

MEDITATION

by
Geshe Tenzin Zopa



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Editor's Note

This word "Meditation" is one of those buzz words which everyone thinks they have a correct understanding of. Add to this, the availability of a mountain load of books on how to meditate, some of which guide or some misguide; some make dismally dry reading; whilst some make the reader grasp at it with a distorted understanding of meditation's true potential and its methods.

In this book, Geshe Tenzin Zopa reveals the Buddha's indispensable advice on this practice in a refreshingly un-complicated manner and makes yummy reading. Meditation is not only for the yogis but a necessary vehicle that each practitioner needs to mount and master, if one is to traverse the rocky road towards enlightenment.

Presenting the essential points on meditation, 6 types of meditation are explored through Geshela's guidance which is infused with wisdom, compassion and humour. Even routine acts like watching TV can be conducive for meditation! This "Meditation" book implodes all pre-conceived ideas and misconceptions about meditation and unleashes the wondrous power of one's mind in the pursuit of ultimate happiness.

With profound gratitude to our Gurus for their patience and courage in trying to tame the wild minds of their students, this book is dedicated towards the good health, long life and fulfillment of all the holy and temporal wishes of HH Dalai Lama, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Geshe Tenzin Zopa. May all living beings gain full Awakening and accomplish our Gurus holy wishes.

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**“ Meditation is state of mind; not a state of body.
It should be used as a cause for liberation and not
for more samsara. ”**

There are people who do not have time for proper breakfast because of the stressful jobs they have. They complain that they do not have the time to practice dharma, let alone meditation. There are housewives who lament that they are totally occupied with their family and have no time for Dharma study or practice. In fact, all of you DO have the time to practice dharma, to practice meditation. Doing what you do in the office or for your family and in fact, performing every type of activity, THAT is the best time to practice dharma; that is the best time for meditation.

Meditation does not involve sitting in a remote cave or rooted on a cushion. Even if you found a cave to meditate in, instead of subduing your mind, you could end up merely frightening yourself. Or you could end up lost as you do not know why you are there. If you do not know the purpose of meditation and merely think that meditation is somehow good for you and then run off to a cave to meditate, there is the likelihood that you will end up being nothing more than a stone in the cave, sitting there without any benefit. If you pursue meditation without a proper understanding of its purpose and correct motivation, instead of gaining increased compassion nor wisdom, you will only achieve a state of no-feeling. Therefore, when one says the word “meditation”, one ought to let go of the image of caves, cushions and

solitude. Every single moment, lifestyle, corner or circumstance can present the best opportunity to practice Dharma and especially meditation.

Meditation is not about the mind going blank. It is not about tranquilising the mind and making it numb. The Tibetan word for meditation is “gom” which means to familiarise the mind, to habituate the mind. Familiarise with what? Familiarise the mind with virtue, with the Buddha’s teachings which will secure the bliss of enlightenment.

The motivation for doing meditation is vital. If you engage in it for personal bliss or liberating oneself from suffering, it is not sufficient. That would be a very narrow-minded motivation. It is not just you alone who seeks freedom from misery. There are numberless beings wishing for happiness like you do and wishing to avoid suffering, like you do. Therefore, one needs to have a big-hearted motivation for engaging in meditation – to enable oneself and all living beings to gain liberation and enlightenment.

Before elaborating on meditation, it is always useful to reflect briefly on the history of Buddhism and how its practices came about.

How Buddhism came about and its relevance to modern life

Firstly, the Buddhadharma can be described according to its religious aspects but at the same time also possesses the characteristics of philosophy, science and also a way of life. Buddhadharma is not the creation of a contemporary scholar nor is it about mindlessly following it based on blind faith. Rather, it is a roadmap, a practical method cultivated by numberless past enlightened beings whose lives began like ours, completely dominated by delusion and karma, totally overwhelmed by samsaric rebirth but who persevered in their practice and finally eradicated samsaric suffering and obscurations to nirvana and enlightenment.

The teachings given by the Buddha range from the correct devotion to the Guru, to ethics, to the 6 Perfections, right up to Enlightenment. Buddha's attaining enlightenment was not just for the self-centred purposes of self-liberation but out of great compassion or bodhicitta. The Buddha provided guidance through teachings on the 3 Principal Aspects of the Path, namely renunciation, bodhicitta and right view of emptiness/selflessness. Why these 3 aspects of the path in particular? Because they are the fundamental prerequisites for enlightenment. They form the full set of antidotes needed to eradicate samsaric suffering and its causes of karma and delusions. These teachings came 2600 years ago. That does not mean that before the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was no Dharma, as there were already beings who had attained enlightenment previously. Shakyamuni Buddha (Shakya Thup-pa) was the 4th Buddha, with the other 3 prior Buddhas being Buddha Korwa Chig (Kakuchanda), Buddha Ser Thup (Kanakamuni) and Buddha Woer Sung (Kashyapa). There are 1000 Buddhas who will descend into our world and we are very fortunate to be born in this world where Shakyamuni Buddha has come to teach the Dharma.

When the Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught according to the mental dispositions of the Hinayana disciples, the Mahayana disciples and the Vajrayana disciples. All aspects of the teachings are relevant to the pursuit of enlightenment. If one's purpose is to actualise enlightenment but gives up learning Theravada teachings, there is no opportunity for us to attain enlightenment. Likewise, if one fails to cultivate the teachings of the Mahayana and Vajrayana, there is no opportunity to attain full enlightenment, even though high realisations may be gained. The complete study of the Buddhadharma is needed.

If our aim is to actualise full enlightenment, we have to cultivate the teachings found in all the 3 yanas (Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana). How do we achieve this? We do it gradually as it is not necessary to adopt everything at one time. The teachings of the 4 Noble Truths, the 8 Fold Path and the cultivation of Refuge are the foundation, preliminary teachings. From there,

one should then proceed to the teachings on bodhicitta and emptiness as the core teachings. Finally, at the resultant stage of having studied and applied both Hinayana and Mahayana teachings, one should then adopt the Vajrayana teachings, which focus on the eradication of impure perception, to actualise pure perception and transform the ordinary into the divine. An intensive process is required to accomplish this final area of knowledge and practice.

All the yantras are factual and part of the history of the Buddha's descent into the world. After Shakyamuni Buddha attained full enlightenment in Bodhgaya, he remained in silent retreat in Deer Park, Sarnath, as there was no request for teachings. After many days, deva Brahma - due to the ripening of a past, positive karmic imprint - was inspired to receive guidance from the Buddha. He blew the right-turning conch-shell, causing the Buddha to stir from His single pointed concentration. Brahma then offered Buddha a Dharma Wheel requesting for the Buddha's teachings. The importance of this gesture of requesting for Dharma lies in the fact that Dharma is not mere ordinary knowledge but unveils the ultimate path to full awakening, to enlightenment. Hence the Buddha manifested not revealing the Dharma until sincerely requested for. Although Brahma was a worldly god, he is greatly respected for being the one who made the auspicious request to the Buddha. It resulted in the emergence of the teachings which enable the cessation of all suffering and securing lasting happiness for all living beings.

Buddha's first 5 disciples were karmically linked to Him from a past life. During that time, Shakyamuni Buddha was a prince. One day during a walk in the forest with Bodhisattva Maitreya at a place called Namobuddha, Nepal, they encountered a starving tiger family of 5 tigers. Out of great compassion, Shakyamuni Buddha offered his flesh to the tigers. Sensing the great force of the Buddha's compassion, the tiger was unable to eat his flesh. Right there, the Buddha made a prayer saying, "By your consuming my flesh, you will not commit the negativity of abusing the body of a Buddha but instead be born as a Brahmin when I come into the world to teach the Dharma and you will be my first disciples to learn the Dharma".



The stages/types of teachings given by the Buddha

The first teaching given by the Buddha was on the 4 Noble Truths. These are the teachings that are common to all 3 yanas or vehicles, namely the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions and are the focus of the Hinayanic practitioners. These teachings were given at Sarnath.

Amongst those receiving these teachings were bodhisattvas who descended from their purelands. They proceeded to request the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma of the Mahayanic teachings. For this, the Buddha travelled to Rajgir, India and there on Vulture's Peak, with thousands of beings in attendance - humans as well as non-humans – the Buddha expounded the teachings on great compassion/bodhicitta, including the Perfection of Wisdom teachings on the Heart Sutra, a cornerstone teaching for the Mahayanic practitioners. Whilst giving the teachings at Vultures Peak, Shakyamuni Buddha simultaneously manifested in the tantric deity form of Kalachakra at Amravati, South India to deliver the Tantra teachings, which elaborated on the 4 categories of tantra – namely, Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra. The Highest Yoga Tantra teachings involve the practice of the 3 kayas, of transforming death, the intermediate state and rebirth into the path to enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhism contains the teachings and practices shared by the 3 yanas.

One of the fundamental aspects of Tibetan Buddhism is the preservation of the Vinaya vows. There are thousands of practitioners who cultivate these Vinaya vows for their entire lifetime. The Sangha who hold the vows and

practice celibacy do so from a clear understanding of the 4 Noble Truths and renounce samsara through guarding the actions of their body, speech and mind, as well as through the protection of the vows. Similarly in lay life, the more vows we take, the better. Taking vows should not be seen as restrictions to freedom but rather, as a protection from committing negative actions and afflicted states of mind such as anxiety, fear, doubt, laziness, lack of mindfulness. As long as we are influenced by such harmful aspects of mind, we will constantly accumulate negative karma and experience suffering. By practising vows, we generate good karma which is the cause of happiness. Since it is in our nature to want happiness, the only way is to follow the instructions of the Buddha and the path of the 4 Noble Truths.

However, just studying Dharma is not enough. Having scholarly understanding of Dharma is not enough. Being a monk is also not enough. Living in isolation in caves or jungle-retreats is not enough. We need to familiarise ourselves, habituate ourselves with the teachings of the Buddha and understand the reasons and explanations behind them. Only when the Dharma becomes integrated into our lives, will it become transformational for us and benefit us.



Why is meditation necessary?

It is necessary because we are responsible for fulfilling our innate instinct to seek and obtain happiness and avoid suffering. From the moment we are born, we have that instinct. Even ants have that instinct – observe them - they work very hard throughout the whole day simply because they want happiness; likewise with us – we commit 20 years of our lives to schooling in

order to get a good job and after getting a good job, we get into relationships and have families – all this is aimed at getting happiness. We gather friends, wealth and have children in the hope for more happiness but often, we find that the more we have of these, the more problems we have. Then we think there is magic in Buddha's words and we embark into spiritual life. We engage in Dharma study and participate in social welfare work but somehow, problems continue to plague us. The sole reason for this is that we are completely dominated by our afflictive emotions which drag us down, never giving us peace. This in turn is caused by our inability to subdue our minds and why is this so? Because we do not meditate, we do not put effort to control our minds with antidotes to afflictions in accordance with the Buddha's advice; we are simply not mindful of the actions that our body, speech and mind commit. Especially that of our mind.

Whenever we say we want happiness, what we actually mean is that we want ultimate happiness, everlasting happiness – which is Buddhahood itself. Temporary happiness is very frustrating and disappointing. However, everlasting happiness is non-existent in samsara and can only be achieved when we are liberated from this cycle of suffering and not be reborn in the samsaric 6 realms through delusion and karma. Only when we are able to overcome our negative emotions, can we eliminate rebirth in the 6 realms and only then can we achieve peerless happiness.

Therefore, everyone has to become a Buddha! How does one achieve this? Through generating vast merit and purifying our subtle defilements, which is only possible when one starts to assimilate Dharma into one's life. This in turn can only happen if one meditates. In order to actualise even the slightest form of happiness, we need meditation as it has the power to stabilise our mind through being familiar with virtue.

When we have colleagues at work who annoy us or when we get stuck in traffic jams or when we use cunning to get more wealth, there is no peace. This agitated mind affects our chakras which jams up our nervous system,

disrupts our blood flow function, gives rise to neck pains, shoulder aches and smoke coming out of one's ears! Or when people talk to you, this troubled mind causes you to refuse to listen and start scolding everyone around you. Or upon going home, you have to deal with your children and all the noise and fuss that they can generate which makes you go crazy – all these situations can be eased and helped by doing meditation. Start by regarding the noisy children as objects of one's compassion, generosity and patience, for they are the opportunity for one to develop Buddhahood. There is not much point in owning tons of Dharma books if we do not begin to habituate our minds with their content.



Learning, contemplating and meditating

Before we can effectively meditate, we need to contemplate on the points of the teachings but before we can contemplate, we need to listen/study/observe. Therefore, if we only study the Dharma but not contemplate on it, we will not be able to understand the teachings; and if we only contemplate but not meditate on the Dharma, no solutions will come to us. Our mind will remain wild and un-tamed. We need the three aspects - to learn Dharma, contemplate on its meaning and then familiarise our minds (meditate) with them because they show the method for us to attain ultimate happiness. Otherwise, just sitting on a cushion, thinking that is meditation, would be pointless as indeed, it would be like putting a rock in a rock cave, which can remain there for aeons with no benefit being derived.

We need to frequently think, “My enlightenment is dependent on my having

a positive mind. If I keep harbouring and engaging in negative emotions, this will delay my attainment of enlightenment. However, if I cultivate compassion, it will nurture the positive mind, as well as enable my mind to be clear. In this way, I will be able to pacify not only oneself but also pacify or subdue the people and situations which disturb me". I want to specially mention about speech related actions. One has to associate with all sorts of beings everyday, so we need to be mindful. We are often not careful with what we say and engage in idle gossip. The moment we are mindful of our speech, it will bring about good vibrations within the family, relationships and society. Likewise, with physical movements. In the Vinaya vows, we are not allowed to be too active, we are advised to walk like Arhats – this is because if we walk around swinging our arms, it might hurt formless beings.

There are various types of meditation – those in relation to Dharma and those not in relation to Dharma. Those meditations which are not in relation to Dharma are those that are merely making our minds quiet, through focusing on one sound or light. Buddha taught that while such methods bring some level of peace, that alone will not help us attain liberation. Liberation is only secured when we deal with our delusions and afflictive emotions which are the cause of samsaric suffering. The Buddha advises us to set a positive motivation for engaging in Dharma meditation.

Three different types of nirvana /liberation

- (1) The nirvana aimed for by the Shravaka (Hearer) practitioners
- (2) The nirvana of the Pratyekabuddha (Solitary Realisers) who cultivate alone.
- (3) The nirvana of the Mahayana practitioner - Full enlightenment

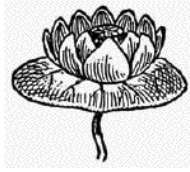
The attainment of the first 2 types of nirvana (which is the goal of the Hinayana practitioners) does not mean that one has become Buddha. The first 2 types of nirvana are levels where one has purified gross delusions and overcome samsara. However, at these stages, one has not removed

the subtle defilement, which is the obscuration to seeing the true nature of existence, namely, the absence of inherent existence.

To understand the true nature of existence, one needs to understand both the emptiness of the person, as well as the emptiness of phenomena. When practitioners actualise the first 2 types of nirvana, they have succeeded in eradicating self grasping i.e. they have realised the emptiness/selflessness of the person only. However, the practice is only complete when one progresses to also realise the emptiness of phenomena.

To engage in the deeper reflection and meditation of the above points, one needs to develop:

- (1) Single pointed meditation (samatha/calm abiding) and
- (2) Special insight or analytical meditation (vipassana).



**Single pointed meditation
(samatha or calm abiding meditation)
– conducive conditions**

When seeking to engage in single pointed meditation, one needs to prepare. Having conducive conditions relate to the place, time, necessities and instructions.

(a) Conducive place – The choice of a meditation place should be a quiet place where one’s mind can avoid being distracted, be easily inspired and where one feels secure from dangers like wild animals, war, elemental disturbances. The place need not be far away and could be at home in front of the Buddha’s image but if family members are not supportive of your meditative practice, then that would not be regarded as a conducive place.

(b) Conducive time – Although one can meditate at any time, from an environmental aspect, dawn time is the best for meditation i.e. between the hours of 3am-6am, as one’s mind is clearest then. Best time is to sleep at 10pm. This is good for meditation and also good for health. The great Indian Pandits followed such a routine. Even in present day, the great living masters rest at 10pm and wake up at 3am. My late master always woke up at 3am and would immediately start to meditate. When he was doing strict retreat for 26 years, he did not sleep but engaged in continuous practice. When he was in the city, he would display the aspect of sleeping but in the cave, he never slept. I regard my late master as enlightened but with an ordinary contaminated body.

Our precious Guru, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche never sleeps. Years ago, I was assigned to serve him during the night. At first, I did not believe the stories about how Rinpoche never slept and thus I stayed up the whole night just to watch, right until it was time to attend the monastery's 5am puja. Rinpoche remained upright in meditation throughout. There are such masters who are able to overcome their gross senses and despite having to interact with thousands of students and handle many projects and related problems at one time, they are not disturbed by anything. So it is possible to have control over one's mind and we can be encouraged by such practitioners.

As a daily practice, one should aim to do some meditation before one's family members wake up and before going to work – even one minute of doing this is beneficial. If one really cannot meditate in front of one's altar, then at least sit up in bed and meditate for a short time – it's all about mental cultivation. The meditation posture is helpful but not necessary nor effective for everyone. It depends on one's physical structure and also one's previous karma.

There was once a meditator who tried for many years to meditate in the normal upright seated position, without success. Feeling concerned at his own lack of progress, he consulted his master who advised him that in a past life, he was a cow and thus the resultant karma was that sitting upright for meditation would not ideal for his practice. His master advised him instead to meditate in a lying position . When he did so, he was able to meditate profoundly and realisations came quickly. Therefore, the most important factor is that one's mind should not be disturbed or distracted. One can even sit on a chair or sofa to meditate but be careful not to fall asleep. Necessities: Have simple food arranged for if you are doing a meditation retreat; food that is soothing.

Instructions: Before embarking on the retreat, it is necessary to receive from a qualified master, proper Dharma teachings to enable oneself to gain control over one's mind, as well as instructions on how to focus one's mind.

Then contemplate well on the teachings and instructions received to derive a firm understanding on the essential points of each subject. Once you have actualised this wisdom of contemplation, one is then ready to engage in a meditation retreat.

As a Buddhist, one is advised to use virtuous objects as one's object of meditation – instead of focusing just on any light, focus instead on for example, Buddha's forehead; instead of choosing to meditate on a tree, one can choose to meditate on the Buddha eyes; instead of choosing to focus on just any sound, focus instead on the syllable OM or the syllable AH or other sacred syllables. Instead of focusing on an object of taste, focus instead on immortal nectar; instead of focusing on touch, visualise and meditate on the Buddha's holy body as if it is in actual form. This is how to use virtuous objects to focus one's concentration and this will bring the beneficial results of concentration and merit. Concentrating on a leaf alone will develop some level of concentration but will bring no merit. So we should choose the object of meditation wisely in order not to waste one's efforts.

It would be good to do meditation in a place where there are qualified masters, so that one can consult them for guidance during one's session.



Points to note when undertaking a meditation retreat

Periods of meditation: If one is undertaking a concentration-meditation retreat, one can divide the session into as many periods you feel you are able to concentrate. However, the general advice is to divide time into 4

sessions of about 2-3 hours each and have post-session breaks. The four sessions could be timed this way e.g. 3am – 5am; 8am-11am; 1pm- 4pm (end before sunset) and last session anytime after sunset (e.g. 7-9pm). After concluding for the day, one could then undertake preparations for the next day such as setting up fresh offerings on the altar etc.

During post-meditation sessions, try to discover what were the obstacles to one's meditation, giving rise to distractions. One can then study more, consult seniors or one's master if able to, on how to remove those obstacles.

Object of meditation: We have already discussed this earlier. One of the most inspiring objects is the qualities of the Buddha. If one wants to attain single-pointed concentration/samatha, then whichever meditation-object one chooses, the object of meditation should not change. For instance, if one has decided to use the Buddha's eye as the meditation-object, then focus on that until the end of the retreat. Do not, halfway during the retreat or meditation session, change to meditating on the Buddha's lips or forehead. If one can meditate on the selected meditation object in a stable and focused way, one can attain samatha within 6 months.

Meditation posture: The Vairochana position enables the inner-channels to function in the most efficient manner.

- Head - Sit naturally with the back upright without forcing one's posture. One's head should not be tilted too far back as this could lead to mental excitement; nor placed too low, as this will result in laxity and sleepiness;
- The legs - the Cross Vajra or Lotus posture is ideal. If you find this difficult to do, sitting with one leg lifted above the other or in a chair-sitting position like Buddha Maitreya or with one leg in and one leg extended like Buddha Tara. The main point is to have the body in a position where it will not get distracted nor be prone to sinking/sleepiness.

- Eyes – these should not be totally opened as this could lead to distraction nor closed as dullness and sleepiness could arise. Instead, look downwards naturally.
- Hands - place the right hand over the left hand, such that the ring finger on the right hand sits just on top of the ring finger of the left hand, with the thumbs touching each other. This placement of the ring fingers stimulates bodhicitta with you because the nerves of ring finger connect to your heart chakra, which is connected to one's subtle Buddha nature mind. The hands should be positioned with the linked thumbs 1 inch above the navel and the other fingers 1 inch below (i.e. the hands are "circling" the navel).

It is not possible to discuss here in detail about chakras. Briefly, we have an inner nervous system made up of channels and inner winds. There are 3 main channels called the central channel, the right and left channels. These 3 channels cross over in various places and these spots of crossing over are called chakras. The inner winds travel throughout the channels and our consciousness/mind is like a horse rider, riding on these inner winds. The location of the central channel is that it starts from the forehead area between one's eyebrows, curves over one's head and goes all the way down to the bottom of the body and curves upwards a spot that is located between the anus and the sexual organ. The central channel is accompanied by 2 sub-channels on either side. These 2 sub-channels are linked at one end (like 2 hooks) at the bottom of the central channel and at open up at the other end via the 2 nostrils.

The mother and father substances received at conception abide in a dhall-sized, oyster shaped seed called the indestructible drop, which is located in the central channel and remains closed until death, when the indestructible drop opens. The mother-essence in its gross form is menstrual blood; the father-substance in its gross form is the white fluid. By placing our hands in the manner described above has the effect of activating the tummo (heat) energy which causes the melting of the essence-drops of father and

mother and this is what brings about the sensation of inner bliss. They also symbolise the unification of method and wisdom (the right hand represents father/Method/bodhicitta and the left hand represents mother/Wisdom/emptiness). This area of study comes from the tantra teachings which explain about the drops and channels. However, one needs to get the proper initiations to be able to receive the full teachings on tantra.

- Mouth: One's mouth needs to be gently closed and the tip of the tongue should touch the palate. In this way, our saliva will naturally flow back without causing us to have to frequently swallow which would be a distraction to our meditation.

Breathing meditation is about bringing one's busy mind into a state of calm. Left and right channels are linked to corresponding nostril. Left and Right channels are linked to the interior of the central channel. Your mind should follow the passage of the inward and outward air.

Common obstacles to single pointed meditation:

- (1) The main obstacles are excitement and laxity (dullness) . These need to be overcome because one needs to attain clarity and firmness on the object of meditation in order to achieve samatha.
- (2) Other obstacles are having too many plans, outings, business, parties, emails, diaries, mobile phones and chatrooms. If you want a good business plan, do more meditation and the plans will come clearly!

The Actual Samatha/Concentration/Calm-Abiding Meditation process :

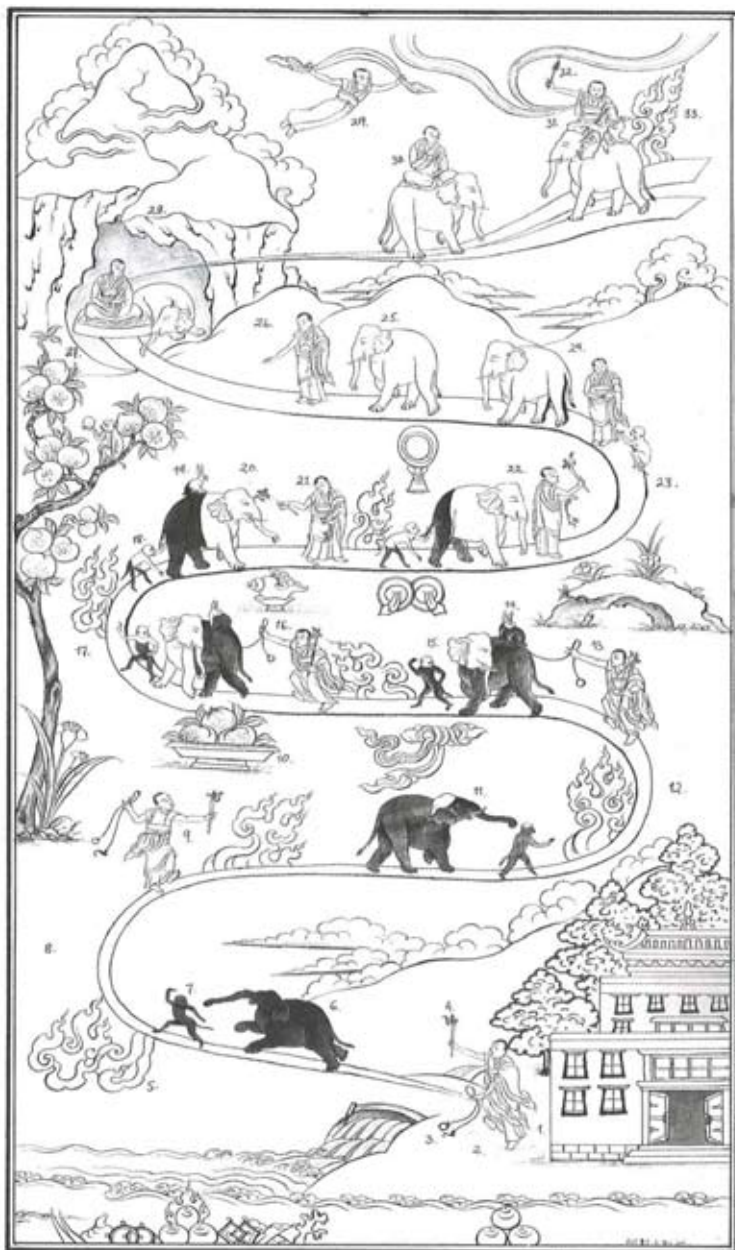
The 5 faults & the 8 antidotes

When engaging in single pointed meditation (also known as samatha meditation or calm-abiding meditation or concentration meditation), one needs to be aware of the 5 faults that affect meditators, the 8 antidotes to be applied and the stages of the meditation process itself.

To fully achieve the perfection of calm-abiding, one must eliminate the 5 faults by applying the 8 antidotes:

| Obstacles to samatha / calm-abiding | Antidotes |
|---|---|
| 1. Laziness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faith - Aspiration - Perseverance - Suppleness or pliancy - this is where the body & mind feels light due to the ability to pacify the mind. |
| 2. Losing clarity / forgetting the object | Mindfulness – By reminding oneself of the object of meditation (3x in the morning and 3x at night), it helps one to retain a clear image of the object. |
| 3. Laxity & excitement | Introspection or vigilance which observes and guards the mind. |
| 4. Non-application – this is when we lose focus of our object of meditation and allow other thoughts on the object to enter our meditation. | Application - means we need to bring our mind back to the object of meditation. |
| 5. Over-application – this is where one starts to exaggerate the object of meditation by adding more information on that object. The practice is to maintain the characteristics of the object of meditation visualised at the beginning of the meditation retreat until the end. | Equanimity/consistently maintaining a detailed image of the object. |

The attached diagram illustrates the learner meditator’s mind and how it experiences the obstacles to perfect concentration and also shows the effects of applying the antidotes. There are 9 stages of meditative or mental absorption that are achieved through specific types of mental effort.



Guide to the diagram

1. The 1st stage of meditation is attained through force of hearing (listening to the explanations of the teachings).
2. Focusing the mind on the object of meditation.
3. The force of mindfulness or recollection/remembrance.
4. The force of introspection, vigilance or alertness.
5. Referring to the diagram, from here until the 7th stage of mental absorption, the flame (which represents the non-stable mind) is decreasing in size at each progressive stage until it becomes absent. This strengthens one's recollection and vigilance.
6. The black elephant represents mind in a state of laxity.
7. The black monkey symbolises distraction coupled with the mental factor of excitement.
8. The force of reflection. This achieves the 2nd stage of mental absorption.
9. Lengthening the period of concentration to gain the uninterrupted absorption on the object of concentration.
10. The 5 sensual desires are the objects of the mental factor of excitement.
11. From here, the black colour (laxity), beginning from the head of the

elephant, changes to white and denotes the progress in gaining clarity over the object of meditation.

12. The force of mindfulness/recollection. The attainment of the 3rd and 4th stages of mental absorption is achieved through this.
13. Redirect the strayed mind to the object of concentration.
14. The rabbit/hare represents the subtle aspects of the mental factor of laxity. At this stage, one recognises the nature and gross aspects of the mental factor of laxity.
15. Looking back refers to the awareness that one's mind has been distracted and thus brought back to the object of concentration.
16. Maintaining a clear visualisation of the elaborate details of the object of concentration
17. The force of alertness/vigilance. Through this is attained the 5th and 6th stages of mental absorption.
18. The mental factor of excitement is very much reduced.
19. During samatha (concentration) meditation, even thoughts of virtue that arise need to be removed. It is because at this stage, one is developing the quality of concentration required to be able to carry out analytical meditation. Analytical meditation focuses on the Buddha's teachings and virtuous thoughts which will aid the meditator to gain the direct realisation of emptiness/selflessness.
20. The force of vigilance arrests the mind from drifting astray.
21. The mind is controlled

22. The mind is subdued/pacified
23. Through the force of continuous effort/perseverance, the 7th and 8th stages of mental absorption are achieved.
24. The mind becomes perfectly pacified. At this stage, subtle laxity and excitement has ceased.
25. The black colour of the elephant (laxity) has completely faded out and the monkey (distraction) is also absent.
26. Single-pointedness of mind.
27. The 9th stage of mental absorption of the 9th stage is attained through the force of complete familiarity.
28. Perfect equanimity
29. Great ease of body (thereby the need for sleep declines)
30. Attainment of calm abiding or samatha
31. Mental bliss
32. The root of samsara is eliminated through the joint power of calm abiding meditation and the direct insight into emptiness/selflessness as the object of concentration.



How do we engage in concentration meditation using the visualisation of Shakyamuni Buddha as the concentration object?

How do we engage in concentration meditation using the visualisation of Shakyamuni Buddha as the concentration object?

We begin with the choice of the size of the Buddha's image that we are going to concentrate on. If you feel that it is easier to visualize a bigger image, you can visualize the image as big as Mount Meru. If you prefer to visualize a smaller image, you may use an image the size of one's thumb. It is generally recommended to use an image size about the size of one's thumb. Visualise the image at the level of our forehead and at a distance of 4 feet from us. This will enable one to maintain the image comfortably.

The visualised Shakyamuni Buddha image in front of you is facing towards you. Focus on the details of the image - for example, the image of the Buddha could be the Buddha seated on a lotus on top of a sun disc and moon disc. So for that, you could begin from bottom up i.e. visualising the lotus, the seat, the Buddha's crossed legs, the position of the hands, the neck, the head and its features and the ushnisha (crown protrusion).

Mindfulness and introspection are two aspects of our mind. One's mindfulness constructs the visualization of Buddha's image. It then proceeds to focus and maintain that image. Introspection guards the strength of that mindfulness in order not to lose the focus, to see whether the image remains clear or whether dullness or excitement is affecting one's concentration. The moment sleepiness comes, introspection hints to mindfulness, "Oi, oi. Wake

up! Wake up! Don't sleep, don't sleep. Get up!" and straightaway your mind wakes up to restore the whole image, as before. You try your best to focus on the image for short periods to begin with. Gradually you will be able to remain for many hours.

Just this simple practice of concentrating on the Buddha's image brings heaps of merits and benefits. It can be the greatest protection at the time of death. Through familiarity, the imprint of the Buddha's image will appear at the time of dying, during the departure of the subtle consciousness. It is unbelievable protection and blessing to be able to have this image appear at that time. Think of it - at the time of dying, that which is surrounding you and holding your consciousness is the Buddha's peaceful image. That state of consciousness, that condition of your mind will be virtuous, which will affect the throwing karma. If the throwing karma is positive, rebirth in the higher realms will be attained; if negative throwing karma is activated, rebirth in the suffering lower realms will occur.

"Pureland practice"

Chinese and Tibetan communities are big fans of Amitabha Buddha Pureland practice. They focus on frequently chanting the detailed description of the Amitabha Buddha Pureland. The main focus of this practice is to intensively pray to Amitabha Buddha, to engage in visualisation, meditation and generating the aspiration to be born in His Pureland. This is to plant deep mental imprints so that at the time of death, it will help to direct one's consciousness to that Pureland. Once there, one will be free from the sufferings of samsara. One will have the ability to emanate many bodies, travel to a hundred different Buddha Lands and meet the Buddhas directly, face to face and receive Dharma teachings directly from the Buddhas. It does not mean that by being born in a Pureland one is already a Buddha but the conditions in the Pureland are highly conducive to studying Dharma and gaining realisations. So that is how devotees are able to obtain enlightenment

speedily upon being born into Amitabha Buddha Pure Land.

There are 3 causes for birth in the Purelands, namely:

- (1) A strong wish to be born in the Pure land,
- (2) Describing the beauty and details of the Amitabha Buddha mandala and celestial mansion,
- (3) Preserving vows, i.e refuge vows, the 5 lay vows, individual sangha vows, Bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. You will need as a minimum, the foundation vows, namely, the Refuge vows.

Cultivating these 3 causes makes one's life so easy. If you are born in Amitabha Buddha Pureland, it will be a beautiful paradise, with beautiful clouds, gardens, flowers and jewels and whatever you need, you will have. All that you will have will be used for virtuous deeds, unlike birth in the God realms where every moment merely sees the depletion or exhaustion of past good karma; whereas being born in a Pureland, one constantly meets the conditions which increase one's good karma. That's the difference.

Our training in concentration needs to be motivated by bodhicitta i.e. not to merely help oneself but to help all living beings to free them from the disturbed mind which carries endless suffering. The motivation for engaging in samatha meditation should therefore be to realise emptiness of self and phenomena.

After attaining samatha, one needs to use that clarity of mind to develop special insight .

Analytical meditation – special insight/vipassana

In general

Once again, it is important to set the proper motivation for doing this form of meditation of analytical meditation to gain special insight into the teachings, especially, emptiness. One puts effort into studying the Buddha's teachings and applying mindfulness and introspection in order to infuse our mindstreams with what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. Studying, contemplating, even debating and doing research in Dharma with the right motivation will become real meditation. Otherwise, these activities may bring some intellectual knowledge but it will not bring the ultimate benefit that comes from habituating one's mind with the teachings of the Buddha nor the accumulation of merit.

If whatever knowledge one acquires, one uses it to benefit others and one has the enthusiasm to integrate the teachings into one's daily life, that it itself becomes meditation because the mind is constantly habituated with the Buddha's purpose. This is how to generate the causes for liberation and enlightenment, as well as prevent the planting of seeds of suffering.

You can therefore see that every aspect of our life can become a form of meditation. For example, when we speak, we should ensure we avoid harsh words or sarcasm, as this will only bring upset and unhappiness.

Right speech is speaking only the good qualities of the others. Avoid degpa – this word has many meanings which include physical hitting which takes the life of another life, up to minor actions like unintentional hitting due to the lack of mindfulness and is therefore still a negative act.

Without mindfulness, we commit all sorts of negativities – like within a temple compound, one might pluck flowers that one is not supposed to do, giving rise to stealing. If we work in an area without offering due respect

not only humans but also non-humans (such as earth protectors) or not caring about the animals that inhabit the place and merely proceed to break up the land and destroy mountains in order to build houses, we could be creating negative karma. One of the causes for getting cancer (which under the Karma teachings is under the category of a result that similar to the cause) is causing harm to animals and nagas who are attached to a place, resulting in the people who committed the harm getting skin diseases, cancer and leprosy. This is why sometimes people who live on farms and eat only healthy or organic food, still get cancer.

Therefore, one should cultivate the 10 virtuous actions and if one falls ill, one should immediately reflect on karma and help to liberate life or offer medicine to a poor person who is in need of medicine. Similarly, if one finds that one cannot retain the money one has worked hard to earn or cannot even get a decent meal, this is due to the past karma of stealing, which could be in relation to as simple an object as plucking flower without permission. When we carefully reflect on karma we will come to understand many of our life-experiences and why there is no point in blaming others and external circumstances.

We are not seeking only ordinary happiness but lasting happiness. For this, the Buddha never asked us to give up one's comfortable life but rather, practice virtue and live an ethical life, do the right thing. For instance, when we have a meal, since there are countless living organisms in our body, we should have the kindly thought that when we eat, we are also feeding them and fulfilling their needs. This is an attitude of generosity. As regards the objects to whom one can cultivate the practice of generosity, there are the Buddhas and ordinary sentient beings. By making offerings to the Buddha, it is a practice of generosity which only benefits us. As for sentient beings, we should try to the best to share whatever we can to fulfil their needs.

As a Buddhist having refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, one of the precepts is to always offer whatever food or drink we have to the Triple Gem

before consuming it. Profound merit comes from this simple act.

To do this, one should begin by reciting the mantra OM AH HUM over the food or drink. These syllables were manifested from Buddha's enlightened body, speech and mind. The syllable OM manifested from Buddha's crown /forehead and white in colour; the syllable AH emanated from Buddha's speech and is red in colour; the syllable HUM manifested from the Buddha's heart and is blue in colour. When Buddha manifested these syllables, they were in the form of light. Through the power of the Buddha, HUM has the power to purifying all impure substances and transform them into pure nectar; the syllable Ah transforms what is being offered into immortal nectar; the syllable OM has the power to increase the quantity of offerings being made into infinite amounts. The syllable AH is the seed syllable of the Amitabha Buddha family and one of the manifestations of Amitabha Buddha is Amitayu, which holds the long life vase, so when you recite AH over the food or medicine, it becomes like medicine to prolong one's life. Then by remembering that there are 84,000 bacteria in each of our bodies, we make charity to them as well. Although bacteria may not considered as living beings by some quarters, in the Dharma text called Abidhammakosha, it is explained that even cells can be living beings. Their life is dependent on our sustaining our own life. When we die, those beings lives also cease. Thus the food we eat sustains both our lives and their lives as well. Thus we are making charity to 84,000 beings! Amazing! It is not easy to find 84,000 people or beings to make offerings to, yet in our own body alone, we have this precious opportunity. This shows that we can practice at any time and in all circumstances. Whether something is Dharma or not, is all dependent on our mind.

Specifically on Analytical Meditation – Why it is needed and what to analyse during the meditation

Although concentration/calm abiding meditation brings clarity of mind and

bliss through pliancy of body and mind, one should not be satisfied with this because it will not create the causes nor merits for one to attain liberation.

To gain liberation/freedom from samsara and attain enlightenment, one needs to cultivate analytical meditation/special insight into the entire Buddha's teachings and in particular, selflessness or emptiness. Analytical meditation is therefore to be carried out in conjunction with single pointed meditation. The ultimate goal is to gain understanding and direct realisations into emptiness.

To attain full enlightenment, one then needs to practice what is called method and wisdom. The term "method" refers to bodhicitta (the altruistic intention to take on the personal responsibility of bringing all beings to enlightenment). The term " to practice wisdom" means to eradicate all self grasping and belief in inherent existence which comes when one is able to realise emptiness (which is the lack of inherent existence of self and of phenomena).

Only the wisdom realising emptiness can cut off ignorance which is the root of samsara. You must have conviction in this. It is not merely about attaining high levels of concentration. After all, even non-Buddhists can attain the 9th stage of concentration but once they attain this, they feel their goal is achieved by remaining in bliss. However, from the Buddhist perspective, the objective is not to attain personal bliss and supernatural powers but to overcome taking rebirth in samsara which occurs through the force of karma and delusion; to eliminate samsara for oneself and all living beings. Therefore, one must gain the correct view of selflessness/emptiness. We need to study well the exact method on how to analyse selflessness/emptiness so that we can arrive at the realisation of selflessness/emptiness.



What to meditate on during analytical meditation and the prerequisites

To do analytical meditation effectively, we first need to engage in the analytical meditation on the Lam Rim (which is the entire Buddha's teachings organised in a sequential manner and presented as a graduated Path to enlightenment). With repeated meditation on the Lam Rim, one eventually gains deep and profound insight on the entire Path, which then facilitates the completion of one's practice.

To obtain perfect knowledge, one needs a perfect teacher as a prerequisite – the Buddha was such a perfect teacher. Once we find the perfect teacher, we need to devote 100% to him. First we need to analyse carefully whether this teacher possesses all the qualifications to guide oneself. The Guru should have requisite qualities because of the spiritual relationship between the Guru and the disciple and if we are not careful, our realisations could be delayed. Until we are sure, we can regard that person as a mentor or discussion leader but not as a Guru. We need to be clear in our mind that the Guru is imbued with compassion, renunciation and adorned with moral ethics, lives a life cultivating emptiness and is never grasping.

The 10 qualities that a Dharma teacher ought to have are:

- The Teacher's mind stream should be subdued by ethics
- The Teacher should be stable concentration
- The Teacher has the wisdom that pacifies self-grasping
- The Teacher should have more good qualities than the student
- Has perseverance
- Has great scriptural knowledge

- Have realisations into emptiness
- Is skilful in teaching
- Has pure and unconditional love
- Does not get discouraged

When referring to the need to “analyse or check” the qualities of a teacher before accepting that teacher as a Guru, this does not mean investigating with a negative mind or looking for faults or measuring how many good points or bad points a teacher may be seen to have. Rather, it refers to one observing the overall manner of the teacher and listening to the teachings he gives and when one views them as being in accordance with the above 10 qualities, one can then generate the respectful attitude that this teacher has the qualities needed to be a Guru.

Once we see the above qualities, we devote to that teacher as Guru. However, the student also needs to have qualities and they are:

- Be honest and non discriminatory i.e. friendly to some and hostile to others
- Should have wisdom to know right from wrong
- They should yearn for the teachings
- Have great respect for their guru
- Should have virtuous motivation to study Dharma

Establishing the Guru-Disciple relationship can be either through a formal request to the teacher or from regarding from one’s heart, that teacher as one’s Guru.

Next comes the meditation on seeing the Guru as Buddha having the Buddha’s qualities. One devotes to the Guru through actions of body, speech and mind and act according to Guru’s advice, which is the Buddha’s word. Have faith, devotion and conviction in the Guru and when one does this, one receives blessings and benefit. If one regards one’s Teacher as merely ordinary, then you receive only ordinary benefit; if one regards the teacher

as a dog, then one gets the benefit in the form of having a dog. But if one sees the Guru as Buddha, then that helps one to improve one's mind and spiritual practice. The Guru should have proper scriptural study and inner qualities including realisations. In this way, a student learning from such a Guru receives blessing from the heart.

The actual analytical meditation – having gained some level of concentration through calm abiding meditation methods, how does one begin meditating on the Lam Rim teachings? How do we familiarise our minds on the Buddha's teachings and assimilate them into our own lives, thereby enabling us to perfect our practices on the Path?

Let us begin with the first topic of the Lam Rim, namely the analytical meditation on **Guru Devotion**. Train the mind to see the qualities of the Guru as that of the Buddha's such as the 10 qualities which are 1. Power of thought 2. Power of resolved thought 3. Power of retention 4. Power of concentration 5. Power of perfect application 6. Power of authority 7. Power of confidence 8. Power of prayer 9. Power of great love and compassion 10. Power of the blessing of all the Tathagatas.

In terms of appearances, one's Guru may look ordinary, plain and even worse off than oneself. However, even if the Guru regards himself as ordinary, from the student's own side, one should project and see all the Buddha's qualities in that Guru.

Sometimes, when Guru acts in a manner outside our expectations, we start to doubt the Guru and negative views begin to enter our minds. The moment such doubt and views arise, we should immediately pause and think it over - we should check ourselves and question whether this is merely a negative reflection of one's own mind. A person suffering from jaundice will see the white snow on the mountain as yellow snow. Or if Guru displays anger, instead of jumping to the conclusion that the Guru is flawed, we should realise that Guru is teaching oneself the faults and impact of anger and why

it is important not to allow oneself to be angry towards others.

In this way, we should regard every aspect of the Guru's behaviour as a teaching to help us develop positive qualities. This requires one to discipline the mind. The moment we attain stable conviction in the fact that whatever the outer circumstances may be, they are the Guru's teachings to us and if we combine this with seeing the Guru as inseparable from the Buddha, that is the day one gains realisation on Guru Devotion. This is not a cult-practice. It was taught by the Buddha.

It does not mean that one blindly does whatever the Guru instructs. If one is genuinely unable to do at the present time what the Guru requests, one should - without losing faith in the guru - respectfully explain to the Guru why one is unable to carry out the instructions.

Next, comes the analytical meditation on the ***Precious Human Rebirth*** – There are many beings who never encounter Dharma. They meet religion but not Dharma. So you should feel happy that you have this precious rebirth to meet and practice Dharma, having all the 8 Freedoms and 10 Endowments which include being born with full faculties and live in a world where the Buddha has come and taught, where Dharma continues to exist and where there are practitioners of the Dharma.

The cause to gain such a precious human rebirth is one's engagement in moral ethics and the 6 Perfections in past lives. The rarity of such a human rebirth requires us to make good use of it because there is no guarantee that we can gain such a precious human rebirth again. This thought ought to inspire us to practice Dharma consistently. At the time of death, when the dissolution of the physical aggregates and consciousness occurs, there will be much confusion and fear with no ability to practice virtue. Thus, to obtain another good rebirth is difficult. With that thought, one should rejoice at having life now to practice and resolve to make it worthwhile.

We all say we know about impermanence but we are not genuinely convinced about this. That is why we make plans as if we are going to live another 100 years or at least live till next year!

Hence it is vital that we undertake analytical meditation on the next Lam Rim topic of ***impermanence and death***. Death is certain, time of death is uncertain – chant this again and again. If one is still not convinced of death coming at any time, recall those friends who have passed away, especially those young friends who should have lived longer or the healthy ones who have suddenly died. Even all the great beings have manifested death, so how can we think that that we will never die.

We have an inborn sense of grasping at life as if it is permanent. We never think of death. We do not want to think about death. Every single moment that we fail to remember death is an illustration of our grasping at the idea of permanence of life. Although we do not say it this way, we actually live this way. We think and plan for tomorrow, for next year, for the next 10 years – if you want to really plan for secure tomorrow, the best approach is to practice Dharma now. There may be a not future time to do it. The great Milarepa committed heavy negative actions but after he met his Guru and receive teachings, he realised the fragility of life and the certainty of death. He developed the constant awareness that to achieve enlightenment one had to practice without a moment's delay and after tremendous effort on his part, before he died, he attained enlightenment.

Therefore, one's attitude towards death should not be one of superstitious fear but one of reasoned urgency i.e. understanding that death is certain and can come at any time, we should make best use of the time that we have. The way we live influences the thoughts we have at the time of death. At the time of death, the last thought can determine the completion of one's throwing karma. This means that if one has a strong negative emotion at the time of death and is let us say, attached to one's money, then even though one has lived a life with Dharma practice, that last thought of strong

attachment will link-up to the store of negative karma within us, to propel us to a rebirth in the hell realms. Conversely, a positive thought can activate the accumulated positive karma within us and secure us rebirth in the higher realms.

One aspect of Dharma is preparing for a proper death to connect with next life. This life has a maximum duration of perhaps 100 years but there is the next life (even if one is destined to become a Buddha, it might take 3 countless aeons). What we normally do is busy ourselves with preparing for this life's matters but totally ignore the future life, forgetting that death will come and force us onto the journey into the future life. How then should we prepare for the long journey into the future life? Meditate on death. It will strengthen our resolve to extract the essence of life, it will help us make proper choices. Because we do not understand and recognise the process of change and impermanence, we are frequently surprised, as it seems like we have suddenly grown older overnight! The Lam Rim says from the moment of birth, the cycle of decay and death begins. Due to a lack of mindfulness of impermanence, we grasp at the past and fantasise about the future and thus have no genuine sense of inspiration to practice Dharma now because we think we have time and we think we still have a chance to study and practice Dharma.

Ours is the story of an empty life: We think, "I will do this when I finish this job". Then 20 years pass. Then we then think, " I will do this later when I have more time". Then another 20 years passes. Then we say, "I'll do this when I retire". Another 20 years pass and death is already knocking at the door. Before actualising any Dharma practice, death comes. Hence, we need to practice Dharma now.

However, this does not mean we have to give up our lifestyles. Conventional life can remain as it is but the change is in our minds, our mentality, our attitude. We need to learn to transform the mind, the source of all happiness and misery. The Buddha's fundamental philosophy is embodied in 4 simple

lines - “Never commit non-virtue, cultivate only wholesome virtue, subdue one’s mind, this is the teaching of the Buddha.” By living in accordance with this, one can transform one’s ordinary body into a Buddha’s rainbow body; eradicate all suffering and attain blissful perfection.

The analytical meditation on death is to repeatedly reflect on the certainty of death, the uncertainty of the time of death and only Dharma is of help at the time of death. It is useful to consistently reflect on impermanence and life’s momentary changes. Each moment contains 64 sub-moments and each sub-moment contains zillions of further micro-moments of time. All carry their effects of change.

Knowing that there is a future life, who will be our guide on that journey to the next life? This brings on the next topic for analytical meditation - Refuge. Let us recap: First, we found the right (qualified) teacher; then we rejoiced at our good fortunate in having this precious human rebirth; then we freaked ourselves out by death/impermanence and finally concluded that we need insurance because one simply does not know how far one’s own spiritual practice can take care of oneself. Furthermore, at the time of death, when the dissolution of the elements our body occur, one’s senses get numb and there will be limited opportunity to start doing practice. What is this insurance? **Refuge** in the Triple Gem.

The actual refuge however, is not the Buddha. The actual refuge is the Dharma teachings. After learning, contemplating and meditating on the Buddha’s teachings, one can control and direct one’s mind at the time of death. At clinical death, all gross functions cease but one’s subconscious still continues and is fully functional but whether this consciousness is controlled by positive or negative imprints, will depend on the level and quality of one’s meditation throughout one’s life and at that time. Therefore, the insurance here, the protection one receives comes from having lived a life taking refuge in the Triple Gem, especially the teachings.

How to meditate on Refuge? Start by reflecting on how we spend our time. It can be described by being occupied mostly by either negative emotions or a state of numbness but rarely by virtue. We might go to the temple on Sunday mornings but even when we do that, there is the influence of grasping at wrong views e.g. we think “If I don’t go, Master won’t be happy” or “My friends will think poorly of me if I don’t attend puja” and such thoughts based on one’s reputation and thus worldly and negative.

To obtain insurance from the rebirth in the lower realms, whose sufferings far exceed the human realm, we go for refuge to the Triple Gem for guidance and support for our spiritual growth. Through understanding the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – and establishing irreversible faith in the Triple Gem as the protection from oneself going to the lower realms, this creates the cause of having stable conviction in Triple Gem and gain the result of avoiding the lower realms. There are refuge vows to be followed but as a minimum practice, if we cannot benefit others, at least one should not cause others any harm. Up to this point are the teachings of the Small Scope according to the Lam Rim.

Next comes the meditation on **Karma**: There are 4 characteristics of karma - (i) karma is certain (if we create negative causes, negative results will come; from positive causes, positive results will arise); (ii) karma increases (iii) one will not experience the result if one didn’t create the cause for it and (iv) karma will not disappear on its own accord (one has to purify the karma committed in order not to face its result).

How to purify karma? We need to apply for the 4 Opponent Powers – all karmas including the heinous karma, can be purified. This in itself brings quite a great deal of relief! So one needs to meditate and practice on the 4 Opponent Powers which are

- (a) Power of Reliance on the Triple Gem
- (b) Power of Regret (to be differentiated from guilt, which is a negative

thought). Regret is acknowledging the mistake and seeing its faults

(c) Power of the Remedy – e.g. to purify the karma of killing, one can do liberation of animals or recite sutras or do Vajrasattva practice (a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha for the purposes of purification practice); recite purification mantras like Om Vajrasattva Hum 28x

(d) Power of the Promise to refraining from committing the same mistake for a stated period of time.

By engaging in the 4 Opponent Powers, all forms of negative karma can be purified.

Then comes the very important meditation on ***sufferings of samsara***. All 6 realms of samsara have their respective types of sufferings. If one has killed mother and father, that karma will throw us into the hell realms (there are 16 hot and cold hells, each with their respective causes); the hungry ghost realm and their great sufferings of never having enough and the little they have transforming into thorns and burning liquids (one realises that one cannot afford to go there!); the animal realm (we think pets have a good life but in truth, they have constant suffering of ignorance, anxiety, great fear, loneliness, danger of larger animals eating smaller ones). The higher rebirths also have suffering – the human realm experiences constant ups and downs, encountering what we do not want and not getting what we want; god and demi-god realms are existences which have no incentive to practice Dharma and constantly experience the depletion of good karma. One month before the god realm being dies its luxury-existence declines, the radiance fades and this is due to the exhaustion of karma to remain as a god-realm being. When this happens, there is much fear and anxiety and they perceive their next rebirth either in hell or rebirth.

Through the above, you can see how terrifying and unsafe samsara is. The only safe place is liberation. We have observed many people who have comfortable lives. They don't think of Dharma. They are pre-occupied with their luxury life. Only when they are in trouble, they look for Buddha. When their karma for the good life begins to decline, fear arises and the search for

Buddha begins.



What is the method to attain nirvana?

One needs to practice ethics/morality/vows and wisdom.

What is the wisdom involved? It is to eliminate the concept of the permanence and inherent existence. There is nothing that is un-associated with mind. People and things exist as merely labelled. When I was in the womb, “Tenzin Zopa “ did not exist – only when I was born, I was given the name Tenzin Zopa. From that day, Tenzin Zopa came into being but as a merely-labelled being. As a merely labelled being, that exists i.e. I have parents, I have a body. But problem is, we do not analyse this way – we believe the label and the person as the same. We must cut down on our grasping at this merely-labelled “I”. Then when we die, we are able to avoid the negative clinging mind and have positive thoughts instead, which will be the connecting factor to the next life.

Does it mean that only the last thought counts and not all the karma that one has committed?

NO. For this we need to study the 12 links of dependent origination – one’s last thought can influence the completing karma, which can interrupt the 12 links (ordinarily, the 12 links will be complete in 2 or 3 lifetimes but due to interruptions, one set of 12 links can take countless lives to complete). Let us say I commit the cause to be reborn as a human being again. I need

to first perform virtue in order to be reborn as a human again to enjoy the results of this virtue. But this relies on the last thought being able to continue this continuum of virtue. If the last thought is negative, it will activate the negative karma that is stored in one's consciousness and cause an interruption to the continuum of virtue. Of course, the virtuous karma will still ripen in the future but it could be delayed.

Buddha in one of his past lives, was a hell-being pulling a cart. There were two others there who were unable to pull the cart and the hell guard (who was a projection of the negative mental imprints of all the hell-beings) beat them and Buddha stopped him and offered to carry the load on his own shoulder instead. At this, he was beaten to death but due to his right intention, the act of compassion ripened his positive 12 links of the past and was suddenly thrown into a rebirth in Tushita paradise.

One can learn about the causes that give rise to the sufferings of the various realms. Through this, one aspires towards enlightenment. The Hinayana focus is on morality and the selflessness of self; the Mahayana focus is bodhicitta and emptiness of self and phenomena.

The meditation on the next topic that is particular to the Mahayana path, Bodhicitta, the altruistic resolve to lead all beings to the blissful state of enlightenment. For this, one first starts with equanimity – regarding all beings as equally deserving of compassion and help.

Right now, we have enemies, friends and strangers – these all flow from our partial mind. We can see the uncertainty of these labels because relationships change. We are looking at just this one lifetime. If we go in previous lives – all beings have been our mothers, who have been closest to us, offering us protection and help, not just once but many times and the reason we cannot see this due to the interruption of recollection cause by rebirths. So we need to remember the kindness of all beings, as they have been our mother before.

When we are born, we feel like we are being squeezed between 2 mountains. Nowadays there is Caesarian birth. Karmically, it is unnatural and thus brings equal pain and suffering to child and mother. Due to the sufferings of birth and death, we forget about the particular sufferings of life. By being convinced in this teaching, one should eliminate partial thought and develop love and compassion equally to all.

Try this equanimity meditation with a very difficult person i.e. seeing that such a difficult person is like oneself in wanting to be free from suffering and wanting happiness. If one cannot manage this, then apply it to a mildly irritating person. By engaging in such meditation, the heart becomes soft and gradually you will find that even enemies will help you. We need to do this practice towards every single living being. When one is successful in equanimity practice, then bodhicitta practice becomes possible, the 6 Perfections training also become possible and all Mahayana practices become possible.



Training to attain bodhicitta

There are 2 methods - Arya Asanga's tradition (the 7 fold cause and effect) and Shantideva's tradition (exchanging of self for others).

Asanga's method of the 7 fold cause and effect – Starting with No: 7 which is the result i.e. bodhicitta (the altruistic thought to actualise full enlightenment)

for the sake of all living beings for them to also attain enlightenment) ; The 6 causes are: (1) seeing all beings as having been one's mother, (2) remembering their kindness, (3) repaying their kindness, (4) special love (cherishing others), (5) compassion, (6) great compassion/altruism (taking on the responsibility to liberate beings) and the result is bodhicitta.

The first one (seeing all beings as one's kind mother) is the most difficult. Compassion is common to all 3 yanas (Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana). Great compassion however, is practiced by Mahayanic/Vajrayana practitioners, namely taking the responsibility to liberate all beings from suffering.

Shantideva's method of exchanging self for others. From beginningless time, one has indulged in the self cherishing mind. Why is it that there have been enlightenment beings, yet I am still here? Because they cherished others equally and cherished others more than themselves. They overcame self importance and prioritise others. We need to deconstruct self cherishing and construct cherishing others. If we can do this, we will achieve bodhicitta. There are different labels and aspects of bodhicitta. Contrived bodhicitta (one which requires effort and we all start with this) and spontaneous bodhicitta (actual, continuous bodhicitta).

There are 5 Paths to Enlightenment namely the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Preparation, the Path of Seeing, the Path of Meditation and the Path of No More Learning. When we enter 1st of the 5 Mahayanic Paths, three things occur namely we attain spontaneous bodhicitta, Mahayanic renunciation and enter into Mahayanic Path of Accumulation.

1st Path – Path of Accumulation – in Sutrayana, one needs 3 countless aeons merit to become a Buddha; in Tantrayana/Vajrayana one requires 3 countless aeons merit but not that period of time to attain it.

2nd Path of preparation – this is the period of intense engagement in

mediating on emptiness whilst cultivating ethics.

3rd Path of Seeing – here one realises emptiness directly; realises the reality of existence and from this point, the 10 Grounds (of practice) begin. The 10 grounds are the applications/antidotes to remove defilements (9 defilements of which the first defilement is split into 2 which is why there are 10 antidotes). When is able to overcome all these, one is filled with the direct realisation and mindfulness of emptiness of phenomena.

4th Path of Meditation - one enters this stage when one is at the 8th Ground (and this continues until one reaches the 10th Ground). When you reach the 10th Ground, there are 2 levels, namely the stage of total vigilance through the application of antidotes and the last stage relates to the elimination of the most subtle defilements which then leads to the final and 5th path of No More Learning which is the attainment of Cessation, which is the omniscient mind or Buddhahood itself.

During the 10 grounds, we engage in the 6 perfections. The 6th perfection is on the wisdom realising emptiness. When one is fully matured with the conditional factors to fight with delusions, then when one applies the final wisdom realising emptiness, it becomes very forceful.



6 Perfections – the Bodhisattvas practice

Generosity: This refers to the giving of material possessions, of protection and of Dharma. Generosity means total giving without expectation of return or conditions such as expecting the recipient to use our offerings the way

we want them to. We tend to grasp before we give and still grasp after we give! In Lhasa Tibet, there is the Jowo (Buddha statue in main temple in Lhasa). One day, butter was offered by the benefactor to the Jowo for lamp offering but instead, the temple-keeper used the butter to make butter tea to drink. The benefactor got very angry and confronted the temple-keeper who advised him, “The benefit from your offering will be received when you totally let go”. He was right. It did not matter whether the butter was used for light offerings or as butter tea. The point of giving is to let go of grasping at the offering.

Morality: Ethics , avoiding the 10 non virtues and keeping vows. There is blessing from receiving and keeping the vows. [**For detailed teachings on the avoiding the 10 on virtues, please refer to Geshe Tenzin Zopa’s book “Karma” at www.fpmt-ldc.org under E-Books].

Patience: One needs to have a clear understanding of the disadvantages of anger and the advantages of patience. This is ultimately about not grasping at the “I”, the dismantling of self cherishing and the cultivation of cherishing others.

Joyous perseverance = enthusiastic effort at continuing in Dharma. There is no compulsion in Buddhism. If a teaching is beneficial for you, accept it; if it is not then leave it aside for the time being. If we want to go for class or retreats, we should not force ourselves. There are teachings on how to listen to Dharma. One should feel joy at learning the Dharma and listening to it with a questioning mind and check the Dharma the way a goldsmith checks the quality of gold. We need to learn about the benefits of Dharma practice, then there will be joy in us to practice.

Concentration – we already covered this on samatha section – it is to stabilise one’s mind and prepare it for analytical meditation to gain special insight.
Wisdom - the wisdom realising the emptiness of self and of phenomena.
First, the emptiness of self: We tend to believe that I exists as an absolute entity existing right here. But how can the subject (the person meditating)

and object (of meditation) be one? And if I am all the parts of my body, there will be multiple “me” which does not make any sense. Then we think we are our consciousness – let us check - we have a zillion thoughts – so which one is “me”? The conclusion is that self is totally empty. However, this could then give rise to a sense of loss of entity.

Truth is, there is an existent self and non-existent self. The non-existent self is that which thinks itself permanent; that thinks its existence is not reliant upon causes and conditions; that thinks it is independently existing. Such views are born out of ignorance.

The self that exists is the merely-labelled I on the base of aggregates. In other words, the “I” that does exist is the dependently-existing I. That “I” comes about due to causes and conditions, parts and mental labelling. It does not exist independently. By familiarising and meditating frequently on this, the grasping at an inherently existing, solid I will end.

Now the emptiness of phenomena: This is the antidote to all subtle defilements. Phenomena refers to external objects and includes one’s aggregates. These also exist as being merely-labelled. The label has to be on a valid base, otherwise there is the fault of not accepting the conventional truth. Conventional truth refers to characteristics that are commonly agreed upon; ultimate truth is about self and phenomena being merely-labelled. [**For Geshe Tenzin Zopa’s teachings on conventional and ultimate truth, refer to the book titled “Whose Truth” at www.fpmt-ldc.org under E-Books] Whenever one does meditation, one must dedicate the efforts at having done meditation be the complete cause for every single being to actualise enlightenment. Then bring up within oneself a sense of joy and think “May I and others always have the positive karma to benefit others”.

In order to actualize the ultimate truth, to realise emptiness, you first need to begin with realisations of conventional truth, i.e. the ordinary appearance of objects around us, for example, a clock. The reading of 12 hours on the

clock, the hands of the clock moving, these are aspects of the conventional truth of the clock. But does the clock exist as a clock without my mind giving it that label? No.

Similarly, if I want to meditate on you, it is not just imagining your image in front of me. My purpose is to understand and realize the true nature of your existence; not just to become familiar with your appearance. I want to use this method of meditation to know the reality of all things; to attain enlightenment; to find the truth.

To find the truth of you, I first need to establish the conventional truth of your existence. That means that I need an image of you in front of me. Having done so, I analyze whether you truly exist on your own or whether you exist due to causes and conditions, parts (aggregates) and my mental action of labelling you as “you” . I will discover that you are a dependent-arising, i.e. you come into being from a combination of these factors.

Do this method of analysis frequently. Applying it to oneself, to every experience and to every aspect of the world one lives in. Eventually it will bring you to the point that everything – people, experiences, phenomena – arise dependently and not independently. They thus lack inherent existence. It will help you to abandon the grasping at a solid “I” and the perpetual egoistic cherishing of the “I” , which is the root cause of all the suffering in us. By doing so, we will gain the direct understanding of selflessness, the emptiness of the “I” . That is the purpose of Buddhist meditation.



Tong Len – the meditation on taking and giving

Tong Len literally means giving one's resources to others to help them and taking on others' misfortunes. This is not an easy practice. Since doing it literally is difficult, we tame our minds by doing it mentally. Through the cultivation of offering up our virtues and prayers to benefit other living beings, that thought acts like a radio-frequency and will bring benefit to that person. Through one's visualisation during tong len meditation, one takes on all others sufferings and offers to them, all of one's happiness. When one achieves Arya Bodhisattva levels, one can have an effect on the level of others' sufferings but for us, in the meantime, this practice is to develop one's courage of heart.

Tong Len meditation uses one's inward breath and outward breath. When we inhale, we visualise taking on all the sufferings of others and when these "sufferings" flow into us, the suffering strikes at the ego residing at our heart and with our out-breath, whatever merit or positive energy we possess is shared and transmitted to sentient beings.

To enhance one's tong len practice, we invoke emptiness i.e. we think, "Whatever sufferings of others there are, they are now brought upon oneself as black smoke to be applied to the self-cherishing I". We then meditate on the emptiness of "I" by reflecting on how the idea of "I" comes from a combination of causes & conditions, parts (aggregates/phenomena) and mental labelling. From this, we realise there is only such a dependently-

existing- I; there is no independently existing “I” to cling to; similarly apply this meditation in relation to the sick person, who is also not independently-existing but is a dependently-arising sick person. At the end of the session, transfer the merit of this emptiness meditation to that person’s recovery.



Deity Yoga

The practice of deity yoga comes from the Buddha's teachings on Tantra and is extremely important for one's spiritual development towards enlightenment. Enlightenment comes about when there is the total elimination of the ignorant mind and accomplishing the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. However to be able to eradicate ignorance and defilements, one requires the genuine realisation of ultimate bodhicitta.

To achieve this, one needs to use the most subtle mind to actualise bodhicitta and emptiness. Gross consciousness itself will not be able to do this. The activation of the subtle consciousness is required. The practice of deity yoga is the method by which the practitioner engages with the subtle consciousness/mind.

In the Sutrayana, there is very limited discussion on the method of utilising the most subtle mind. Only the resultant vehicle of Tantra contains detailed and complete teachings on the method of working with the subtle mind.

Tantra practices contain some mudras and outer practices which appear at a superficial level, to be similar to Hindu tantra, which has led some scholars to the mistaken belief that Buddhist tantric meditation are derived

from Hindu practice. This idea is absolutely wrong. Other outer aspects of Buddhist tantra like fire pujas and the creation of mandalas may have some similarities with Hindu tantra, yet the purpose, motivation, fundamental practices and the objectives are totally different.

Buddhist tantra is based on the practitioner having a firm understanding and practice of the 3 Principal Aspects of the Path, namely renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness. There is no similar requirement in Hindu tantric practice. In the concentration practices of Hindu tantra, the practitioner is able to go up to the stage of concentration which is able to eliminate gross sufferings, whereas Buddhist tantric practice enables the practitioner to not only eliminate samsaric suffering as well as the contaminated samsaric happiness, it also eliminates the neutral state of existence. The Hindu tantric practitioner is at best able to attain a high level of concentration (peak of samsara) but that state of existence is still within samsara; whereas for the Buddhist tantric practitioner, he is able to go beyond this stage and attain enlightenment through the method of deity yoga meditation.

Deity Yoga meditation involves the visualisation of a Buddha-deity (a symbol of bodhicitta and emptiness) and the meditation on the chakras, wind, drops and channels which form one's subtle, inner nervous system.

A Buddhist tantric practitioner who lives an ethical life infused with renunciation, bodhicitta and an understanding of emptiness and then perseveres in this method of meditation, will be able to tame the inner winds, stimulate the drops, harness one's concentration to activate the subtle consciousness, the most profound wisdom mind and use it to destroy even subtle defilements and actualise the fully awakened state of enlightenment, within one lifetime.

When doing deity yoga meditation, one commonly relies on a sadhana (a comprehensive set of prayers conjoined with visualisations). The overall structure of a deity-sadhana would consist of homage to the Buddha and

lineage Lama prayers, followed by Refuge & bodhicitta prayers. These practices drive the blessings of the Buddha, the Triple Gem right up to one's Guru into you. This is then followed by the meditator (who has received the appropriate Initiation into a particular Buddha-deity from a qualified Mahayana vajra master) generating himself as the Deity through the understanding of emptiness.

The purpose of such visualisation of oneself as the Buddha needs to be understood. It is to cut off ordinary perceptions, to transform the impure into purity; to remind oneself of all the perfected qualities of the Buddha. Tantra/deity yoga practice is to take the resultant state (of Buddhahood) into the path now, while we are still cultivating. Like the apprentice who should know the qualities and skills of his master to become a master, similarly, we need to be totally-familiar with the appearance (form) and qualities/realisations (wisdom) of the Buddha we are seeking to emulate. This familiarisation happens during the deity yoga meditation. To avoid samsaric pride from arising during such self generation as deity, it is imperative that one needs to understand emptiness.

Whilst dwelling in the understanding of emptiness and generating oneself as the Deity, one then consecrates or blesses the inner and outer offerings. This is then followed by the mandala (celestial mansion) where the deity resides. Recitation of the deity's mantra follows, which help to confer both purification and the accumulation of merits. During this practice, one radiates light to all the Buddha realms and draw the light back-in in order to receive blessings and then radiate back the same light to all realms to bless all the beings there to the state of the Buddha. This is one of the great practices of generosity. The sadhana practice concludes with extensive supplication prayers, prayers of auspiciousness and dedication for the benefit of all sentient beings and one's enlightenment to be able to lead all living beings to that state.

Deity yoga is not a practice that is to be done only while one is on the

meditation cushion. Done correctly, deity yoga requires everything that one does during the day or night to be in the nature of the Deity's activities – for example -

Sleeping Yoga – the practitioner should go to sleep visualising himself/herself as the deity. One of the purposes of this practice is that in the event one dies during that sleep, one will have created the causes to be born in the Pureland of that deity.

The Yoga of Waking Up – when you wake up in the morning, every sound you hear and every sight you see should be thought of as mantra sounds or divine sights. For example, someone wakes you up from sleep in the early morning. It can be quite irritating when all you want to do is to sleep on. But if you practice the yoga of waking up, then even if someone pours a bucket of water over you to wake you up, you will feel blissful. Like being bathed by nectar (laughter). It is true! This practice has that much benefit.

The Tasting Nectar Yoga - Transforming the ordinary substances that one consumes. Like your breakfast, for instance. As you taste the first sip of tea, visualise it as nectar essence. Everything will then become delicious. Even if you happen to burn your tongue on the hot Milo, it will not bother you. It will just bring bliss.

The Yoga of Daka and Dakini: Dakas and dakinis are defined as “skyfarers who offer aid to practitioners and are messengers of the Buddha to bring benefit to numberless living beings” - in more familiar language, dakas would be male angels and dakinis female angels. So as you go about your day, this yoga requires you to visualise every male you see as a daka and every female you see as a dakini. This will encourage you to have a divine view of everyone.



Healing anger meditation

There was the earlier discussion on visualizing Shakyamuni Buddha for the purpose of training in calm abiding/concentration meditation. That method can be used for a different but beneficial purpose too – for the purpose of managing one’s anger.

This technique can help you to receive the Buddha’s blessings to heal the disturbed mind of anger. You may be someone who does not like being angry but somehow find that you always end up getting into that state. Small things make you angry, not to mention major issues.

Here, applying your mindfulness, that is accompanied by introspection (vigilance), direct your concentration to drive nectar-light from Shakyamuni Buddha into you. This nectar-light carries garlands of advice which tells you, “Oh, poor child, poor child. Getting angry brings suffering to you and it brings suffering to others as well. It harms your health and prevents solutions from being found. That is just the immediate suffering that comes. Then there is the accumulation of negative karma which brings on future suffering. There will be no end to problems. When death finally comes, the karma committed out of anger will bring you to the suffering realms, the hell realms. Therefore, nothing good comes from anger.” Then in your heart, you think, “Ah! Shakyamuni Buddha, thank you. The disadvantages of anger are many. It harms me and others. Thank you. I’ll try my best to capture this thief of my merits and happiness” . By doing this meditation for at least 5

minutes, you will not be angry for those 5 minutes and give your mind that space to be clearer, to be free from harm.

That is how to subdue one's mind and receive the Buddha's blessings. Receiving blessings is not like suddenly sprouting horns. "Give me blessing", then suddenly, you sprout horns. Not like that. Instead, it is about the small, steady steps that one takes which finally lead up to enlightenment. And in order to strengthen one's meditation, invoke light radiating towards you. When you get angry, the whole world looks dark, heavy and scary. When others look at you, they too feel scared! Within your mind of anger, there are only shadows with every single corner cluttered with garbage and negative energy. If someone were to offer you delicious food, you would find it tasteless or too spicy or too salty. Nothing seems right and comfortable when you are angry. Nothing makes you feel good.

To cleanse this clutter, to subside this emotional turmoil, use visualisation involving light together with nectar flowing through you from the Buddha. If you feel comfortable with golden coloured nectar, then use golden coloured nectar during your anger-management meditation. If you feel comfortable with blue-lapis lazuli coloured light, then use that. Whichever suits you. The nectar light enters from the crown or alternatively, enters you from every single pore of your body, gently dissolving into you. Completely fill your entire body with this nectar-light, dissolving and pushing out from you, all negative thoughts, scary things, ugly things, painful moments, everything dark and upsetting simply flows out. Nectar-light fills you up and you feel your entire physical form becoming completely clean, clear and light – you become like a form of light.

Naturally, through the power of Buddha's holy image brought into being through your visualisation, it has the effect of bringing peace, bliss and relaxation to your body and mind. There it is. You should try it. Whenever you feel that you have difficulties or are suffering in your physical form or in your mind, just do this simple meditation, it will definitely, 100%, bring a

shift within the angry, congested mind towards a more spacious, peaceful mind.

This visualisation meditation can be used to gain realizations in the Grounds and Paths to achieve enlightenment. “Ground” here is not the ground on which we walk on but the stages of realizations up to the enlightenment. In my young days, when I was studying the philosophy for the first time, my teacher talked about these “Grounds” (in Tibetan it is pronounced, “Sa”). It puzzled me, so I asked him, “You emphasise so much about the Grounds. What is this ‘ground’?” You see, for quite a while back then, I was confused between the grounds of realizations and ground of the earth! (Laughter). These days, it is so easy to get frustrated or get attracted to objects of desire. We are never satisfied. Why? Because we have done the strongest meditation in attachment, anger, ignorance for so many lifetimes.

Thus, it has become extremely easy to manifest anger and attachment, to the point of it being almost spontaneous within us. The moment you see your enemy, you do not even need to think deeply or recall the incident where he angered you. The anger simply arises. Even when not in the company of the enemy, you can just be sitting there by yourself and the adverse mind towards that person comes up. Why does this happen? This is because you have obtained “realizations” through habituating/meditating on your enemy with an angry mind. So now, that negative feeling you have towards that person becomes spontaneous, without requiring any effort. Similarly with objects of attachment. We constantly feed our grasping mind.

Therefore, we need to re-direct our focus. The mind of contentment, the mind which recognises and values what it has, the satisfaction-mind. Such a mind is necessary for inner peace and happiness. That is what we should focus on. However, this involves training our minds in meditation to actualize this manner of contentment through our thoughts, lifestyles, outlook. To achieve a mind where few obstacles or circumstances are able to destroy one’s peace of mind requires the practice of meditation. Without meditation, nothing can be achieved.



Meditation while carrying out routine activities

Meditation can be used in every situation and manner to train one's mind. No exaggeration. The main point is that as Buddhists, one should use meditation as a cause for enlightenment and not for the short term gains of this-life, which is nothing more than samsara.

However, the potency of meditation can be seen EVEN IF one were only talking about the purposes of this life. For example, some people are worried about being fat. They then starve themselves, avoiding this and not eating that. The problem is that the moment you start worrying about being fat, you start to get fat. This is because samsara is totally upside down. What you want, you don't achieve. What you don't want comes easily. That is the nature of samsara. So my thoughts are that, if you wish to get thin, you should enjoy being fat! (Laughter) Of course, this is just my self-created theory. Likewise, if you want to get fat, you should wish to get thin. Upside-down samsara works this way. The more craving you have, the more uptight you are about wanting something, the exact opposite happens. I have seen people who worry so much about being fat and they really do get fat fast. They subject themselves to so much restrictions and suffering due to the craving, grasping mind. Isn't this is suffering also?

Meditating while watching TV

Meditation on Compassion while watching TV: Turn the TV to the Discovery Channel or National Geographic or just watch the evening news. What

you see there is sometimes more effective in explaining suffering than the Sutras.

It is very painful and pitiful to see how fragile life is, how destruction and suffering comes quickly through natural disasters, sicknesses, the aggressive mind, the lack of awareness and care for others. It is unbelievable.

So here, while watching TV, you can use what you see to habituate your mind with what the Buddha taught. Sincerely from the depth of your heart, feel the fear and terror and anguish of all those suffering beings, FEEL it until your goose bumps pop out and your tears flow. Feel their loss and pain. Feel it until deep inside you until the thought "I can't bear seeing those sufferings. May those beings be free from whatever suffering they are experiencing right now and all entire suffering. I want to do my part. I want to take responsibility for this" arises. What can one do? Do what you can manage. Like the wild bush fires in California, if you can afford to fly to California to help, do it! And if not, send one cent donation with good motivation. As a minimum, offer your prayers and dedications for the fire to be extinguished and the suffering to end. That is a manner of meditation on compassion. That is how to use your TV-time to train your mind in compassion and to strengthen it every day.

Meditation on Emptiness while watching the TV: There are many shows regarding family life. A common story begins with girl meets boy, they get married and children come along. Then all the problems of the householder's life come. They get into conflict, frustrations and want to give everything up. They might have moments of joy but soon moments of trouble and sorrow arise. Such are very common scenes in these stories of life.

Did you notice how each character in the story projects onto their partners, family, situations certain views or labels? However, they do not realise they are giving labels nor think that everything is merely projected by their mind or interpreted by their mind. To them, what they see is "truth". They see

their own projections as “truth”. Nothing in samsaric mental imputations is true. Everything exists dependently on cause and conditions and mental projections. These projected images are merely like clouds in the sky, temporary and interrupting the clarity of the sky.

So you should ask yourself, why are you clinging to this “projected-existence” and get so stressed up? Why are you so worried of getting sick or being harmed by others? Or that you have to return to the office tomorrow to work on problems there? Instead, try to see the true nature of existence (that it is not permanent and also not independently-arising nor inherently existing). That will calm and stabilise your mind, as well as give it a fresh perspective.

The above are two simple examples of how to do meaningful meditation while watching TV. Let your mind habituate with the Buddha’s teachings slowly, while enjoying the show. Your ability to combine doing something routine, whilst applying the Dharma, will get stronger. Your mind will gradually get into this habit. Your mind will eventually be able to automatically respond in a virtuous, wise, insightful manner in all situations, even difficult ones. You will find that the moment you feel hardship coming on, you are able to flip your mind as easily as snapping your fingers, turn it positively towards the problem and find a good solution for it. It is like that. Such is the wonder of the practice of meditation.



Questions & Answers on Meditation

Q: Are the 9 stages of meditation the same as the Theravadan method which refers to the single-pointed stage.

Ans: It is the same – there is no need to specifically refer to the term “the 9 stages” but the goal of achieving the single pointed concentration would be the same. The total physical and mental pliancy influences one’s mental development of samatha. Samatha is attained after the 9th stage of absorption.

Q: As a beginner, we may have some concern about whether doing tong len will results in our contracting the disease.

Ans: Firstly, if we do not have the karma to get the disease, we will not get it. (And if we had the karma to contract the illness, we would get it whatever we do!) However, if we have such fear, then do this instead – whenever we are having some unease or difficulty – we can think “May whatever pain I may be having be sufficient to clear the suffering of all beings and all the merits I have been given to them”.

Q: Can we do any meditation practice that will allow us to know exactly when and where we will die?

Ans: As long as one is not in control of karma, it is not possible to determine when and where we will die.

Q. Visualisation meditation actually involves both concentration and analytical meditation?

Ans: It can involve both. If one is only seeking to develop concentration, then one would apply mindfulness and introspection to stabilise one's concentration on the visualised object and nothing else. However, visualisation should go beyond that i.e. after establishing concentration on the meditation object – for example, the Buddha – one should then apply analytical meditation to familiarise one's mind with the qualities of the Buddha and teachings which lead to Buddhahood.

Q: During meditation, one works towards calming the mind. However, if one then brings up an object through visualisation, wouldn't this be a distraction?

Ans: We need to be clear about our purpose for meditation. If one only seeks concentration, then elaborate visualisation may be (though not necessarily) a distraction. But if one seeks to explore one's mind and the Truth more deeply, visualisation helps to train one's mind. Group meditation is useful for analytical meditation; for concentration meditation, solo practice is better.

Q: If one has good understanding of Dharma and tries to problem-solve during meditation. At that stage, questions or thoughts do arise in the mind in its effort to find a solution. Does that mean that one is no longer in meditation?

Ans: There is contemplative analysis and meditative analysis. If there is an

element of instability during this effort, it is more likely a contemplation, rather than a meditation.

Q: There are all kinds of meditation. Is Buddhist meditation only for high lamas and not for ordinary people?

Ans: Meditation is for everyone. Yes, there are various kinds of meditation taught in Buddhism such as visualisations of the form and qualities of the Buddha; meditation on the Buddhadharma; meditations using nectar and light to drive out negativities, tummo/inner heat meditation to stabilise oneself against elemental disturbances. The best meditation is to study and then meditate on the Lam Rim (graduated path to enlightenment) so that one's meditation will be the cause for liberation.

Q: When one is asked to "visualise numberless Buddhas" how would one do this?

Ans: Visualise them from a bird's eye view. Not necessarily one by one. Meditating on Refuge objects and holy objects brings great benefit to one's mind and life.

Q: I first thought meditation is just for physical relaxation but I began to realise that Buddhist meditation is more than that.

Ans: The purpose of meditation or the purpose for anything we do, should be for liberation from samsara and for enlightenment of all living beings. The main goal of meditation is not about physical comfort. Even calm-abiding/concentration meditation alone will not secure liberation but can instead become a cause for more samsara. The practice of concentration meditation is to create the basis and means to do analytical meditation to gain insight

into the Buddha's teachings, which are the ultimate refuge from suffering. Meditation and Dharma is not to secure miracles nor mantra powers. These arise as a result of proper Dharma practice but is not the purpose for doing so.

Q: Once we have done a purification practice, do we have to repeat the purification?

Ans: If one has conviction in the purification practice, there would be no need to repeat it. However, if one has again committed the negative deed, then one would need to do the purification practice again but one needs strong resolve to avoid repeating the negative act. There is not much purpose in doing purification practice if one knows or is careless about repeating the negative act.

Q: We are taught that we need to listen (to Buddha's teachings), then contemplate and then meditate. For us as beginners, our concentration span is limited. So how will we know whether we are contemplating (thinking about the meaning) or really meditating.

Ans: When we are just exploring the concept, our conviction and understanding of the concept is unstable, that is contemplation. Once we come to the point of analysing that concept through proper, steady analysis and this mode of analysing becomes a habit, then one is engaging in meditation. The wisdom gained through contemplation is brought into the habit of ones mind and is meditation

Q: We are taught to first engage in concentration meditation; followed by analytical meditation. What would be the sufficient level of concentration to be able to begin to start doing analytical meditation?

Ans: In the Lam Rim, concentration meditation (Samatha) is the basis to do analytical meditation to gain special insight (vipassana). Analysis however, is needed to during the study of the teachings which one will later meditate on. For most beginner practitioners, it is acceptable to alternate the practices of concentration meditation and analytical meditation.

Q: Sometimes when meditating on one's past mistakes, a kind of deep sorrow arises – cannot tell whether it is just emotion or wisdom – what should we do when this situation arises?

Ans: If sorrow arises, it is not a realisation but an emotional state. Instead, one should honestly recognise one's mistakes and should feel joy that one has realised this and that total purification is possible.

Q: What causes should we create to be able to succeed in concentration meditation and analytical meditation?

Ans: Train our mind in mindfulness and introspection and live an ethical life , particularly the 3 higher trainings of ethics, concentration, wisdom

Q: Amitabha Buddha and other Dhyani Buddhas are always depicted in specific colours. Similarly, mandalas are always in full colour. When we meditate on this colourful forms , is something happening to our subtle consciousness?

Ans: Yes. The 5 Dhyani Buddhas represent the purified aggregates. When we accomplish the total eradication of the contaminated aggregates, ie. when we become a Buddha, we will attain all the 5 Dhyani Buddhas' qualities. By visualising oneself as deity having the purified aggregates and visualising one's abode as a mandala, we are purifying our subtle defilements and

creating the causes for the result of Buddhahood. Thus this practice is the causal stage of cultivation.

Q: Sometimes, when on holiday or feeling very stressed, meditation becomes difficult. If we want to do meditation regularly, what can we do to ensure we do regular meditation?

Ans: For this, one needs to inspire oneself. Whether one is in an excited state of mind or when one's mind is occupied with worries or work, one needs to continuously inspire oneself. Think of the Buddha's qualities. Recall the life stories of Buddha and the pandits and mahasiddhas. Remember the enormous benefits of meditation. Motivate positively at the start and end of each day. Whenever you feel distant from Dharma practice or bored with it, bring up the image of the Buddha or of one's Guru as an inspiration.

The End

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- With applause to LDC members and readers of Dharma books, who become the upholders & preservers of the Buddhadharma.

How To Treat Dharma Books

All Dharma books should be treated with respect – kept off the floor and places where people sit or walk and should not be stepped over. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separated from other mundane materials. Other objects, including statues and stupas, should not be placed on top of dharma books and materials. Licking the fingers to turn pages is considered negative and will create negative karma.

If it is necessary to dispose of written dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash.

When offering dharma texts to the fire, first recite the mantra OM AH HUNG, then visualize the letters of the texts to be burned absorbing into the syllable AH and the AH absorbing into you, transmitting their wisdom to your mind stream. After that, as you continue to recite OM AH HUNG, you can offer the texts to the fire.

Photos or images of holy beings, deities and other holy objects should not be burned and instead placed with respect in stupas or other high clean places so that they do not end up on the ground.

As a minimum, place this book on a clean shelf with a mind of respect

- thank you!



Biodata of Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Geshe Tenzin Zopa holds a doctorate in Buddhist Philosophy from Sera Jey Monastic University in South India and is a master in Tibetan Buddhist rituals. He is currently the Resident Teacher at Losang Dragpa Buddhist Society, Malaysia and is also the Director of the Tsum Valley Project (Himalayan Region), which provides Buddhist study and practice facilities and accommodation for the community in the

Valley. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the principal and focal point of the award winning film titled “Unmistaken Child” which chronicles the search for the reincarnation of his great master.

Geshe Tenzin Zopa has a contemporary style of teaching which he combines with the ancient wisdom derived from his years of philosophical studies and debate, thereby benefiting everyone who has met or heard him teach. Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the face of a dynamic and socially engaged Buddhism in the 21st Century.

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