma. This means that when hearing teachings, we sit there thinking, “Yeah, I know, I know. I’ve heard all that before. Why doesn’t my teacher say something new and interesting?” Or we comment to ourselves, “This teacher could improve his way of speaking. His delivery is boring.”

We will know when we become immune to the Dharma. Our mind becomes tougher and tougher, even though we know a lot. Instead of our mind being subdued, it becomes worse. If, by having heard a lot and knowing a lot, our mind becomes better—more flexible and open-minded, more receptive and appreciative of the teachings—then we do not have the problem of being immune to Dharma. But when our mind becomes hard or proud, it is difficult to cure. Usually the way to make the mind flexible is to know what the Buddha taught. However, in this case, we may know the

meaning of the Gradual Path, but our mind has become tough. We have become insensitive to the medicine of Dharma. If a person has become immune to the Dharma, it is difficult for him or her to benefit even from a great master. Why? The spiritual master may use one reason to explain a certain point, but this student has studied a lot and thinks, “I know a better reason. I know more reasons.” It is difficult to benefit someone when his or her mind has become hard like this. Therefore, we should try to avoid this happening to us.

In Tibetan monasteries, when the pupils became clever the teacher says, “Be careful, you’re becoming immune to Dharma.” Those who do not know much have no danger of becoming immune, so there is no need to warn them. It is those who, knowing a little, become proud of their knowledge and proud of their ability to explain it to others, who are in the greatest danger. They should be especially careful. When bad people meet Dharma their minds can easily be made good. Before, they did not know Dharma and acted destructively. Then they meet Dharma and easily become good. But if they know a lot and their minds become immune to Dharma, it is very hard to change. The experience that arises from listening is a superficial understanding. To deepen it we must practice analytical meditation. Even if we have only a little definite knowledge from analytical meditation, there is no danger of becoming immune to Dharma because the understanding has been made secure by tying it to our experience.

How do we do analytical meditation? Take the precious human life, for example. This topic includes identifying the characteristics of a precious human life, seeing its value, and knowing its rarity and difficulty to attain. We think about each of the eighteen characteristics of a precious human life one by one. We use reasons to recognize the advantages of each freedom and fortune. It is also helpful to think about quotations from the Buddha or the past sages on this topic. We also look at our own experience and recognize our potential. By familiarizing ourselves with this topic consistently over time we will begin to feel from our heart that we are unbelievably fortunate, that our life is highly meaningful, and that it would be a terrible pity to waste it on meaningless activities. This is analytical meditation. As we engage in analytical meditation, we make our understanding firmer. As a result it will not disappear easily and our mind will not doubt the value of our precious human life even if someone else disagrees. This understanding has been planted firmly in our mind.

A person who does not do analytical meditation might hear that the aggregates are impermanent. He might think, “Yes, they are impermanent.” But that understanding can easily change. He might meet someone who says the aggregates do not change moment by moment and thus are permanent, and he starts to wonder, “Maybe they are permanent, after all!” This situation arises because the person did not make his initial understanding firm by thinking about it deeply and from many angles in analytic meditation.

Someone may study a little Dharma and like it, but then meet a non-Buddhist teacher who says, “The Buddha’s teaching is wrong. If you devote yourself to my path, you will gain powers immediately.” The person then stops her Dharma practice and adopts another path. This is because she had not yet gained her own inner experience of the Dharma. Her understanding was at the level of listening only, and she had not yet validated it and made it firm through contemplation and analytical meditation. When we experience the Dharma, whatever anyone may say will not shake us. Our understanding will be firm, not wishy-washy.

The Buddha said we should not just take his word on anything, but check for the truth of his teaching by way of three analyses. These are likened to the three types of analysis made by those buying gold. First they check for the more obvious faults by rubbing the gold, then for less obvious ones by cutting it, and finally for the subtlest impurities by burning the gold. The Buddha said, “Check my teachings in this way too. See if they are true or not. Make your understanding firm through reasoning, and do not believe on faith alone.” Lama Tsong Khapa also stressed this. This instruction gives us so much freedom. It is really marvelous advice.

### *Glance meditation*

The word “meditation,” in general, includes several types of meditation. Besides analytical meditation in which we validate the points of the teachings using reasons, scriptural quotations, and by applying them to our own life, and single-pointed meditation in which we focus single-pointedly on what has been previously discerned by analysis, there is also glance meditation. Before doing analytical meditation on the topics of the Gradual Path, we need an overall idea of the entire path. Then we will be able to look at the whole path like someone who has a panoramic view of a town from a nearby hilltop. It is like having a map indicating all the countries, geographical features, and so on. In other words, we need to know the structure of the path, its outline, its main headings, the order of the meditations, the connections between them, and so on. When we know the structure of the Gradual Path clearly, we will feel confident that when we go through the meditations one by one, spending an appropriate amount of time on each, we will be able to develop the realizations. This is the purpose of glance meditation. We can do a glance meditation on the path each day, in order to leave an imprint of the entire path on our mindstream. Through this, in time we will have a thick layer of imprints and seeds for realizing the whole path.

Glance meditation is thinking briefly and succinctly about all the points of a particular meditation in their proper order. If we have studied well, glance meditation will come easily and will help us understand what we have studied. For example, we review that the meditation on precious human life has three major divisions: identifying it, seeing its value, and recognizing its rarity and difficulty to receive. The first part, in turn, has the ten freedoms which are 1, 2,3,... and the ten fortunes which are 1, 2, 3 Then we go on to the next topic, impermanence and death, and do the same, and so on until we have recollected the essential points of all the meditations of the Gradual Path. Glance meditation is very worthwhile and important, for it plants seeds of the various realizations on our mindstream. However, its function is not to gain certainty on the points, for it is too brief and concise for that. It does help us to remember the points and to understand how they fit together and gradually develop in our mind. The great masters of the past have written various prayers that serve as glance meditations, for example, The Foundation of All Good Qualities by Lama Tsong Khapa, and the “Lamrim Prayer” at the end of The Guru Puja by Panchen Lobsang Chokyi Gyaltzen.

If we are new and not familiar with all the steps in the Gradual Path and with their individual points, it is helpful to meditate on them in a summarized form with glance meditation. Then, we can gradually go into it more extensively with analytical meditation. This is advised for any topic: first ascertain it in a general way. At the beginning, do not go into it extensively, thinking about each detail. It is better at first to develop a general understanding in which we know the fundamental point of each topic and the principal reasons to back it up and then progressively make our meditation more exten-

sive by doing analytical meditation. It is like painting a picture: we make a sketch of the entire scene first and gradually fill in the details. We do not paint one corner of the canvas in all its detail, leaving the rest blank. Thus in learning the Buddha's teachings, we first learn the summarized, essential points, then learn all the topics in detail. Once we have gained experience in each topic, we can go through it in a concise way again because now it is easy and the feeling can arise in our mind quickly.

### *How to do analytical meditation*

In daily life we often do "analytical meditation." For example, when we are attached to a certain person, our basic assertion is, "He/she is wonderful!" Then we think of many reasons to prove that. She looks good, she is intelligent. He has a good mind, he is kind. She is interesting to listen to. He is marvelous to look at. With these reasons and many more, we strengthen our feeling that this person is wonderful, and as a result our attachment fully blossoms and we think that we have to be with that person to be happy. There is no other way; we can't bear to be without him or her. This mental process is analytical meditation. If someone says otherwise, that he or she is unpleasant, not so attractive, we do not listen to a word of it because we are completely convinced. Analytical meditation is like this.

Sometimes we engage in analytical meditation on anger. We think such and such a person is bad. We confirm this with various reasons, such as remembering that he hurt us or our friends in the past and that he is talking behind our back now. We speculate on the harm he might do in the future. We also back it up with quotes, "My friend said this person can't be trusted," and so on. The more reasons we have, the more convinced we become and the more impervious we are to another's words pointing out that person's good qualities.

Similarly, there are some people to whom we are very close, who have helped us a lot, or with whom we have spent a lot of time. When they die, we think of them wherever we go. Everything we do reminds us of them. We think of them again and again, "If they were alive, we would do this and that, we would have a good time together. How wonderful it would be!" By repeatedly calling them to mind and thinking about them, we miss them even more and our suffering increases.

This is how "analytical meditation" reinforces our disturbing attitudes. Yet, we can use the same technique to reflect on Dharma topics for the purpose of increasing our constructive attitudes. To do this we repeatedly contemplate a particular topic and the reasons used to prove its various points. We should use whatever reasons and examples we can to make the meditation topic clear and convincing, and keep the topic in mind without forgetting it. As we do so, we will experience the conclusion more and more strongly, and we then hold this experience in our mind single-pointedly. When this happens, it is a sign that our analytical meditation is yielding results. For example, if we meditate on impermanence and death, we go through the three root points and the nine subsidiary points one by one: "Death is definite because everyone must die, because our lifespan is continuously decreasing and cannot increase, because we will die without having practiced Dharma if we continue wasting our time." We think about each point in depth, relating it to examples from our own life, using reasons, and applying it to our own experience. Thus the feeling dawns in our mind, "I must practice Dharma. This is really important." When this feeling arises strongly, we cease analyzing and focus our mind on it as much as possible. This has a transformative effect on our mind. After that we can go on to meditate on the second root in the death meditation. Some people associate the term

“analytical” with dry, intellectual verbiage and thus think analytical meditation is intellectualizing. This is not correct. By examining the steps of the path closely, with reasons and examples, and by applying it to our own lives, very strong experiences can arise that transform our mind.

It is possible that despite continuous meditation, our mind does not seem to be noticeably changing in a positive way. In such a case, there is a danger of becoming immune to Dharma. To avoid it, we should temporarily stop our analytical meditation and focus on practices that purify karmic obscurations and accumulate positive potential for a week or two. It is also helpful to do guru yoga practices, such as Lama Tsong Khapa Guru Yoga, in which we recite the prayer requesting his inspiration. Then we can resume analytical meditation.

These practices to purify negativities and accumulate positive potential are very important to prepare our mind for analytical meditation. Our mind is like a field in which realizations grow from the seeds of listening to teachings. For a seed to grow, the earth needs to be free from adverse conditions and to have conducive conditions such as water, fertilizer, and sunshine. Purifying negativities in our mind is like freeing the earth from adversities, while creating positive potential is comparable to adding the water, fertilizer, and sunshine. When these factors are as they should be, the seeds of realizations will gradually sprout and grow. Thus, whenever we get stuck in meditation, or if we do not gain the experience from a particular meditation that our spiritual teacher said ought to come from it, it is very helpful to put more attention on practices such as guru yoga, prostrations, offerings, and so forth. Making prayers of request to the Three Jewels is also very effective.

It is not necessary to do analytical meditation on every topic in the teachings. For example, in the Lamrim or Gradual Path, analytical meditation is not done on the first three main sections: (1) explaining the greatness of the author, to inspire confidence in the source of the text; (2) explaining the greatness of the teaching, to generate faith in the teaching; and (3) the way to teach and listen to the teaching possessing the above two qualities. Glance meditation is sufficient for these three points. Analytical meditation is only done on topics in the fourth section, entitled “The way to lead the disciple to enlightenment through the actual lamrim teachings.” This section starts with an explanation of the six preparatory practices, which are explained below, and then goes on to explain the way to follow a spiritual guide. Analytical meditation is necessary for the topics starting from “how to rely on a spiritual guide.”

Through analytical meditation we gain certainty about our topic of meditation. This is the experience gained from contemplation. To gain certainty means to realize with a valid mind, and within the different types of valid mind, this refers to valid inference. The experience arising from hearing is an understanding that is merely able to echo what we have heard. That level of understanding is called correct assumption or a belief that is true. Inference is much firmer; it is an incontrovertible understanding reached through sound reasoning.

When we do analytical meditation on a topic, we reflect on the various points, making effort to understand the reasons, the quotations, and their applications to our life. Applying it to our life means checking to what extent our life experiences confirm the points in the lamrim. It also means contemplating how to use the teachings to deal with situations and difficulties we encounter in our life. When, through such meditation, we develop positive thoughts, feelings, and outlooks, this is



called “experience requiring effort.” At this stage, when we are thinking about the topic, the experience arises and is heartfelt, but when we stop thinking about the reasons, it fades. To make it firm, we need to habituate ourselves to the experience that was generated with effort, and by doing this, it will eventually become effortless. Whenever we think of the topic, the experience will automatically arise without doing analysis, and this is called “effortless experience.” For example, if someone is very attached to something, merely by remembering it the attachment arises automatically, without having to think about many reasons. Currently our attachment is usually effortless while our Dharma understanding requires effort. However, by training our mind in the Dharma over time, the realizations of love, compassion, wisdom, and so on will become effortless, and it will take great effort to get angry or attached. Thus, first we do glance meditation to become familiar with the general layout of a topic. Then we apply effort to generate the experience of it. Finally, because our mind has become very familiar with the topic, the experience becomes effortless.

In general, we should meditate on the steps of the Gradual Path in the order they are presented. When we have gained deep experience or realization of one step, then we go on to do analytical meditation on the next. We should not neglect the previous steps, but continue to do glance meditation on them in order to keep our experience of them vibrant. Before realizing one subject, we should not move on and begin analytical meditation on the next. However, traditionally the Gradual Path begins by contemplating how to rely on a spiritual mentor. Because this topic is difficult and takes a lot of time to realize, it is not suitable to meditate only on this until we realize it. We can make it our main meditation while also doing analytical meditation on the topics that follow, which are easier. By proceeding in this way the realizations will come quicker in the long run. Thus, the advice from the lineage lamas is to carry out several series of meditations on several points along the path concurrently. This is like planting several seeds at once, and as a result having several trees with their blossoms and fruit simultaneously, instead of planting one seed, bringing that to maturity, then planting another seed, bringing that to maturity, and so on. This is the experience of past yogis.

In a meditation session, people who have received teachings on all the topics of the Gradual Path can either first do glance meditation on the entire path and then do analytical meditation on one topic, or first do analytical meditation on one topic and at the end of the session do glance meditation on the other steps of the path. Or we can do glance meditation up to the topic that we have reached in our analytical meditation, and then after the analytical meditation complete the glance meditation on the remainder of the path. We should do analytic meditation on the steps of the path in order: first relying on a spiritual mentor, then the precious human life, impermanence and death, and so on. If we neglect the meditations at the beginning of the path and meditate on love, compassion, and bodhichitta instead, it is useful, but if we do not go through the topics one by one in sequence with analytic meditation, there is no way that we can generate valid and firm realizations. If we do only glance meditation and not analytical meditation, the realizations will also not come about. Analytic meditation allows the mind to go deeply into a topic; we familiarize ourselves with it each day until a stable experience arises.

If some doubt arises while we are practicing analytical meditation, we should think it over, and if possible, discuss it with our spiritual mentor. If our teacher is not available, we can discuss it with knowledgeable Dharma friends who can give us good advice. If we do not discuss our doubts and merely brush them aside or suppress them, they can block our progress by making our mind tight and unclear. Thus it’s important to seek help to resolve our doubts.

In a retreat setting when we do several meditation sessions a day, the main glance meditation of the Gradual Path is done during the first session. A brief glance meditation can also be done when we develop our motivation at the outset of each session. Reviewing the steps of the Gradual Path makes our motivation clearer and stronger. If we do three meditation sessions daily, the first could be a glance meditation on the entire path, the second on one section of how to rely on a spiritual mentor, and the third on precious human rebirth. If we do four sessions daily, the fourth could be on emptiness, so that we can develop familiarity with this very important topic.

During such a retreat, the spiritual mentor often has the meditator live nearby. That way he or she can explain how to meditate on each topic one by one. The student does the meditation and the mentor asks, “What experience did you have? What ideas came to you?” In this way, the mentor guides the disciple through the experiences by means of analytical meditation. It is not always necessary that the student stay near his or her mentor. If he or she has ascertained well the reasons to be contemplated with analytical meditation and has a solid foundation in the path, it is fine to meditate alone.

This advice on how to organize our meditation sessions is for those interested in realizations, who, like people climbing stairs, look up and see all the steps ahead. Even when busy, they keep going, meditating on whatever step they have reached, even if only for ten or fifteen minutes a day. This continuity is very important. For example, if we rub two sticks together trying to make fire, we have to continue without stopping, or else they will become cold. If we keep going, they will eventually catch fire. Similarly, in our meditation practice, we keep going so that the warmth of our experience is not lost. In this way, by doing analytical meditation, combined with practices to purify negativities and create positive potential, we will be able to have all the realizations of the Gradual Path in a step-by-step manner.

There are two basic types of meditation: stabilizing meditation to develop single-pointed concentration and analytical or checking meditation to develop deep understanding of the topics. Until one attains higher levels of the path, these two types of meditation are done alternately. We begin analytical meditation on the topics for the initial-level practitioner: precious human life, impermanence and death, unfortunate realms of existence, refuge, and karma and its effects. Then we go on to do analytical meditation on the topics for the middle-level practitioner: the four noble truths, the twelve links, and the three higher trainings. At the advanced level, analytical meditation is necessary to generate the altruistic intention. When, through analytical meditation, we gain some understanding of a topic, we then focus on that understanding with stabilizing meditation. By eliminating distractions, stabilizing meditation enables our mind to become more accustomed to the understanding we have generated through analytical meditation.

When the altruistic intention has been developed, we practice analytical meditation on the six far-reaching attitudes of generosity, ethical conduct, patience, joyous effort and wisdom and then practice them in our life. Calm abiding, which is included in the far-reaching attitude of meditative stabilization, is stabilizing meditation and does not involve analytical meditation. The wisdom realizing emptiness is sometimes generated after the altruistic intention and sometimes before. Analytical meditation is definitely required to develop it. When, with the motivation of bodhichitta, we have fully developed calm abiding and are able to do analytical meditation on emptiness without it disturbing our single-pointedness, then we will have special insight on emptiness, which is an important part of the far-reaching attitude of wisdom.

Having said all this as general advice, it is important to note that we should make sure that our meditation suits our mind. If we feel comfortable doing analytical meditation on the various topics in a progressive way, we should go ahead with it. If, on the other hand, we find it difficult and it is not compatible with our mind, we should meditate on whatever topic we like. If we enjoy meditation on emptiness, we should go ahead with this. If it suits us and we derive pleasure from meditating principally on the altruistic intention, we can emphasize this. At some point if we find that we cannot really get into whatever analytical meditation we have been doing, but doing prostrations, chanting mantra, visualizing a meditation deity, or reciting aspirational prayers brings peace and pleasure to our mind, we should do that practice.

### *Setting up a meditation practice*

Our time can be divided into two: the times of actual meditation sessions and the break times in between. The meditation sessions have three parts: preparation, actual meditation, and conclusion. The preparation consists of six preparatory practices:

1. Clean the room and setup symbols of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind.
2. Make beautiful offerings which have been obtained honestly and through right livelihood.
3. Sit in the proper meditation position—the seven point posture of Vairochana (or however we are comfortable)—take refuge and generate bodhichitta.
4. Visualize the field of positive potential, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
5. Offer the seven-limb prayer to purify and accumulate.
6. Make requests to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their inspiration.

More about the preparatory practices can be learned from texts on the Gradual Path. Before beginning the actual analytical meditation, it is helpful to think, “Since beginningless time until the present, my mind has been under the control of the disturbing attitudes—ignorance, attachment, anger, jealousy, pride and so forth. They have made me act in harmful ways and have brought about the various difficulties I've experienced in cyclic existence. From now on, I must try conscientiously not to let my mind be controlled by the disturbing attitudes. I will develop flexibility and firmness of mind so that I will be able to concentrate on the object of meditation without distraction or lethargy. I will develop my good qualities, and since this depends on understanding and integrating the Buddha's teachings into my being, I will put effort in this direction during this very meditation session.”

Then we do the actual meditation, which in this case is analytical meditation. We have already discussed the analytical meditation on the precious human life and will discuss analytical meditation on other topics in the upcoming verses. At the conclusion, we make dedication prayers for the happiness and enlightenment of all beings.

What we do during the time between meditation sessions when we are going about our daily activities influences our meditation sessions and vice-versa. Therefore, during the breaks it is advised to “close the doors of our sense faculties.” This means we should be aware of when to speak and what to say, so that we do not talk indiscriminately about things that stir up our disturbing attitudes or harm others. Similarly, we should not listen indiscriminately because this can stimulate many negative thoughts in our mind, and should avoid looking around indiscriminately at things that could incite our craving, anger, jealousy, and so forth. Before acting, it is wise to check whether the action



is appropriate or not, and if it is we should do it with awareness. Eating and sleeping in moderation are important as well, and rising early in the morning is good. Whenever we do things to care for our body—eating, drinking, washing, dressing, sleeping, and so forth—we should think it is to bring well-being to our body and mind because they are necessary for meditation. In other words, we transform our motivation for these activities from one of self-indulgence and self-centered pleasure, to one of taking care of the body and mind so that we can use them to practice the path to enlightenment for the ultimate benefit of all sentient beings.

*Colophon:*

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