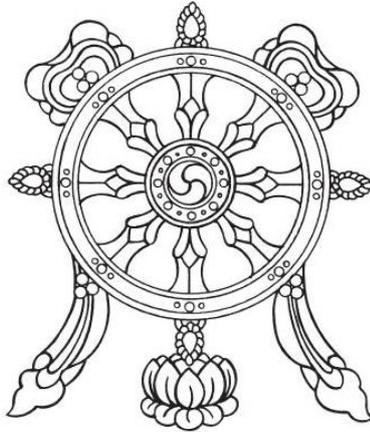


# Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

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



SUBJECT AREA 2

How to Meditate

*Teachings and Meditations*

*by Ven. Sangye Khadro*

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# Session One

## *Taught by Ven. Sangye Khadro*

We're now starting a course on How To Meditate, and in each session of this course I will spend some time explaining different aspects of meditation and will introduce different kinds of meditation techniques. In this first session I'll talk about what meditation is, and what is the purpose of doing meditation. I will also mention some mistaken ideas people have about meditation that need to be cleared away. Then I'll talk about posture, the way of sitting when we do meditation. And then we'll do a very simple, basic meditation on the breath.

### *What Is Meditation?*

So first of all, what is meditation? The word for meditation in the Tibetan language is *gom*, which literally means "familiar." So meditation is making ourselves familiar with positive states of mind, making our mind familiar with positive thoughts. Now, we might have a better understanding of what that means if we think about how our minds normally function, what already happens in our mind. Normally, we are familiar with negative states of mind. And when we're familiar with a particular state of mind then it comes up very easily. It becomes a habit. And we fall into that particular state of mind very easily. For example, many of us may have a problem with anger. We find ourselves feeling unhappy when things go wrong. When things go opposite to the way we want them to go, then we might find ourselves trying to find some external object to blame for our unhappiness. We might blame one of our family members. We may think it's our husband or wife who is at fault, who is the reason for us to be unhappy or for things going wrong. We might blame our parents or our children, or somebody else in the family, or the neighbours. Or we might blame the government. It's the government's fault.

This is a habit that many people have. When feeling unhappy, when things don't go well, we blame someone or something outside of ourselves. And then we get all caught up feeling angry at that person or that object. This can become a habit. The more we do it, the easier it becomes. The more easily and naturally we fall into that, without even knowing it, it just becomes automatic and spontaneous.

Another example that many of you might find familiar in your experience is that we tend to become addicted to things. Sometimes when we feel unhappy, bored, restless or dissatisfied, then we turn to something outside of ourselves, to try to feel better, to try to feel good - to get some pleasure, some happiness, to get us out of this unpleasant state of mind that we're in. For some people that may be alcohol or drugs, cigarettes, food, or maybe people, relationships, or sex. The things that people turn to can sometimes be unhealthy, like alcohol and drugs. And food can become unhealthy if you eat

too much or eat the wrong kind of food. Gambling is another thing people often become addicted to. And so this can become a habit. We turn to this external source of happiness in order to get a sense of pleasure, to feel good, to feel better. And then the more we do that the easier it becomes. It becomes a habit, it becomes something very familiar, and then it's very easy to fall into that, for that to happen again and again and again. So these are just some examples of things which might already be happening in our experience - where we are familiar with certain states of mind or certain patterns of thinking, certain attitudes, certain kinds of behaviour. And the more we allow ourselves to fall into this then the easier it becomes. It becomes very familiar.

The idea of meditation is to make ourselves familiar with more healthy, positive, and helpful ways of thinking, states of mind, patterns of thinking and behaving. And the more we make ourselves familiar with these positive states of mind, the more they will arise easily, naturally, and spontaneously.

### *What Is the Mind?*

Now I'll talk a bit about the mind because I've already used the word 'mind' a number of times, and it's important to clarify what the mind is in Buddhism. I'll just give a brief explanation here because it's actually the subject of another course - Mind and Its Potential.

According to Buddhism, each of us is basically composed of two things - body and mind. The body consists all the physical, material parts of us, such as our skin, bones, blood and so forth, which can be further broken down into cells, and further into atoms and subatomic particles. That's one aspect of our being, our physical body.

The other aspect of us, what we are, is our mind. And the mind is of a completely different nature to our body. It isn't made of any material, physical substance, like cells, atoms, subatomic particles. So it's not any part of our body. Some people have the idea that mind is something in our body, like our brain or nervous system. But according to Buddhism the mind is not any part of the body. And in fact it's not physical at all. It has no physical properties or physical attributes. So that means it cannot be seen, it's not visible to the eye. We can't touch it, it's not tangible. We can't open up the body, take it apart and find the mind in there because it's not that kind of phenomenon. Mind is said to be a non-physical, non-material phenomenon. That's probably a new idea that might be difficult to understand or to accept and will take some time to get used to. But just keep it in mind and gradually it will become more familiar.

The other main attribute of the mind, in addition to it being non-physical, is that it has the function of knowing or experiencing things. That's what the mind does, that's its function. There are different ways that the mind can know or experience things. One way is through our senses: seeing, hearing, smell, taste, touch - the five physical senses. Any time we have any of those experiences, any time we see something or hear something, it's actually our mind that's having that experience, that is that experience. It's not our eyes, not our ears, it's our mind.

And another way our mind can know or experience is through thinking, thought. When we think about things - for example, now you're listening to what I'm saying, and there are thoughts going on in your mind, and you're trying to process and understand these ideas that are being presented to you. So thinking is also the mind. Thought also includes memories. When we remember things that happened in the past, whether it's five minutes ago or ten years ago or twenty years ago or any time in the past, those memories are also our mind.

Mind also includes emotions. Sometimes in the West we make a differentiation between the mind and emotions. We tend to think of the mind as being the intellect, thinking, and emotions are something else. But according to Buddhism emotions are also part of the mind. All the different emotions we have - joy, sadness, love, anger, fear, courage, and so on - all of those are also part of the mind.

So the mind includes many different kinds of experiences. In one way we can say that the mind is the general category of all the different kinds of experiences that we have: perceptions, thoughts, memories, feelings, and emotions. And we shouldn't think of the mind as being like some kind of organ that's sitting somewhere inside of us and having these experiences. It's not like that. Rather, the mind is compared to a river or stream that is constantly moving and changing. The mind is more like a stream of these different experiences, each of which is momentary. Each experience lasts just a moment, then it passes. Then the next one arises and passes. Then the next one arises and passes. So it's a constantly flowing and constantly changing stream of experiences. Try to get that image of what the mind is. Not some kind of solid thing sitting there and having experiences.

The mind is something that never stops. You might think that when we go to sleep at night the mind shuts down and stops functioning. But it doesn't. Even when we're asleep, or even if a person is in a coma, in a state of unconsciousness, the mind is still there and having some kind of experience. When we sleep we sometimes have dreams, and dreams are the mind. And even when we're not dreaming, but are in a state of deep sleep or deep unconsciousness, still the mind is there. The mind is functioning, having some kind of experience, even if it's just darkness, blackness. There is always something happening in the mind. The mind is always doing something, experiencing something. It never stops. It keeps going twenty-four hours a day, continuously.

So these are just a few of the things said about the mind in Buddhism. It's important to understand what the mind is, because meditation is a function or activity of the mind. It's our mind that meditates, not our body, even though we say it's important to try to put our body into a good position for meditation. But just putting our body into a certain position isn't meditation. Meditation is what we do with our mind, what's going on in our mind. So it's important to have some understanding of what the mind is. And also when we're meditating, what we are observing, what we're looking at, and what we're working with is the mind.

### *Positive and Negative States of Mind*

As I mentioned before, the meaning of "meditation" in Buddhism is becoming familiar with positive states of the mind. So I need to explain what is meant by a positive state of mind as opposed to a negative state of mind. The main criteria in determining whether a state of mind is positive or negative is what kind of result or effect it has. A positive state of mind will be a state of mind that brings peace and happiness, both to oneself and to others. Whereas a negative state of mind will be one that is unpeaceful - it brings unhappiness and disturbance and suffering to oneself and to others.

I already mentioned anger as one example of a negative state of mind. It's not there all the time. We don't have anger in our mind constantly - it comes and goes. When it does come into our mind, then immediately it has the effect of making our mind unpeaceful and disturbed - it's not a happy, peaceful state of mind. We can see that for ourselves. We don't have to take the Buddha's word for it. We can check that out in our own experience. Anger can also become disturbing to other people. If the anger gets stronger, then it might start influencing our behaviour. We start slamming things around, we might speak in an angry way, we might say nasty, hurtful things to other people so that it becomes hurtful for them and disturbing for them. So anger is a very clear example of a negative state of mind. And the reason it's said to be negative is because of the kind of effects that it has. It has the effect of making ourselves unpeaceful and of making other people unhappy and disturbed.

On the other hand, an example of a positive state of mind would be a feeling of love or loving kindness, which is explained in Buddhism as wishing others to be happy. It's when we feel a sense of respect and care and concern for other people or even one other person, and then we do what we can to make them happy and not hurt them, not disturb them. When that feeling comes into our mind, when there's the presence of loving kindness in our mind, it automatically has the effect of making our mind peaceful and happy. It's a very beautiful feeling to have, which again we can experience for ourselves. It's a wonderful thing to be able to feel love, loving kindness. It makes us feel good, and brings happiness to our own mind. Then when we relate to another person and other people with that feeling in our mind, the way we behave, the way we talk to them, the way we treat them makes them feel good. People like to be treated with love and kindness - they feel happy. Even animals respond to being treated with love and kindness. Again, that's a clear example of a positive state of mind.

There are many examples of both states of mind, negative and positive. And we have both within us. Within our minds there are some thoughts, feelings or attitudes which are negative, which cause unhappiness to ourselves and others. And there are some which are positive, which bring peace and happiness to ourselves and others. We have both. And probably most people, if they had a choice, would want to be in a positive state of mind all the time, twenty-four hours a day - always feeling love, kindness, patience, happiness, clarity, and so on. This is how we would like to be all the time, but are we able to do that? We would probably choose never to experience any negative state of mind - to never have anger, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, unhappiness, depression, and fear. If we had our

choice we would get rid of all of those and never experience them. But are we able to do that? Do we have that ability? Do we have that kind of choice, that kind of control over our mind?

### *Changing the Mind Through Meditation*

We *can* work on our mind and bring about a situation where we have fewer negative thoughts and feelings and more positive states of mind. The mind is changeable. The mind isn't something fixed, concrete, permanent, and unchangeable. The mind is a changeable phenomenon - it's changing anyway. Remember I said it's a stream of constantly moving, constantly changing experiences. By its nature the mind is a changing thing. And we can work on our mind and bring about more changes. The idea of meditation is to change the mind in such a way that we have more positive states of mind, like love, patience, joy, and peace - and fewer negative states of mind like anger, hatred, greed, and jealousy.

That is the real purpose of doing meditation in Buddhism - working on our mind to decrease the negative, disturbing, unhappy states of mind, and to increase the peaceful, positive, beneficial states of mind. And it's beneficial not only for ourselves but for others as well, because depending on what state of mind you're in, then that influences your behaviour. And that affects the people around you, family, friends, and even further - the community, the country, the world. So how we think, what goes on in our mind does have repercussions and creates energy which goes out to the whole world.

### *Ideas About Meditation*

We need to think about what we understand by meditation, what kinds of ideas we have about meditation and what kinds of goals or reasons we have for doing meditation, because they may be different from what is explained in Buddhism. For example, some people have the idea that the purpose of meditation is to attain fantastic experiences, like going out of your body and traveling to other worlds, traveling around the universe and meeting other kinds of beings in other realms. Other ideas that some people have is that you will have visions, or experiences of bliss and so on; or attaining powers like being able to see other people's minds, eavesdrop on other people's thoughts, or being able to walk through walls or fire. Although in fact these things can happen, we can have these kinds of experiences, according to Buddhism that's not the purpose of meditation.

We don't meditate in order to have those kinds of experiences. Because it's usually the ego that wants to have these fantastic experiences, to be more powerful than other people, to be able to do things that other people can't do, or to be able to impress other people with what you have experienced. Often there is a sense of ego involved in being interested in those kinds of things. Even if we did have those kinds of experiences - so what? What good is that going to do us or anybody else?

One time when I was living in Singapore, a man came to see me who was very interested in astral travel. He wanted to learn to go out of his body and travel around the universe and go to other realms. So I asked him: "Okay, but even if you did that, even you did go and visit those other realms, you'd still have to come back to your body, to your life, to your family, to your job. Would those

journeys have been any good to you? Will you be a different person? Will you become more kinder, more generous, less selfish, and so on?"

It's possible that even if we have those kinds of experiences, it wouldn't make us a better person. It wouldn't necessarily help our mind to be less negative and more positive. We might still be the same person we were before - just as selfish, maybe even more selfish, because we might have a bigger ego, bigger pride. We might even become worse, more disturbing to other people, rather than more helpful and kind to other people. So attaining fantastic experiences is not the purpose of doing meditation, but if they happen, that's okay. You just notice them, don't be attached to them, let them come and go, and just get on with your practice.

Other people might have more down-to-earth ideas about meditation and reasons for doing meditation, for example, just being more healthy. Some people become interested in meditation when they experience health problems. Other people become interested when they feel stressed, and want something that will help them to calm down, to be less tense and more relaxed. Meditation *can* have this kind of effect - helping us to be more relaxed and also to be healthier. I believe research has been done that shows that meditation can have a positive effect on our health, reducing blood pressure, for example, so it's good for your heart. It can help you be more relaxed and so on, but again that's not the real purpose of doing meditation.

Actually, we don't really need to do meditation in order to be relaxed. There are other things we can do - take a day off and go to the beach, listen to some pleasant music, have a massage. And even if we do become more relaxed, how long will that last? How long will we stay relaxed before we get tense again? Because the causes of tension are still in our mind - the causes that make us tense in the first place are still there and haven't been dealt with or worked on. So you might get some kind of temporary experience of being more relaxed, but after some time, again something comes up in the mind and you find yourself feeling angry, or annoyed, or depressed, or you feel overwhelmed at work, overworked or whatever. There are still factors within your mind that make you tense again.

### *The Purpose of Meditation*

So the real purpose of meditation isn't just to feel good and relaxed, but to look at our mind. And come to understand what's happening in our mind, what states of mind are coming up, causing us to be unhappy, stressed, unpeaceful, and unrelaxed. Working on those is going to the root of our problems. Meditation is going to the root of whatever it is that's causing us to be unhappy and unpeaceful.

Because unless we work on the root of that, the cause of unhappiness and unpeacefulness and stress is still there in the mind and is not being dealt with. Then we keep facing the same problems again and again.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be more healthy, wanting to be more relaxed and peaceful and not so stressed - that's not wrong at all. But meditation goes beyond just that. It can help us look deeply into our mind and understand what is it really going on in our mind. It enables us to recognise

the causes and conditions within the mind that cause the mind to be disturbed, and cause problems in our life, in our relationships with others and at work - and then we can work on those. Actually meditation is something quite vast. Here we're just looking at the basics of meditation - it's like an introduction to meditation. But if you want to know more about the real purpose of meditation and how to really work on the mind and transform the mind, to decrease all the negative aspects of the mind, and increase the positive aspects of the mind, then you can study more about Buddhism. You can learn more about the Buddha's teaching because that's what Buddhism is all about. The essence of Buddhism is understanding our mind and working on our mind, transforming the mind from being negative to being positive.

### *Body Posture in Meditation*

So that is a brief introduction to meditation. Now I'd like to go on to talk about the recommended way of sitting when we do meditation, how to arrange the body. The body and the mind are different kinds of phenomena - the body is physical, the mind is nonphysical - but they are not completely separate and independent of each other. Rather they exist in an interdependent relationship - the body depends on the mind, and the mind depends on the body. They affect each other. What we do with our body will affect the mind and vice versa. Because of that, the way we sit when we meditate has an effect on our mind and how well our meditation goes. And because of that there is a recommended way of sitting. I'll explain this, but it isn't something that is really strict, it isn't that you have to sit in this way. Some people may find some of these points difficult, and if that is the case, you can adapt the posture to your own needs, what is possible for you and what works best for you.

### *The Seven-Point Posture*

In the Tibetan tradition the recommended posture is said to have seven points to it. **The first point has to do with the legs.** The best way of sitting, if you can do it, is what's called in the Tibetan tradition the vajra position. In the yoga tradition it's call the lotus position. You sit cross-legged with your feet placed on the thigh of the opposite leg. You have your left foot on top of your right thigh and the right foot on top of your left thigh. That is the best way of sitting because your body gets locked into a position and you can sit still without moving for a longer period of time. For many people, especially in the West, we're not used to sitting cross-legged. We're used to sitting in chairs so we don't develop that kind of flexibility with our legs - unless you practice yoga. If you're a yoga practitioner, you could probably sit that way. If you can sit that way, it's good. If you can't, then you can find another cross-legged position.

For example, there is the half-lotus position, where you place one foot on the thigh of the opposite leg and the other foot on the floor. You don't have both feet up on your thighs which is quite hard. You have one foot up and one foot down. Some people can sit like that. Another way is to just have both feet on the floor. Whichever way is most comfortable for you - the important thing is to be comfortable - it's not correct to force the body into a position which is really painful, because then the mind will be distracted by the pain in the body and we won't be able to meditate. It's more

important to be comfortable than to sit in a perfect position. That's why it's also said you can sit on a chair. If you can't sit cross-legged or it's too uncomfortable, it's okay to use a chair. Some people use a little bench that has a slanted surface - you kneel, with your legs under the bench, and sit on top of the bench - some people find that more suitable. The point is to be in a position that is comfortable so you can just focus your mind on your meditation practice.

**The second point has to do with the hands and arms.** In the Tibetan tradition it's recommended that we place our hands in our lap, with the right hand on top of the left hand, and the palms facing upwards. Your right fingers are on top of your left fingers. The palms will be slightly curved and the two thumbs touch above your hands, making a kind of triangular shape. Doing this with the hands is to enable the energy to flow nicely in our body. Another practical thing is that you can tell if your mind is really concentrated and alert or not, because if you start to become dull and sleepy, then your hands kind of collapse. Your thumbs aren't pointing up and touching any more, they're sort of collapsed. That tells you the mind is not so awake and alert any more.

Your arms shouldn't be pressed against the side of your body. Rather, leave some space between your arms and the sides of the body so that the air can circulate. The reason for that is that if you are meditating in a warm place and you have your arms pressed against your side, that can cause heat to build up in your body and you can become too warm which can induce sleepiness. It's harder to stay awake and alert. And let your shoulders relax. Don't have your shoulders tight or tense but let them drop and be relaxed and natural.

**The third point has to do with the back.** The back should be straight. This is actually the most important point of the posture - keeping the back straight. Whether you sit cross-legged or in a chair, your back should be straight. It can be helpful to imagine that there is a string attached to the top of your head and someone is pulling it from above, straightening your back.

**The fourth point has to do with the eyes.** When people first start to meditate, they might feel that it's better to close their eyes. However, closing the eyes can lead to drowsiness or even sleepiness, and when we meditate, we need to stay awake and alert. So to prevent sleepiness it's recommended that we keep our eyes open a little bit - just enough to allow some light to come in, but not enough that we can see things clearly that might distract our attention. You just have them open a little bit, with your gaze directed downwards, onto your lap or the floor in front of you.

But you might find it difficult to keep your eyes open a little bit like that, if you're not used to doing it - you might find that your eyes start fluttering and that can become a distraction. So don't worry about this. It's not something you absolutely have to do. It's mainly to help you stay awake and alert. So if it's difficult and distracting to keep your eyes open a little bit, then just let them close gently. And if you do notice that you're starting to nod off or fall asleep, then it's time to open them a little bit.

**The fifth point has to do with the mouth and the jaw.** They should be relaxed. Don't clench your teeth. Keep them loosely, naturally apart and have your lips together. Ideally, we should breathe

through our nose, not through our mouth. So unless your nose is blocked for some reason and you can't breathe through your nose ... then of course you need to keep your mouth open to breathe. But the best way of breathing is through your nose, so your mouth should be closed.

**The sixth point has to do with the tongue.** Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth behind the upper teeth. Just let the tongue rest there. This is to prevent the flow of saliva. Swallowing can become a distraction when you meditate, so placing the tongue like this decreases the need to swallow. It also has to do with the most conducive flow of energy in the body.

**The last point has to do with the neck and head.** It's recommended that we don't have our head raised up too high nor too low. Having it too high can make the mind more busy, agitated, and distracted in thoughts. Having the head too low can make the mind more dull and sleepy. So the best way is to have the head and neck just slightly bent downwards, not too high and not too low.

So those are the seven points recommended in the Tibetan tradition - the seven-point posture. And again if you can sit in this posture with all the seven points, that is good, but if for some reason you cannot do all of them, then just do whatever is comfortable.

Sometimes people ask me about meditating lying down. One problem with that is that it's hard to stay awake and alert. You might find yourself snoring after a couple of minutes. But if you're not well, or if you're injured and you can't sit up, then of course you have no choice. So if there is some good reason to be lying down, then it's better to meditate lying down than not to meditate at all. But generally speaking, it's better when you meditate to sit up, in order to have the mind more clear and awake and concentrated.

### *Explaining Meditation on the Breath*

Now we are going to do a meditation on the breath. I'll explain it briefly before we begin. It involves using the breath as an object on which to focus or concentrate the mind. The Buddha recommended different objects that can be used to develop a more concentrated state of mind. The breath is one of the easiest objects to use because it's already present, we're breathing all the time anyway. We don't have to visualise anything or recite anything or bring anything to mind. All we have to do is focus on what's already there, what's already happening. It's a good way for people to start meditation. That's what I usually teach in the beginning.

The meditation is really quite simple - we just concentrate our mind on our breathing. Whenever the mind wanders away from the breath - which will happen - when we realise that has happened, then we bring our mind back to the breath. What often happens is that people get frustrated when they first try to do this. They think, "This is so easy; I should be able to do it!" But then they discover that it's actually very difficult to keep the mind on just one thing like the breath. Other thoughts come - there could be hundreds of different thoughts - so the mind keeps going away from the breath. You shouldn't feel surprised or discouraged if this happens; it's normal. Our normal state of mind is to be like that, to be very busy, thinking of many different things, one after another, jumping from one thing to another all the time.

We're not used to focusing on just one thing and keeping our mind on one thing. We're not familiar with that, so of course it's going to be difficult. But by training ourselves, by practicing, by doing it again and again and again, then we become familiar with doing that and it becomes easier. Remember, the meaning of meditation is to become familiar. The more you become familiar with focusing your mind on one object, and bringing it back to that one object every time it wanders away, the easier it starts to become. So don't be discouraged or frustrated if at first you find it difficult to keep your mind focused on the breath. It's a question of training, practice, and becoming familiar with that.

One thing that can be helpful is to think that learning meditation is similar to learning any other kind of skill. For example, playing a musical instrument or playing tennis or driving a car or using a computer. Before we learn how to do these things, we don't know how to do them. We need to be taught, so we need an instructor who teaches us how to do these things. The first time we do them we're not going to be able to do it perfectly. The first time you pick a tennis racket you're not going to play like Andre Agassi or Steffi Graff. You'd be crazy to think like that. It takes time. You have to learn how to hold the racket, how to move it, how to hit the ball. So we have to learn and then we have to practice, and the more time and energy we put into practicing then the easier it will become, the better we'll get.

It's the same with meditation. You can't expect that when you first try practicing meditation you're going to be able to do it like someone who has been meditating for years. You have to first learn how to do it and then the more time and energy you put into practice the easier it will become. So that idea might be helpful to avoid getting frustrated; just think of it as similar to learning to play tennis or to drive a car. It takes time.

Now do Meditation One, *Awareness of the Breath*.

# *Meditation One: Awareness of the Breath*

*by Ven. Sangye Khadro*

Begin by sitting in a way that is most comfortable but also most conducive for doing meditation. Have your legs crossed either in the full lotus or half-lotus position or whatever way is most comfortable for you to place your legs. Have your hands resting on your lap, right hand on top of the left, right fingers on top of the left fingers, palms facing upwards and the two thumbs touching, making a triangular shape with your hands. Don't press your arms against the side of your body but leave some space for the air to circulate and let your shoulders relax.

Have your back straight. Imagine your vertebrae being like coins and make this stack of coins very straight and even. Or imagine there is a string attached to the top of the your head and someone is pulling it from above, making your back straight.

Have your eyes left open a little bit with your gaze downwards on your lap or on the floor in front of you. Your mouth and jaw are relaxed, don't press your teeth together but leave them loose. Have your mouth closed and place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth behind the upper teeth. Have your head gently tilted downwards just a little bit. Let your body relax in the position.

To relax the body first feel the top of your head and let a feeling of relaxation develop in the top of your head, let the top of your head be relaxed. Then imagine that relaxed feeling traveling down from the top of your head and down through your whole head, letting your whole head relax. Relaxing your forehead, your eyes, your face, the sides and back of your head; and the inside of your head, your skull, your brain.

Let the feeling of relaxation penetrate every cell, every atom, every tiny particle of your head. Let it continue to travel down and relax your neck and throat. Then into your shoulders, the relaxed feeling flows into your shoulders, relaxing your shoulders. Then let it travel down your back, let your whole back become relaxed.

Now the front of your body: let the relaxed feeling travel down to the front part of your body, your chest, your abdomen, relaxing all the internal organs and muscles as well. This relaxed feeling travels down into the upper parts of your legs and your knees and the lower parts of the legs and then ankles and feet and all the way down to your toes.

Allow the relaxed feeling to travel from your shoulders down your arms, relax the upper part of the arms and the lower parts of the arms, then wrists and fingers.

Do your best to keep your body relaxed for the remaining time of this meditation; don't let it become tense again. Be relaxed and let your breathing be natural. Let your breath in and out in a natural rhythm.

Bring to mind a positive reason for doing the meditation. Have the wish that this meditation will be beneficial for yourself and others - that it will help to bring about a greater peace and happiness, as well as more positive thoughts and feelings.

Now focus your mind, your awareness, on your breathing. There are two places that are recommended for doing this. One is at the nostrils where the air is coming in and out of the body. You may actually feel the sensation of the air just passing in and out of the nostrils or even if you can't feel it keep your mind, your awareness, at that place, being aware of your breath, going in and going out. The other place you can focus on is the abdomen which is moving in and out with each breath. You can feel the sensation of your abdomen moving in and moving out with each breath. Choose one of those two places and decide to keep your mind at that place, being aware of the sensations with each breath.

Any time your mind wanders away from this place, watching the breath at that place, gently bring it back.

Disengage from whatever else your mind has become distracted by, or involved with, the thoughts or the sounds or the feelings in your body. Once you realize that is happening, gently disengage your mind from the other object and bring it back to the breath. You might have to do this many times, again and again but be patient with yourself. Just keep bringing your mind back each time it wanders away from the place you are focused on; watching your breath.

Some people find to have better concentration it's helpful to count the breath. Watch each full breath, each inhalation and exhalation and count each breath as one.

Say to yourself, breathing in, breathing out, one; breathing in, breathing out, two and so on, up to ten and then start at one again when you reach ten.

If your mind becomes completely distracted from the breath while you are counting to ten, once that happens then start again at one. See if you can get to ten breaths, keep your mind focused on your breathing for ten breaths, without wandering away.

Just keep doing that over and over. If it's helpful to count then count or if you could keep your mind focused on the breathing without counting, that's okay.

Keep your body relaxed. Keep your breathing normal, natural and keep your mind focussed on the breathing, watching each breath go in and out. Bring the mind back to the breath each time it wanders away.

Before opening your eyes to conclude this session, remember the positive thought we had at the beginning of the meditation, wanting it to be beneficial for ourself and others. By doing the

meditation we've created some positive energy, what we call merit in Buddhism. This is the cause of happiness and the cause of good experiences. It's good to share this merit with others. At the beginning of the meditation we have the thought to do the meditation to benefit ourselves and others. Bring that thought back into our mind and mentally dedicate the positive energy or merit you created by doing this meditation to that same goal or purpose. May this be the cause of greater peace, happiness and benefit both to ourselves and others.

When you feel ready you can open your eyes and relax.

# Session Two

## *Calming the Mind*

Let's start the session by settling down our body and mind. First sit comfortably, and relax your body - let all the muscles in your body relax, let go of any tension ... and let your breathing be natural, a gentle, natural rhythm ... then relax your mind, by putting aside or letting go of thoughts. There may be thoughts in your mind relating to things that you did or things that happened to you earlier in the day, or yesterday, or any time in the past; or there may be thoughts about what you are going to do later, after this session, or tomorrow, or any time in the future - put aside all of these thoughts, and let your mind rest in the present, present moment and present place. To help the mind become more calm and clear, focus your mind, your awareness, on your breathing. You can watch your breath at the nostrils or at the abdomen, whichever you prefer. Just be aware of each breath, each inhalation and exhalation of the breath. If you find it helpful, you can count the breaths, in rounds of ten breaths.

The important thing is to bring the mind back to the breath each time it wanders away. And do this patiently and gently. Don't get frustrated and impatient with yourself. Just patiently bring the mind back to the breath each time it wanders away.

## *Common Problems in Meditation*

In this session I will talk about two of the most common problems or difficulties that can occur when we practice meditation - being distracted, and feeling sleepy or dull - and I will explain what we can do about them. It's useful to know this information so that we can recognise these problems when they happen and can apply antidotes to deal with them. I will also talk about how to set up a session of meditation and what are the main components of a meditation session.

## *Distractions*

First let's look at distraction. This is one of the biggest problems when we try to meditate: the mind being distracted from the object of meditation, whether it's the breath or whatever it is we are meditating on. We can't keep our mind concentrated on the object, but it keeps going away, getting distracted by other thoughts, or sounds, or sensations in our body, and so forth. This is completely normal; so if it happens, don't feel bad, or that there is something wrong with you and you can't meditate. I remember one time there was a man who was coming to a course, and he came to me and said, "I can't meditate." He looked very sad and frustrated, so I asked him why, and he said, "I just can't keep my mind on the object, it keeps going away." He had the idea that in order to meditate, in order to be able to say I am meditating or I can meditate, you have to be able to have perfect concentration and keep your mind always on the object.

Some of you may have the same idea - thinking that if you can't keep your mind on the object that means you can't meditate. So it's important to understand that it's normal, it happens to everybody.

Even people who have been meditating for years and years have trouble keeping their mind on the object; the mind wanders away. Of course, at a very advanced level it's possible to get to the point where you can focus your mind on an object and keep it there and it doesn't go away even for hours. But that's a very high achievement and you have to meditate a lot to be able to get to that point. So don't expect that right from the beginning you should be able to do that.

So what to do about this problem? Actually the only solution is to just keep bringing the mind back to the object. There is no magical cure for this problem except to just be very patient. Every time the mind wanders away, realise that your mind has wandered away and bring it back. Let go of whatever the other object is, whether it's a thought or a sound or whatever. Just keep bringing the mind back to the object again and again and again.

Something we can do that can be helpful, is a kind of mental note-taking. This involves focusing the main part of your mind on the object, such as the breath, but another, smaller part of the mind is like a spy, watching your mind, checking to see what is happening in your mind. And when you notice something else, some other experience in the mind, you make a mental note about it, and then let it go. If it's a thought, you can note 'thinking'; if it's a sound, you can note 'sound' or 'hearing'; if it's a sensation in your body, you can note 'feeling cold' or 'feeling an itch' or 'feeling pain.' Or you might notice emotions, so you can make notes like 'feeling sad' or 'feeling irritated' or 'feeling happy.' Then once you have noted this other experience, you can drop it, let it go, don't get caught up or involved in it. And if we can do that, the distraction will go away - remember how all the experiences in our mind arise and pass away. They are impermanent, they arise, last just a moment or two, and then disappear. It's only when we give attention to something like a thought, and get caught up thinking the thought, that it stays in the mind.

There is something else that can be helpful. In the Tibetan teachings there's an explanation that the mind can be compared to the sky or space. The mind is like the sky because it is not a solid, tangible, physical thing, but is like space, clear and empty. And then thoughts and anything else that might arise in the mind can be compared to clouds. Clouds are not permanent parts of the sky - they appear when the right conditions are there, they pass through the sky and then disappear, and even while they are there in the sky they are changing, so they are also not solid, tangible, permanent things. The same is true of thoughts - when the conditions are there in the mind, thoughts and other mental experiences arise, and then after some time they disappear - they are not solid, tangible things.

Another reason you can compare the mind to the sky is that in Buddhism it is said that the actual nature of our mind is clear and pure. This clear and pure nature of our mind is always there, always present, even though sometimes we can't see that because our mind is obscured by many thoughts - sometimes very disturbing, very negative thoughts and emotions. It may feel as though our mind is totally crowded and confused and disturbed - it doesn't seem clear at all. But in fact the clear nature of the mind is always there, even when there are lots of disturbing thoughts and emotions.

This is similar to the sky in that the clear sky is always there even though some days it's totally covered with clouds. But if you go above the clouds the clear sky is there, unobstructed. Sometimes there are just a few clouds, sometimes the whole sky is covered with clouds. But regardless of how many clouds there are and how thick the clouds are, the clear blue sky is always there. It's similar with our mind in that the clear pure nature of our mind is always there, always present. The disturbing thoughts and emotions are similar to clouds that come and go. They're not permanent just like the clouds in the sky are not permanent. Sometimes they are there, sometimes they're not. They always eventually go away. Having some understanding of this can be helpful in dealing with thoughts, when there are thoughts in the mind when we try to meditate. We remind ourselves that the nature of our mind is clear and pure like the sky - spacious, vast, unlimited and always there just like the sky. And whatever thoughts there are - memories, images, emotions - these are similar to clouds that are only there sometimes, they come and they go. They are not permanent. And they are not solid. So if we can remember this when we are meditating it can help us to just observe the thoughts and other experiences coming and going in our mind, without being disturbed or distracted by them.

We'll be learning different kinds of meditations as we go through the course. Some meditations involve thinking or analyzing, and others involve visualizing. And when we are doing those kinds of meditations, our mind is more busy, more active, so it may have more distractions - because the mind is already busy thinking about one thing, so it may think about other things as well. If you're doing an analytical or visualisation meditation and your mind is very agitated and restless and many, many thoughts are coming, it can be very difficult to calm it down. Then you might try just doing some breathing meditation for awhile - stop thinking, analyzing, and visualizing, and just focus on the breath, because that has an effect of making your mind more calm. The rhythm of the breath is calm, so by focusing on the breath, that can help your mind to calm down as well. Then when your mind has become calm, you can return to the analytical or visualization meditation you were doing before.

So meditation on the breath is recommended as an antidote to the mind being very restless, agitated and having many thoughts.

### *Dealing With Noise*

Another idea that can help us in dealing with distracting thoughts is to think of them as being like noise. When we practice meditation we have to learn to deal with external noise. Probably most of us live in places which are not completely quiet all the time. There is noise - there's traffic noise, there's noise from the other people you live with or your neighbours, playing music or watching TV or talking, sometimes having a party; there may be aeroplanes going over head and so on. There's usually a lot of noise in the environment. And we can't expect that the whole world is going to stop, everything is going to stop making noise just because we're meditating.

If we want to practice meditation we have to learn how to deal with noise. And actually we already know how to do that because we probably all have the experience of studying. For example when we have to study for an exam, and there's noise, especially if you are living in a college dormitory, with

lots of people and radios and TV and so on. You have to learn to just shut out that noise and focus on your books and what you're studying. And we do know how to do that. We have had experience of doing that. Or when we are reading a very interesting book or watching a football game on TV or watching a movie - there are certain times when we're really interested and involved in something and we can get totally absorbed in that and we can just ignore noise that's happening around us. The noise is there, it doesn't stop, it doesn't disappear but we just ignore it and continue to concentrate on what we are doing. So we've had the experience of doing that in our normal life, and we can do that in meditation as well. We can just ignore the noise and keep on doing our meditation.

### *Internal Noise*

Learning how to do that with external noise can help us to deal better with our internal noise. The thoughts in our mind are like chatter, like noise. Don't expect them to stop, just because you're meditating. If you have the expectation that the internal noise will stop, then you'll probably just get frustrated, because it doesn't stop. And the harder you try to make it stop, the more it might happen. If you have the attitude, "I want all my thoughts to stop," this might cause even more thoughts to arise! So don't expect them to stop or that you can make them stop. Instead, just learn to ignore them. Don't be bothered by them, don't pay attention to them. Ignore them, just as you can ignore the noise from outside, the dog barking, the cars going by, the aeroplane going overhead, the TV, the radio, people talking. Just let them happen and focus on what you're doing. Focus on your meditation.

These are some ideas that might be helpful for you to deal with the things that disturb you and distract your mind when you're meditating. Remember it's a question of training and practice. The more you practice meditation - the more you develop the habit or familiarity with this discipline of focusing your mind on the breath or whatever the object is, and then bringing your mind back every time it wanders away - the more you train in that the easier it becomes. So it's just a question of training and practice.

### *Sleepiness and Dullness in Meditation*

Another common problem that happens when we try to meditate is that the mind can become sleepy and dull. Sleepiness may not happen so much in the beginning when you're first meditating because it's something new and exciting. You might have so much excitement about meditation that you don't fall asleep. But it certainly happens later on after you have been meditating for a while - it's not so new and exciting any more, and it can even become boring. Then sleepiness is something that can happen quite easily. So again don't be surprised if it happens, it's normal. We just need to know what to do if it happens.

There are few practical things you can do - for example, checking your position, your posture. Having the back straight, sitting up straight helps you stay awake. You might notice that you're not sitting up so straight, maybe you've slouched a bit. Sit up straight again - that can help to wake you up and wake up your energy.

Also, as I mentioned before, if you close your eyes you're more likely to be sleepy. So have your eyes open a little bit. But even with your eyes open a little bit, it can still happen that you feel sleepy. So then open them even more. You can actually meditate with your eyes wide open, it's not impossible. Just open them as wide as you can to make sure you don't fall asleep.

Then focus on one point in front of you and don't let your eyes wander around looking at other things. Do that only if you need to, until the sleepiness passes. My experience is that I sometimes feel very sleepy when I meditate but it usually passes. It's not that you get sleepier and sleepier and you have no choice but to fall asleep. It's just a temporary thing. It happens for a while and if you resist it, then after a while it goes away and you're wide awake again. So resist it, and eventually it will pass.

Another thing recommended in the teachings if the sleepiness is very strong and it's very hard to stay awake is to take a break from the meditation. You can stand up and stretch, or go and put some cold water in your face, or get some cool fresh air on your face. Doing those kinds of things can help you wake up, and then after a few minutes when you feel awake again, sit down and go back to your meditation.

Something that could effect being sleepy in the first place is the temperature - if it's too warm in the room that could make you sleepy. The warmer it is the more likely you are to fall asleep. So it's better to have the air in the room cool, and then if you need to you can put a blanket around you to keep your body warm.

Also light can have an effect - if the room is very dark, that might be a cause for you to feel sleepy and dull. So don't have it too dark. It's also not good to have it too bright. Really bright light could be distracting as well. So have some light - don't have it too dark but not too bright either.

Another thing is eating. If you try to meditate right eating a big meal, I think you would have to be a very good meditator to be able to stay awake. And that's only normal because if we've eaten a lot then the energy of our body will be going into digesting the food. So it's better to leave some time, at least an hour or maybe two hours after eating a meal, before you try to meditate. Those are some things that could be helpful to deal with the problem of sleepiness. I'll talk about some of the other common problems and antidotes later, as we go along in the course.

### *The Structure of a Meditation Session*

Now I'd like to talk about the structure of a meditation session; what are the components, how to set up a meditation session; what should we do when we're doing a meditation. There are four steps to follow.

#### *Arranging Your Body*

The first is to sit, and that means arranging your body in a comfortable position and in a comfortable, conducive place. If you can sit in the seven-point position, that is considered the best. But if that's

not comfortable for you then find whatever is the most comfortable and most conducive position for you. I didn't mention this before but with regard to sitting crossed legged, what we sit on will have an effect. If you sit on a very hard surface, a hard wooden or concrete floor, that's going to be very uncomfortable. So it's best to have a cushion under you, some kind of mat, both for warmth if it's cold and also for comfort.

I personally find that if I try to sit on a very hard surface then I get what's called pins and needles - your legs and your feet become numb which is rather uncomfortable. And this is a problem that many people have when they try to meditate. So it's good to sit on something that is fairly soft and cushiony to prevent that problem from happening. Another cause of pins and needles is if you are sitting too flat - it's best to be sitting on a cushion so that your buttocks are higher than your knees. You can experiment to find what kind of cushion works best for you - some people may need a very high one, or put several cushions on top of each other.

So then, sit on your cushion, get yourself into a comfortable position and relax. You might spend a couple of minutes settling your body into a relaxed position and getting your breath to be even, in a natural rhythm.

### *Generating a Positive Motivation*

The second step is to generate a positive motivation. This is emphasised very much in the Tibetan tradition. Tibetan teachers always talk about the importance of motivation. Motivation refers to our purpose or intention for doing meditation. This is true not just for meditation but for everything that we do. There's always something that motivates us to do the things that we do - even brushing our teeth or eating or going for a walk. There is something that drives us to do things, and that is our motivation. Motivation is very important because whatever we do has effects. Everything we do brings about consequences both for ourselves and for others. And the kind of consequences or effects our actions have, whether they are good or bad, happy or unhappy, mainly depends on our motivation. That's the most important factor in determining what will be the outcome of our actions. If we have a positive motivation, the outcome will be positive. If the motivation we have is a negative one, the outcome will be negative. So we want to have good results. We want to have happiness. We want to make sure things go well for us and for others. To make sure that happens it's important that we have a positive motivation for the things that we do.

This is especially important when it comes to meditation because meditation has to do with spiritual practice, spiritual development and transforming our mind. We have to be particularly careful that we do meditation with a positive motivation. We should at least try to not have a negative motivation. A negative motivation would be one that's mixed up with our ego, or even with some kind of harmful intent. It is possible that people might want to do meditation in order to do something harmful, like develop powers with which they can control other people. So we have to be careful that we have no harmful intention in doing meditation. Also we have to be careful about our ego and pride - 'I want to meditate so that I can develop myself into someone fantastic, someone really wonderful that other people are going to be impressed with.' That isn't a correct attitude to

have for meditation, wanting other people to be impressed with us, or becoming a famous meditator or some sort of spiritual person that everybody knows about. We have to be careful that we don't have that kind of intention in our mind, to do with ego and pride - attachment to our own image, attachment to some kind of self-gain.

The best motivation to have is an altruistic one, which means being concerned about others and wanting to benefit others. That's actually the most positive motivation we can have for doing anything, especially spiritual practice. Caring about others and not wanting to hurt others, wanting to develop ourselves so that we'll be more helpful and more beneficial for other people, being able to bring them happiness and peace. Helping to relieve their problems and suffering. If we can have that as our motivation for doing meditation then that is the best. And the meditation that we do with that motivation will be most beneficial, most positive and powerful. So we can think, 'I want to benefit others - that's why I'm meditating', or 'may my meditation be beneficial for others, for the whole world'. If you don't feel comfortable with the idea of benefiting everyone, the whole world, then you can think of a smaller number of people such as your family and friends, neighbours- whatever you are comfortable with. And if you don't feel comfortable with the idea of benefiting others, for example you may not feel able to benefit others at this point, then try to at least have the motivation of wanting to benefit yourself. Wanting to work on yourself, make yourself a better person, more happy, more peaceful, more kind. Try at least to have some kind of intention of improving yourself, improving your mind, if it's difficult to think about benefiting others.

### *The Actual Meditation*

And then the third step is to do the meditation itself. There are different kinds of meditations. As we go through this course we'll be learning and practicing together different kinds of meditation. When you are on your own you can choose what kind of meditation you want to do. And while doing the meditation, you keep your mind as focused and concentrated as you can on the meditation, bringing it back when it wanders away.

### *Dedication*

And then the fourth step is that, when you finish your meditation, before you get up and go off to do whatever you do next, you dedicate. This is again emphasised very much in the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism. It's similar to motivation in that at the beginning before we start the meditation we generate a positive motivation, if possible wanting to benefit others. Then when we've finished, we remember the motivation we had the beginning and mentally dedicate what we've done - the positive energy we've created, which is called merit in Buddhism. We dedicate that to others: may it bring greater peace and happiness and benefit to others. Some kind of thought for others and their benefit, taking care of them.

It's best if we can have all four of these points in our meditation session in order to make it most effective and most beneficial.

Now do Meditation Two, *Clarity of the Mind*.

# *Meditation Two:*

## *Nine-Round Breathing / Clarity of the Mind*

*by Ven. Sangye Khadro*

Have your eyes either open a little bit or closed, whichever is better for you. Relax your shoulders, have your hands on your lap with the right on top of the left; two thumbs touching; arms slightly away from your sides, hanging loosely by your sides. Your mouth and jaw relaxed. Chin tucked in a little bit. The tongue on the roof of the mouth behind the upper teeth and your breathing normal with a natural, steady rhythm.

Now let's start the nine round breathing exercise.

Using your right hand, your right index finger blocks off the left nostril while you are breathing into the right nostril. Just let your breath come in slowly and steadily, pause for a moment, then block off the right nostril and breath out the left nostril.

Slowly and steadily do the same three times. In through the right and out through the left. Focus completely on the breathing, on the sensation of the nostrils as you are breathing in and out.

For the next three breaths keep your right nostril blocked and breathe in through the left and then move your finger to block off the left and breath out through the right. So breathe in through the left and out through the right, three times.

For the last three breaths bring your hands back to your lap and breathe through both nostrils evenly, slowly and gently.

Pause for a moment and then exhale through both nostrils, keeping your mind fully focused on the breath, on the sensations, as you breathe in and out.

Continue to breathe normally and bring into your mind a positive motivation for doing the meditation. Think, 'I am going to do this meditation in order to work on my mind, to be a more positive, beneficial person for others, for the world. May this meditation bring more peace and happiness to others, to the world'.

Once you've generated a positive motivation bring your awareness back to your breathing and just be aware of each inhalation and exhalation of breath.

Let your attention ride or float on the breath similar to the way you would float on the surface of the ocean where there are gentle waves coming and going.

Stay floating on the surface, flowing with the wave, coming and going, flowing in and out, just let your attention rest or float on the gentle rolling rhythm of the breathing.

Now move your attention away from the breathing to the mind itself, that which is aware of breathing. In other words instead of being aware of the breath, which is the object of your mind, the object of your awareness, become aware of the mind itself, the awareness itself, that which is observing the breath, experiencing the breath.

The mind is like space or like sky, completely clear, not solid, and vast, spacious and unlimited.

Try to get a sense of how your mind is like that, like this clear, vast, spacious sky. The things that we are aware of, the thoughts, images, memories and so on, are similar to the clouds that pass through the sky. They're not always there but they appear and after a while they disappear.

If there are thoughts appearing in your mind while you are sitting here doing this meditation, thoughts, memories, images, or if you hear sounds or feel sensations in your body, think that these are just like clouds, passing through this space or clear sky of your mind. Let them come and let them go. Realize that they are only momentary and not solid; they just come and go.

Let them go and return your awareness to the mind itself, which is like the clear spacious sky.

See if you can get a sense of identifying with this clear space-like nature of the mind. In other words feel, 'this is the real me, this is my real nature, who I really am'.

Rather than identifying yourself with the temporary clouds of thoughts and emotions that pass through your mind see if you can realise those as mental events, things that come and go in the mind. They are not you and not who you really are.

Let them go and identify with the clear space-like nature of your mind, your awareness, so that you are the sky, not the clouds.

Before opening your eyes mentally dedicate the merit or positive energy for doing this meditation. In the same way you motivated at the beginning, may this meditation be beneficial for others, may it bring greater peace, happiness, and benefit to other beings, to the world.

Dedicate the effort that you made and the positive energy you've created from doing the meditation to that goal.

## Session Three

### *The Importance of Motivation*

With regard to motivation, which I spoke about in the last session, it is said in the Buddhist teachings that the best motivation we can have for doing meditation or any spiritual activity is wishing to benefit others, to benefit all living beings. For some people this might be quite acceptable and comfortable, and they don't have a problem having that motivation in their mind. But for some people that may seem difficult, maybe because they're not sure if they have the ability to do that. So if it's not comfortable for you then there's no need to force that on your mind. If you try to force your mind to have an attitude that you're not comfortable with then your mind will not be happy, and then you might start to feel some resistance to practicing meditation, and eventually you might even want to give up practicing altogether.

My experience with Tibetan lamas is that they're very flexible. It's not that they say there is only one way to do things and you have to do it that way and you can't do it any other way. Instead they say this is one way of doing it but if that doesn't work you can do it that way; if that doesn't work you can do that way; and if that doesn't work you can find your own way of doing it. They say it's important to have a happy, relaxed and peaceful mind. So I think that we can apply that same idea when it comes to generating our motivation for meditating - we can find a way of generating a positive motivation that we are comfortable with, one that feels genuine to us.

For example, think about how the things that we do - whether we do things with our body, our speech, or our mind, our thoughts - all the things we do have effects. They create energy, which affects the people around us, the environment, and even the world at large. That includes meditation. When we do meditation we are creating some energy. It will have effects. It will have repercussions. So we can ask ourselves what kind of effect do I want to have on others, the environment, the world? What kind of energy do I want to create and send out to the world? Do I want to create negative energy and send out more negative energy to the world? I think probably not - there's already so much of it - so much anger, violence, selfishness, greed, and using other people for one's own benefit. Or do I want to send out a more positive kind of energy? Do I want to send out love and peace?

It's not that we can change the world - we can't expect to do that. But we can just add a little more positive energy - loving, kind, considerate, caring, beneficial energy to the world. That is possible. So if you think about that, the kind of energy you want to create in your meditation that will affect others and the world, you will probably feel the wish for it to be positive energy. So having that as a motivation for your meditation practice might be more comfortable for you. You can think, 'may this meditation create positive energy for the world. May it add a little bit more kindness, joy, wisdom and clarity to the world and to the people around me.' If it's uncomfortable for you to think about

the whole world, then you can think of the people around you - your family, neighbours, friends, the people in your town or city, the people you meet everyday.

So that is another kind of positive motivation that you might feel comfortable with. That's still beneficial, very beneficial. It may not be the highest motivation, which is bodhicitta, aspiring to attain enlightenment to benefit all beings, but it's still something beneficial, and helps you to go beyond just thinking about yourself and your own happiness and benefit. So you can think about this and experiment, and come up with a good motivation that feels genuine and comfortable, as your reason for doing meditation. The real point is to make sure you don't have a negative, harmful motivation, and also to try to go beyond only caring about yourself, only thinking about just this one person, when there are so many others who are in need of love and kindness and care.

### *Placement Meditation*

In this session I would like to teach a different kind of meditation; this will be an analytical meditation. In the Tibetan tradition it is said that there are many different kinds of meditation but they can all be summarised into two groups, two general types of meditation. One is traditionally called placement or stabilising meditation. This is meditation where we have one object that we focus on and bring our mind back to whenever it wanders away. It's for the purpose of developing concentration, the ability to keep our mind concentrated on one thing.

The meditation we did earlier on the breath is an example of that. We use the breath as the object. We concentrate on the breath, and then any time the mind wanders away to something else, a thought, a sound, something happening in your body, a memory, image, or whatever, you catch it and bring it back to the breath. Keep bringing it back again and again. By doing that we train our mind in concentration.

The object that you use can vary. It can be the breath, or an object that you visualize such as the image of the Buddha, or a state of mind such as loving kindness. In some traditions, you can use an object like a pebble or a candle-flame that you have in front of you and you focus your eyes on. However, my teachers say that we should use an internal, rather than an external, object to develop concentration. They say that what we want to train is our mind, not our eyes. Looking at something with your eyes and concentrating on it means you are learning to concentrate with your eyes, but what we really need to do is learn to concentrate the mind.

My teachers usually recommend using a visualized image of the Buddha as the object of concentration. I think for many Western people that can be quite difficult, because we're not used to visualizing, and we may not be so familiar with the image of the Buddha. So it's hard enough to get the image in the first place, much less have it there and keep bringing your mind back to it. That can be quite difficult. The breath is much easier because we don't have to bring anything up into our mind and visualize. The breath is there. The body is breathing all the time anyway, and so that's an easy object to work with.

The Tibetan lamas say it's good to use the visualised image of the Buddha because the Buddha has many positive qualities. When we hold in our mind an image of the Buddha, it's leaving very good imprints in our mind and having a very positive affect on us. Anything we look at, anything we focus on is going to have an effect on us. When we watch violent movies for example, we can see that they don't have a very good effect on our mind. We find that we might start having violent thoughts as, well, like kicking a cat or thinking about blowing up somebody we don't like. Whereas if we look at images that symbolize positive qualities, images that remind us of love, compassion, peacefulness and kindness, they have a beneficial effect on our mind. We find ourselves feeling more peaceful, and having more thoughts and feelings of love and kindness for others.

For that reason the image of Buddha is good to meditate on because it will have a very positive effect on our mind, so that we can develop the same kind of qualities as the Buddha. Another recommended object is love, the feeling of loving kindness. But you have to first meditate to generate the feeling of loving kindness because it doesn't just automatically pop up in the mind. So you generate that feeling then once you have it, you concentrate the mind on that. The general point of this kind of meditation is to train ourselves to concentrate on one thing and not let our mind wander away but keep bringing it back to the meditation.

There is a whole body of teaching on how to do this in the Lam-rim, the path to enlightenment. It explains what sort of obstacles we encounter and how to deal with those obstacles, and the different stages that you pass through. If you develop your ability to concentrate and you become able to keep your mind focused on whatever object you use for as long as you want, you experience bliss - physical and mental bliss. And you can go without food and sleep and so on for long periods of time. But that is quite an advanced level of practice.

We have to understand that being able to concentrate is not a goal or an end in itself. It's really only a tool. We need to develop the ability to concentrate, so we can then use it as a means to go further, to develop our mind even further. Just having the ability to concentrate like that doesn't mean you're enlightened, and it doesn't mean you're free from delusions, from your anger and attachment, and so on. They are temporarily suppressed - they don't go away. Concentration by itself doesn't eliminate your delusions. You could meditate for days in a state of bliss but then when you finish and go outside somebody might say nasty words to you and then you get angry - that can happen.

So what we really want to do on the Buddhist path is to free our mind from delusions, eliminate them completely from our mind. Just concentration alone will not do that. But we do need concentration in order to eliminate our delusions - it's one essential factor. Concentration is important not only for spiritual practice but even in our daily life. When we have a job to do, we need to be able to keep the mind focused on what we're doing otherwise we won't get it done, or it will be full of mistakes. So concentration is very important to develop, and placement meditation is for that purpose.

## *Analytical Meditation*

Then the second kind of meditation is called analytical meditation. This is when we use a different aspect or function of the mind, the mind's ability to analyze, or think about, or explore a particular object of meditation. One example would be meditating on compassion. In order to become enlightened we need to have compassion for all beings. So there are methods for developing compassion using analytical meditation.

Compassion is understanding the suffering and problems of people and other living beings, and feeling the wish for them not to suffer. It can lead us to do what we can to help them become free from their suffering. That's the quality of compassion. It's a natural quality in us but it's not there all the time. We feel it some times but at other times we're indifferent when we hear about somebody suffering or see somebody crying and we can't be bothered.

To feel compassion for others we have to first feel it for ourselves, to understand our own suffering, our own problems, and really understand the situation that we're in. Based on the understanding of our own suffering and wishing ourselves to be free from suffering, we can then be more understanding of others' suffering and wish them to be free from suffering.

A practical example would be if you had had the experience of being addicted to drugs and suffered with that for a long time, and then you finally managed to free yourself from that addiction. Having that experience would put you in a better position to be able to understand other people who have that problem, and you would be better able to help them. Someone who has never had that problem doesn't really understand what it's like, how it happens, how the mind can get stuck in that and what the feeling is like to be in that situation. Someone who has been through that can be much more compassionate and better able to help people who are addicted.

When we've been through a problem - we've been depressed or we've been rejected by our boy friend or girl friend or we've lost a child - then when somebody else is going through that experience we know what they're going through. At least we have a better understanding than somebody who has never been through that. In an analytical meditation on compassion, we try to put ourselves in the position of somebody who is suffering and meditate to try to deeply understand what that person is going through. And in generating compassion for them we think how sad it is that they have to suffer like that and how wonderful it would be if they could be free from that.

You can also use visualization. It becomes very powerful if you actually visualise people or animals who are suffering - this is much more powerful than if you are just thinking about it. If you have had any first-hand experience and you know of some kind of suffering, you can bring it to mind and that becomes very powerful. You use thinking and memory, imagery and visualization. The purpose is to generate some feeling and experience of compassion in your mind, so that it's no longer just a word you heard or read in a book. We can develop incredible compassion in our mind, and that's what we're trying to do by doing that kind of meditation, to generate a natural feeling of compassion. But once isn't enough. Doing one meditation on compassion isn't going to make you a totally

compassionate person forever. We need to do it again and again. Remember that the meaning of meditation is to be familiar. So we're trying to make ourselves familiar with that feeling of compassion, and soak our mind in that experience. When our mind becomes more familiar with that experience, then compassion becomes more natural and spontaneous within us. Eventually, you get to a point where you don't have to meditate. You see a person suffering and naturally and spontaneously you can feel compassion for them.

Another function of analytical meditation is to clear away delusions or mistaken states of mind. For example, analytical meditation is very helpful in the practice of dealing with anger. You can analyse the anger, seeing its harmfulness. And analyse ways you can change your mind, to think differently about this person and the situation. By doing meditation like this, you can move from being in an angry state of mind to being patient, compassionate, and loving, or at least accepting and not angry. So analytical meditation can also be used to overcome negative states of mind, delusions, and disturbing emotions.

The real purpose of analytical meditation is to develop wisdom - to develop the type of wisdom which is a correct view of things. Seeing things correctly as they really are, and overcoming mistaken, wrong ways of seeing. This is the way to free our mind from delusions - as I mentioned earlier - eliminating delusions, negative states of mind, so that they no longer arise in us. Our mind has become completely free from them. So that is the real, ultimate purpose of analytical meditation.

There are many different kinds of analytical meditation. You may be familiar with the Lam-rim, the path to enlightenment. That consists of a whole series of different topics. We learn about these by listening to teachers explaining these topics, by studying the teachings, thinking about them so that we develop the good and correct understanding of them; and then we do meditations on these different topics, and this is done for the purpose of transforming our mind, changing our way of thinking so that we have less negative and deluded ways of thinking and more correct, positive and beneficial ways of thinking.

### *Precious human life*

So I thought in this session we can do a simplified version of one meditation that is found in the Lamrim, the path to enlightenment, which is called 'The Precious Human Rebirth'.

There's a story from the life of the Buddha. Once Buddha was with some of his disciples, and he asked them to imagine the whole world covered with water, like one great big ocean, and living at the bottom of this ocean is a tortoise. Once every hundred years the tortoise has a chance to come up to the surface of the ocean and put his head above the water for just a short time, and then it has to go back down again to the bottom of the ocean; and on the surface of the ocean there is a golden yoke, like a life-saver that they have in boats, and this yoke is floating on the water - doesn't stay in one place - but is moved around by the wind and waves, so it's constantly moving around, from one place to another, in this huge ocean that covers the whole world. Swimming in the ocean is a tortoise who surfaces once every hundred years for air and the tortoise is blind, it can't see.

So imagine that situation.

Then the Buddha asked his disciples, "What are the chances that when the tortoise comes up and puts its head above the water that it will put its head through this yoke?" So the disciples said, "Hmm, not very likely. It's quite unlikely that the tortoise would just manage to stick its head through the yoke, because it's blind, and the yoke is always moving around and never in the same place." So the Buddha said, "That's right, and in the same way, it's very unlikely or very rare for somebody to be born as a human being. And it's also very rare to be able to meet the teachings that show the path to enlightenment. Now you have both of these things - a human life and access to the teachings that show the path to enlightenment. So don't waste your time."

That story is the basis of the meditation on the preciousness of human life, because in actual fact our life is something quite precious but most people don't realize how precious it is. And if we don't realize the preciousness of our life then we might use it to do things that aren't very meaningful or very beneficial. We might even lead a life where we do things that are downright harmful and just create more suffering for ourselves and for others.

### *Buddha-Nature*

What the Buddha actually meant by saying that this life is very precious is that we have the potential to become enlightened. This is called our buddha-nature - it refers to the nature of mind, which is clear like the sky. The absolute nature of our mind is pure, clear, vast, and unlimited. And the disturbing thoughts and emotions are like pollution in the mind, obscuring its pure nature. But this pollution can be cleared away and the mind can be brought to a state of complete purity and enlightenment, being totally free of all negative aspects like anger and attachment and selfishness and so on. All of these negative aspects of the mind can be totally cleared away so that they don't arise even for a moment. And all positive qualities like love, compassion, wisdom, and patience can be fully developed and fully perfected. That, in a simple way, is what enlightenment is. It's a perfect state of mind, totally free of everything negative and fully developed in everything positive. And the potential to attain that state of mind exists in every one of us and in fact in every living being.

The Buddha wasn't always a buddha, an enlightened being. He was once an ordinary being like us. But he discovered the nature of his mind and that it's possible to purify the mind and bring it to a state of enlightenment. Then after discovering that, he wanted to share it with others and show them how they could do that as well. He realized what he did was something that everyone could do, that we all have that potential to make our mind totally pure, totally clear, totally positive and free of everything negative. We have the teachings that show us how to develop this potential, our buddha-nature. So while we have this situation we should use it.

### *Obstacles to Realizing Buddha-Nature*

All beings, even animals, even cockroaches, have buddha-nature. It's the nature of every being's mind, but not all beings are in a situation where they can develop this potential, because some beings have too much suffering. Physical suffering, or mental suffering, or both - their mind is totally

consumed with suffering and they are not able to understand their buddha-nature, much less able to do anything about it. Also, some beings' minds are very obscured. They don't have enough intelligence to be able to understand this and be able to make use of it. And then other beings have too much pleasure. They're totally absorbed in pleasure and just enjoying themselves. And that's not such a good situation to be in because you have to have at least a little bit of suffering in order to appreciate that we need to free ourselves from suffering and this imperfect situation that we're in. That's why being born as a human being is the best situation for developing our buddha-potential. Because we don't have so much suffering that we're totally absorbed in it. And we also don't have too much pleasure. We know there is happiness, we know there is pleasure, but we also know there is suffering. And this stimulates the wish to be free of suffering, and to find a way to be happy all the time.

And so for us the teachings that the Buddha gave can make sense. We can understand and relate to them. So of all the different forms of rebirth, being born as a human is the best. But then not all human beings have the most ideal conditions to be able to develop their potential. Some human beings have a lot of suffering. They may have physical pain, illness, injuries, or disabilities that occupy all their time and energy, just coping with their pain and difficulties, trying to stay alive or just trying to function in the world. There may not be much time and space left for them to be able to do anything else like spiritual study and practice.

Then some people have psychological problems, such as mental illness or disabilities. If somebody is mentally ill or mentally disabled, they would not be in position where they could recognize their potential for enlightenment, and be able to develop it. Others might be hindered because of the physical conditions they are living in. For example, people who are extremely poor, who are just living on the edge of survival, spend all their time and energy just keeping themselves and their families alive - just getting enough money to have food today and still be alive tomorrow. There are a lot of people who are in that situation, being extremely poor or living in very difficult conditions like refugees or homeless people. People in those kinds of conditions have this potential in their mind but their physical situation makes it very difficult for them to do anything about it.

### *Lack of Interest in Spiritual Teachings*

And then there are other people who are physically healthy and mentally healthy, and live in safe and comfortable situations - they have enough money and all the necessities of life. So they have very little physical suffering, but they have the problem of not being interested in spiritual teachings. If you try to talk to them about meditation, about the potential for transforming the mind, they may think that you are crazy - "What a waste of time, what do you want to do that for?" Because they're only interested in things like making money, accumulating as much money, property and possessions as they can, enjoying themselves as much as they can, having as much fun as they can, travelling around the world, accumulating experiences and knowledge and skills. So they're just focused on worldly, materialistic things and that's all they are interested in. They're not interested in anything spiritual. So even if they have access to spiritual teachers and teachings, and they have the time and

energy to practice, they have no interest, so they are unable to recognize and develop their precious potential for enlightenment.

These are some of the situations that some human beings are in which make it difficult for them to develop the potential that they have. Another difficult situation is living in a place where there is no chance to meet spiritual teachers and learn spiritual teachings about the path to enlightenment. Some people live in remote, isolated places, for example a small village in the mountains or in the jungle, in a very remote area where nobody ever heard of such a thing as enlightenment and the potential of the mind to totally transform itself. This kind of idea is totally unheard of. And the chances to find out about this are quite small, unless they travel somewhere else. But some people never travel, they stay their whole life in the same place. So without finding out about the potential of the mind and how to transform it, it's almost impossible to do this kind of work and bring the mind to enlightenment.

So the essence of meditation on the preciousness of human life is to recognise that not only do we have this incredible potential to transform our mind, to make our mind free of everything negative and develop everything positive. But we also have all the right conditions in our life to be able to develop that potential. We have healthy bodies, healthy minds, enough resources like money, food, and comfortable houses. And we actually have leisure time to be able to do a course like this, and to do meditation. We have access to spiritual teachers and teachings, and spiritual friends who can support us in our practice. And we have the interest - we don't think that spiritual practice is something meaningless, a waste of time. We have all the conditions that we need to be able to develop our potential. And it's just amazing if you really think about it. It's extremely rare because compared with the other beings in the universe there are just a small number who have all these conditions. It is extremely rare. And that's what the Buddha was trying to point out with the analogy of the tortoise putting its neck through the ring - it almost never happens that you have all these conditions. And we have them. So we are really, really fortunate, and we need to realize this and appreciate the opportunities we have.

The unfortunate thing is that this precious human life is not going to last. It's going to end at some point. We cannot live forever, our body is impermanent, subject to change, so it won't be around forever. We are going to die one day, and that could be any day. We never know when death is going to happen. So while we have this life, this situation and these conditions, we should try to at least do something in the way of spiritual practice, developing our spiritual potential - even if we can't go all the way to enlightenment, which is actually very rare in one lifetime. But we can do something in the way of getting in touch with our potential and starting to develop it, starting to develop more love and kindness, more appreciation of spiritual teachings, spiritual practice and spiritual teachers. Then at least we're doing something. The point is to recognise that we have so much potential, so that we don't waste our life. Don't wait till it's gone and then feel regret: 'I could have been more loving, more kind. I could have done more meditation, I could have done more good things but I didn't, and now it's too late.' So the point is to use our life wisely, which means learning spiritual teachings and putting them into practice as much as we can. Doing as much work as we can on

developing our precious potential - because this is the most beneficial thing we can do with our life, both for ourselves and for others.

Now do Meditation Three, *Appreciating Our Human Life*.

# *Meditation Three:*

## *Appreciating Our Human Life*

*by Ven. Sangye Khadro*

Start by sitting in a comfortable position. And make sure your back is straight and that your body is relaxed, with all the muscles in the body relaxed.

Let your breathing be natural. And focus your mind, your awareness on your breathing just for a few minutes to settle it down. Let go of any cloud-like thoughts, images, feelings - just let those flow away from your mind and just let your mind be right here in the present, being aware of your breath coming in and out, not thinking about anything else.

Generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation - one that goes beyond just thinking of your own happiness, your own benefit. See if you can generate some kind of motivation that is concerned for others, wanting to help others, wishing that the meditation will be helpful for others, in addition to yourself.

Now begin the meditation by thinking about your own buddha-nature, which is the potential of your mind to become completely clear and pure, free of all negative states of mind like anger. And to fully develop all the positive qualities, the positive states of mind - such as loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom. See if you can get a feeling of this potential right now.

It's possible for your mind, this very mind that is sitting here now meditating, to become completely clear and pure and very powerful and beneficial for others, able to do so much good for others.

If you find it difficult to accept this idea of buddha-nature, then see if you can at least accept that the human mind has incredible potential, so much intelligence. We are able to know what is right, what is wrong, what is true, what is false. We are able to understand other people and their suffering, able to feel moved by compassion to help others and we are able to think of all kinds of ways and means to benefit others.

We have so much potential and capability to make our lives meaningful and beneficial not just for ourselves but for others as well.

Feel a sense of that potential that exists within you.

If your mind comes up with some resistance to this idea or some doubt because you can see a lot of faults in yourself and a lot of mistakes that you've made, you might feel, "Oh, I have so many bad qualities."

See if you can accept the idea that these faults, mistakes, and bad qualities are not permanent; "These are not things that will stay in my life forever."

They are not an inherent part of your mind so they can be cleared away; they can be reduced gradually and eventually cleared away completely. Your mind can be free of them. Your mind is something changeable, not something concrete, permanent, fixed. It's possible to work on your mind and change your mind and all the negative things.

This potential to transform the mind, to free it from negative qualities and develop positive qualities, this potential actually exists in everyone's mind, but not everyone is in the most ideal situation to be able to do this kind of work on their mind. There are some people, some human beings, who experience physical difficulties such as sickness or injuries, disabilities. Or they are very poor, living in extremely hard conditions, really just struggling to stay alive. Other people are experiencing mental difficulties: mental illness or mental disability.

Even though their mind has this potential their present situation is not one in which they are able to recognise and develop it.

Spend some time thinking about people in this situation. They may be people you yourself know or have heard about or seen. Or just use your imagination, think about the lives some people have, the difficulties some people have that make it almost impossible for them to understand the potential that lies within their own minds.

Let's see this potential within ourselves and develop it.

And then there are other people, human beings who may not be experiencing those kinds of problems, physical and mental problems. But they may not have access to spiritual teachers, spiritual teachings that will enable them to become aware of the potential that they have, the possibilities they have for transforming their mind, developing the potential and how to do that. They may spend their whole life completely unaware of this potential and how to develop it.

Again think of people living in very remote places where they don't have access to these kind of teachings and teachers.

There are other people who are not experiencing these problems, they are not suffering physically or mentally, but are well off, living comfortable lives, and they have the opportunity to learn spiritual teachings from teachers but from their side they don't have interest. There's no interest there to understand themselves or their minds, to develop the potential of their minds, to make their lives more beneficial for others and so on.

There are probably people, family members, friends, people you work with, who are totally uninterested in anything spiritual. Instead their interests lie in other things like accumulating money, possessions, property, or worldly kinds of knowledge and skills.

Maybe they just enjoy themselves as much as possible, spending their life that way and maybe doing negative things, not realising that doing negative actions brings suffering, problems to themselves and to others. An ignorance that actually creates more problems, more obscurations, ignoring their buddha-nature, the potential of their mind, rather than getting closer to developing it.

Bring to mind some examples of people who are in that situation, who are not interested in anything spiritual, who aren't interested in developing their minds.

There are also people who have an interest in spiritual teachings, who really want to practice the spiritual path but may not have freedom to do so. For example, in some countries the government doesn't allow people to study and practice the religions or spiritual traditions of their choice. So spiritual teachers may not be allowed to give teachings, spiritual groups may not be allowed to gather and study and meditate on spiritual teachings. People might even be imprisoned for doing such things; books are banned, information is banned. People living in that situation don't have the freedom even though they have the wish to practice.

Sometimes people face objections from family members. They may wish to study and practice but they may have parents or a spouse, or even children, who are opposed to their interest and don't really allow them freedom to study and practice as they wish.

So see if you can bring to mind examples of people who are in that kind of situation. Think about these conditions that some people, actually many people, find themselves in; conditions which are hindrances to recognising and developing the potential of the mind.

Probably it will become clear to you that you are free from these hindering conditions. In fact, you have very good conditions. Your body is healthy, your mind is healthy and functioning properly. You're physically materially well off and comfortable, have time, leisure time to be able to study and practice spiritual teachings. You have access to spiritual teachers and teachings. You can meet teachers and you can learn teachings as much as you want and you have the interest to do so. You are interested in spiritual teachings and find them meaningful, worthwhile. You are free to pursue your interest and are not hindered by government or by other people. You have the freedom to study and practice as you like. You'll probably realise that you have most, if not all, of these good conditions.

These helpful and conducive conditions which enable you to recognise the incredible potential that you have with your human mind, your human intelligence and the ability to develop that potential. The knowledge that there is the opportunity to develop that potential.

Thinking about this see what kind of conclusion you come to. See if you can at least feel how fortunate you are to have this situation and also how it's actually quite rare.

Not everybody has it, many people don't have it. See if you can feel some sense of wanting to use this situation while you have it. Use it in a wise and beneficial way.

Finally take a few moments to mentally dedicate your merit, the positive energy of having done this meditation. Whatever positive energy you have created, remember the motivation you had to start with. Dedicate in the same way that it will become beneficial not just for yourself but for others as well, bringing more happiness and peace, wisdom and other positive experiences, positive qualities, beyond yourself too, for as many other people, as many other beings as possible.

## Session Four

### *Motivation*

To begin this session, spend a few minutes calming your mind. Focus on your breath, the gentle flow of your breath in and out, letting go of other thoughts. Just let your mind settle down in the present, the here and now.

Then generate a positive motivation for being here. As much as possible try to think of others - that your reason for being here and learning about meditation is not just for yourself, for your own happiness and benefit, but to be of more benefit to others. Even if you feel that at this point in time you are not able to do much for others, but if you can have the wish to develop yourself so that in the future you can be more helpful for others, then that is very beneficial. So try to generate some kind of motivation for being here that incorporates helping others.

### *Combining Analytical Meditation and Placement Meditation*

In the last session we did an analytical meditation so that you can get some idea about how to do that type of meditation. It's said in the teachings that ideally we should combine the two kinds of meditation - placement or stabilising meditation and analytical meditation. The way to do that is that when we do a session of analytical meditation, hopefully at some point you will get a feeling, some kind of experience. It doesn't have to be something fantastic, a great realisation, it can be just some kind of strong feeling about what you are meditating on. For example, in the meditation on *Appreciating Our Precious Human Life*, the kind of feeling we're trying to generate there is how fortunate we are - it's a sense of joy and appreciation about what we have. So if we can generate that feeling in the meditation, then we need to stop thinking and analysing and just use stabilising or placement meditation. So you concentrate your mind on that experience, that feeling of joy, of how fortunate you are, how precious your life is. Stay with that feeling and keep it as long as you can, even if it's just a few seconds or minutes. Just hold on to that feeling and use the stabilising meditation to concentrate your mind on that. If your mind wanders away, bring it back and just try to maintain that feeling as long as you can. And then, when it disappears, you can either return to the analytical part of the meditation, go back to thinking/analysing, if you have the time and the wish to continue with that, or you can conclude your session of meditation.

That's how we're advised to combine analytical and placement meditation. And that's how we really bring about a transformation of the mind. We do analytical meditation in order to bring about some kind of experience, some kind of realisation which is a different state of mind than we normally have. Like a feeling of how precious our life is, or the feeling of compassion or loving kindness for others, or some insight into the way things are, a more correct way of seeing things. Then, once that experience has arisen in our mind, we keep our mind on it as long as we can - using stabilising meditation - and in that way our mind becomes familiar with that experience. It's a different way of thinking, a different way of seeing things than we normally have. That's what we are trying to do.

We're trying to change our normal way of thinking, our confused and deluded states of mind, and bring about more correct, positive and beneficial states of mind.

As you study more about the path to enlightenment and learn more about the different topics of meditation, it will become more clear how important it is to meditate on these topics so that we can change our way of thinking. And then we hold onto that experience and keep it in our mind as long as we can. It's also important when we finish our meditation to try to maintain what we learned in the meditation as much we can in our daily life, and not just completely forget it. We carry that understanding, that experience into the rest of our life, because the real point of meditation is to bring about a transformation, not just to sit and meditate and get some nice experience and then go back to the way we were before.

So in meditation we have a chance to bring about some kind of transformation in our mind, in our way of thinking and bring it into the rest of our life. But realistically that's something that takes time, it's not something we can expect to do right in the beginning. It takes a long time because we are so much more familiar with the old ways of thinking, the old attitudes and behaviours. It's important to know that it takes time to change your mind. In my own case it took me a while to learn that. I was very eager, very enthusiastic in the beginning, and very young and idealistic. And I thought, "I want to transform my mind and become enlightened, get rid of all my delusions, help all living beings." I thought that just by wanting to do that I should be able to do it. I didn't realise it's very difficult to really change your mind, and it takes a long time. So sometimes I felt very discouraged and cried a lot, many tears! Because my mind didn't change as quickly as I wanted. So I had to learn and accept that it takes time, and there's no benefit in becoming discouraged and frustrated. Nowadays, I still have anger, attachment, and selfishness, even after so many years of meditating, but at least I have learned to be more patient and accepting of myself, my mind, and the fact that it takes time to change the mind. It takes time, patience, and perseverance.

### *Using a Slow and Steady Pace*

Lama Yeshe used to say, "we're not like mushrooms". I think mushrooms grow very quickly overnight. So he said that people are not like that. It's not like you can meditate one day and the next day you'll be enlightened. He used to say, "slowly, slowly". We can't force our mind to change. We have to change naturally. And all we can do is to just keep trying, keep learning, meditating, trying to change our mind, trying not to follow the old habitual negative attitudes and ways of behaving. Slowly, slowly, it does happen, it does work. The mind does change, but you need a lot of patience.

There's a saying in the Tibetan tradition that it's best in our practice to have the pace of an elephant. An elephant walks very slowly, with a slow and steady pace, but it keeps going for a long, long time. It can walk like that for hours and days. So they say that that is the kind of pace we should have in our practice. You just keep practicing day by day and just keep going at a slow and steady pace, rather than the way a rabbit moves. A rabbit will run very quickly in one direction and then stop, and then

go quickly in another direction, then stop, and then go back to where it came from. So it runs very quickly, but it doesn't get anywhere.

That's similar to what can happen with people when they practice meditation. Especially in the beginning, we might be very enthusiastic and do a lot of meditation - many hours everyday. Or maybe we do some kind of very intensive retreat for a number of days or weeks, and then we burn ourselves out, or become discouraged because we feel that we didn't achieve what we wanted to achieve. Then we completely stop practicing for a couple of months, or even a couple of years. Then after a while we start again, do a little bit then again stop. So that way of practicing isn't good. Just like the rabbit we won't get anywhere; we won't really achieve much if we practice like that. It's much better to do what the elephant does - just keep going a little bit every day, regularly.

The Tibetans seem to have the attitude of simply accepting that it takes time to change the mind; you can't force it to change. It may take many lifetimes. Realistically, it will take many lifetimes to really transform the mind and bring it to the state of enlightenment. So they accept that and realise, "Okay, I may not get to enlightenment in this lifetime, but at least I have started and made my mind familiar with the teachings and practices and left some positive imprints on my mind, and did as much as I could. And that's good enough." It seems this is hard for us. Western people get kind of frantic - I've got to get there in this lifetime. Maybe it's because we're not use to thinking in terms of many lifetimes. We're used to thinking of just one lifetime and having to do everything in one lifetime. And if you're not successful then you're a failure. We put too much pressure on ourselves.

### *Recognising Our Unique Qualities*

Also, we sometimes compare ourselves with other people and then feel inadequate or become discouraged because we think we are not as good as others. Or we try to do as much practice as someone else, but it doesn't work. We might not have the inner resources and the capability to practice as much as that person. So it's not helpful to do that. Each of us is different, each of us has our own unique qualities, the karma we carry with us from the past and what we have done in this lifetime and so on. So instead of looking at others and trying to do as much as they do, it's better to get in touch with yourself, come to understand yourself and what you're capable of doing, and be happy with that. In one sense it's good to look at other people who are doing a lot of practice and feel inspired by them. We actually need to have teachers and spiritual friends who are practicing a lot, to help us to practice more. But still we should not think that we have to do as much as they do, because we may not be able to do that. We need to find out what's possible for us, what is comfortable for us and do that much. One person might be able to meditate an hour everyday. For another person maybe ten minutes is as much as they can do. So then be happy with what you can do. Feel good about that. Feel a sense of rejoicing.

### *Rejoicing*

Rejoicing is when we feel happy about good things that are being done by other people as well as by ourselves. This is really a beautiful state of mind. It's also a very positive state of mind and something that creates a lot of merit. So when you see somebody practicing or doing something good, helping

others, giving money, giving food, whatever they're doing, just feel a sense of joy. Feel how wonderful it is that they are doing that. And by doing that, you yourself get a lot of merit, or positive energy. Rejoicing is said to be the lazy person's way of collecting merit. Other people do the meditating and the hard work and you can just kind of relax and rejoice, how wonderful that they're doing all those things!

But that doesn't mean you should be lazy. I am not recommending laziness. We still have to do some work ourselves. Just by rejoicing alone we won't get enlightened, but it's still a good thing to do. And we also need to rejoice in ourselves when we do something good, when we do some meditation, or help somebody out, practice patience, put up with some hardships. It's good to think "that was a good thing to do; I'm glad I did that." It may sound conceited to think like that, that we are all puffed up with pride and arrogance - "how fantastic I am, how wonderful I am." But it's not like that. There is a difference between pride and rejoicing. Pride is where we exaggerate our good qualities and feel that we are better than we really are, and better than other people. Rejoicing is not like that - it's acknowledging that we have good qualities, or that we do good things, and feeling happy about these things. It's a way of encouraging ourselves to do more. If we do something good and we think "oh why did I do that? I didn't do that very well. That was a lousy meditation that I just did. Why am I even meditating?" That kind of attitude is putting ourselves down, depreciating what we do. Then eventually we might feel totally discouraged and give up practicing.

So we need to encourage ourselves. We *need* encouragement and if we don't get it from anybody else, we can give it to ourselves. We can encourage ourselves to keep going, to keep practicing and rejoice in the things that we're doing, and feel a sense of wanting to continue. That's a very important quality - and a very important practice. Rejoicing is a practice in itself.

### *Letting Go of Expectations*

There are a few other attitudes that can sometimes happen with regards to practice that we need to be careful of. One of these is having expectations. Lama Yeshe used to say, "Don't have any expectations". It's easy to say that but it's very, very difficult to do - to not have expectations. I think it's only natural for our mind to expect to get something out of our practice. Most of us, I think, want to meditate because we're not very happy, we suffer from depression or stress, or boredom or things aren't going well in our life or we have problems. We are searching for something. We are hoping or expecting good results from our practice. We want to feel better, we want to be happier, we want to be more loving. So it's actually very difficult to engage in meditation and spiritual practice without having expectations. But we need to at least recognise that having expectations is something that we should try to avoid. We need to recognise what expectations we have and then work on them.

We don't always realise that we have expectations until we feel that something isn't going well. "I should be feeling blissful. I should be having visions. It should be getting easier. My thoughts should be stopping and they're not." This is how we can come to recognise the expectations that we have -

when we have the feeling that something is wrong, things aren't happening the way they should, or the way we want them to.

I think it's only natural that our mind will have expectations, but they can be subtle and we may not always be conscious of them. Ideally we should meditate without expectations. Meditate for the sake of meditating because it is something beneficial for our mind, but without expecting that something is going to happen at some certain time.

### *Taking Time to Change the Mind*

As I said before, it takes time to change the mind. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. It happens slowly and gradually. An analogy used in the teachings is the filling of a bucket under a dripping tap. One drop at a time falls into the bucket. It's very, very slow but eventually the bucket will be full. So our practice should be like that. You just keep trying to add positive thoughts, do positive things, little by little, slowly, slowly, and eventually the mind will be full of positive thoughts and experiences. It will happen naturally, even if we don't want it happen. Even if you think, "I don't want to become enlightened, I don't want to be free from suffering," but if you create the causes for it by doing meditation, it will happen whether you like it or not. It's only natural. So what we have to do is to just keep creating the causes and eventually it will happen.

But we can't force it; we can't force ourselves to change. We can't force ourselves to have experiences before we're ready to have them - that's just the ego. One thing about expectations is that they usually come from the ego. I, big me, big I, I want something to happen, I want to feel blissful, I want to have a vision. Somebody else had a vision - I want one, too. It's usually ego and pride that is behind wanting special experiences and having expectations.

### *Minding Our Own Business*

Once, when I was teaching a meditation course in India, one student at the course came up to me during a break, and said "I've been meditating for three days now and nothing has happened." I said, "I see. Well, what did you think was going to happen?" And he said, "I don't know, but something should have happened by now - other people are having experiences, but nothing has happened to me. I don't want to keep meditating if nothing is going to happen!" Actually, something was happening, but it probably wasn't what he expected! What was happening was that he was getting a chance to see how his mind worked, to see attitudes in his mind that he might not normally recognize. For example, having fantasies - because the people in this course were supposed to keep silence, not talking to each other, so there's no way he could know what was happening to the other people (and I doubt that he had clairvoyance, the ability to read other peoples' minds.) So he was imagining that everybody else was doing really well in their meditation, having incredible experiences, and he was the only one that wasn't. I think we all do this sometimes - have fantasies about other people. For example, we see somebody meditating, looking very still, very peaceful, and we think, "Wow, that person is really doing well, he must be almost enlightened." But how can we know? Maybe he's sitting there thinking about pizza or thinking about his girlfriend and what he's going to say to her when they meet again. But we do that, we fantasise that other people are doing

things; other people are having experiences that we are not. That's complete fantasy, we don't know what's going on in other people's minds. And we shouldn't even bother, it's none of our business. We shouldn't be thinking about what other people are doing. Our business is working on our own mind.

This is what happens in meditation. We get a chance to see our mind, to see the kind of crazy things that go on in our mind, the fantasies, the expectations, the desires, the ego, all this kind of stuff. It's really fascinating. Meditation is so interesting, much more interesting than watching movies or TV. Just watching our own mind. There is just so much to learn about our mind, so many layers, it's like an onion. You peel away one layer and underneath there is another one. Then you peel away that one and then another, and another. The mind has many, many layers. There are always new things to find out about our mind. That's what we need to do, we need to look at our mind, and to come to understand our mind. Without understanding it then we won't know what work we have to do. So meditation gives us a chance to look at our mind and recognise the unrealistic, unwise and deluded aspects of our mind that need to be transformed.

So try not to have expectations about achieving something or experiencing something. Sometimes we can have a good session of meditation - we are able to sit very still; our mind gets very calm and quiet and peaceful, we might even feel bliss, and then we might think, "Finally, I've achieved something and this is how it's going to be from now on." Then the next meditation session is horrible - you can't sit still, your body is full of aches and pains, and your mind is in a horrible state, full of angry thoughts or totally crazy. And you wonder, "Why? What went wrong?"

### *Accepting What Happens*

It's easy to think when we get some nice experience that after that it's just going to get better and better, but that's not necessarily true. Sometimes we can have wonderful experiences, wonderful meditations, and then the next time we meditate it can be terrible. Actually, we shouldn't even judge our meditation. It's not even right to judge and say, "Oh, that was a good one or that was a bad one." That's not helpful at all. It's better to just do it and accept whatever happens. If you have a wonderful experience, or if you have a horrible experience, it doesn't matter, just accept it.

There is one American Vipassana teacher, Joseph Goldstein, who was one of the first Western people to learn meditation in India and then teach it in the West. In one of his books he tells the story that one time he was in India and doing a lot of meditation, many hours every day, and he got to the point where every time he sat down to meditate he felt as though his body dissolved into light. So he felt just totally light and blissful, every time he meditated. And then he had to go back to America for some reason, and when he finished his business he went back to India. Again he started meditating a lot and he had the expectation that he would experience the same thing he had experienced before, this blissful light body. And he found that instead, his body felt like a painful mass of twisted steel, horrible. Then he kept trying to get back to that experience of his body dissolving into blissful light, but it didn't happen. He said he spent two years meditating, trying to get back to that experience and it didn't happen. Finally he realised, "That's not the point." The

point of meditation is not to get back to some experience you had before, to get some wonderful blissful experience. The point is to be with whatever is happening and learn to deal with whatever is happening in this moment. So he said it took him two years to learn that. Hopefully, we can learn that without having to spend so much time, but it is hard. It's hard to have a wonderful experience in meditation and then not want that or expect that to happen again and again. It's very difficult, but it happens. That's how it is. Really the point is not to have fantastic experiences in meditation, the point is to deal with our mind. To deal with whatever is happening in our mind at any given time.

Now we are just starting to learn about meditation. But in the teachings of Buddha there is so much wisdom, so much excellent advice about how to deal with your mind, how to deal with whatever is going on in your mind. It's all there in Buddha's teachings. If we are willing to spend time studying and practicing then we'll learn all these things and we'll be able to use them in working on our mind.

So we should try not to have expectations and instead just do our practice, do the best we can. Be happy with how it goes, whether our mind is in a wonderful state and really concentrated or is in a bad state, restless, agitated and so on. Just feel, "Okay, I'm doing my practice. I'm doing the best I can and that's good enough." And try not to have a judgmental attitude, oh that was a good one and that was a bad one and I want to do more of that and I don't want that any more. Just do your best and accept whatever happens, because we are not in control of our mind. We don't have control over our mind. Also, we can be affected by other conditions - the weather, the stars, the environment, our health. There's lots of other conditions that could affect what happens in our mind and in our meditation.

### *Avoiding Judgment and Discouragement*

If we can avoid judging ourselves and the quality of our meditation, then that will help us to avoid problems such as discouragement, which is another thing that can happen sometimes. It ties in with having expectations, because if we expect to have certain experiences in meditation, if we expect to get to a certain point in our practice at a certain time, giving ourselves a deadline - like, "By the year 2003, I should have achieved such and such level" - if we have that kind of attitude then we might end up being discouraged, because it probably won't happen. We probably won't achieve what we wish, what we expect. Then we may get discouraged and think, "Oh, I can't do it; I am not capable of doing it." Or we might blame meditation, "Meditation is useless, Buddha was wrong, all these teachers are wrong, it's no good." It happens. People do give up, which is very sad. They give up because they have unrealistic expectations of themselves and of their practice. So this is quite important to understand.

### *Unusual Experiences*

Another thing that can happen in meditation is that we can sometimes have unusual experiences. Sometimes these might be rather disturbing or unpleasant. Sometimes they can be very wonderful and pleasant. What we need to do is to learn to have an attitude of equanimity about these experiences. Otherwise, when there is some unpleasant experience, some image in your mind that's

really ugly or frightening, or some feeling that comes up that's horrible like really strong anger, or some sensation in your body that is really unpleasant - our usual reaction is to feel, "This is bad. I don't like this." We feel aversion. We might even feel fear: "What is happening to me?"

I was in Singapore for many years and people there believe in spirits and the possibility of being possessed by spirits. I found that people there think that if something strange happens in their meditation, that it could be a spirit who is trying to harm or possess them. I don't know if people here would feel that way; here in the west we might think it's some person who is putting this ugly thought or this ugly image into my mind. We might not blame spirits, we might blame another person, like the person sitting next to you. "He's dumping all his garbage on me. I better go and sit somewhere else." But in fact, that is not possible - no one can put thoughts or images in our mind - they are coming from within our own mind, not from outside.

We should try to avoid feeling frightened and feeling aversion. Instead, see this image or feeling or experience as like another cloud in the sky - it's just a mental phenomenon, just something happening in your mind. It comes and goes, it's not permanent. It's not solid. It's like a cloud. Just notice it, and let it go. Don't let your mind get all caught up in fear. If there is fear, notice that also. There is fear in my mind, that's another cloud, let it go. If there is aversion, that's another cloud, let it go. So just pay attention, notice what's happening and don't get into it. Don't get involved in it, because if we do get caught up in feeling fear or feeling aversion we actually give more energy, more power to this feeling or image and that will make it harder to go away. Then we can become obsessed with it. It's a kind of negative attachment and we can't let it go. Just let it go and it will go. You may wonder, Why is this happening in my mind? If you can believe in past lives and karma, in our past lives we did so many actions that left karmic imprints in our mind, and these came with our mind into this life. So this is just some karmic imprint from the past ripening and causing this to happen. You don't have to get into a big analysis of it. Just say, "This is some karma from the past," and let it go. Just ignore it and it will go.

### *Developing an Attitude of Equanimity*

On the other hand, we may sometimes experience beautiful images or feelings or physical sensations in our body. And the tendency is to become attached to those. "I like this and I want this to continue and I don't want it to go away." When it's really fantastic, we might think, "Wow I want to tell all my friends about this, I want to tell my teacher about this. This is great, something wonderful is happening to me."

Again, that's not helpful. We should have the attitude that this is only something in our mind. Let it go like a cloud. It's some good karmic imprint that's ripening but it's not permanent, it's not going to last. Even if you try to hang on to it, it's not going to last. So just see it as another experience that comes and goes, another cloud in the mind.

Try to have the attitude of equanimity which means you are neither attached to the beautiful things nor do you have aversion, fear or rejection towards the unpleasant things. Whatever happens in your

mind, whatever comes up, whatever kind of thought, image, memory, feeling, emotion, physical feeling, whatever happens when you meditate, don't be attached, don't have aversion or fear. Just see it as some phenomenon happening in the mind. Let it come, let it go, like a cloud. It's easy to say that but it can be quite difficult to do - so just try to remember that, practice it, and the more we get familiar with the attitude of equanimity, the easier it will become.

### *Physical Pain and Discomfort*

Another problem that can happen in meditation is physical pain or discomfort. There are different things we can do with regard to pain. We have to be careful if the pain is actually due to some injury or due to forcing ourselves to sit in a position that's not right for us or to sit longer than we're really comfortable with. It could happen that by forcing or pushing yourself, you might end up damaging your body. Somebody asked this question recently in a meditation course that I was teaching: Can you injure yourself doing meditation? I'd never heard anyone ask that question so I wasn't sure. There was a physiotherapist there and I asked her. She said she didn't think so. But she said that if people are concerned about that, then if they are sitting for a long time, like more than an hour, they can move the body sometimes - just stretch out the legs for a few minutes, once every half-hour or hour or so.

So if you are feeling pain that could be due to forcing yourself to sit too long in the same position, it might be good to change your position sometimes, and that's okay to do. In the Tibetan tradition there is no rule that says you can't move when you meditate, that you have to sit like a statue, and if you move somebody is going to come and hit you with a stick. We don't have that in our tradition and in fact my teachers usually say it's important to be comfortable and it's okay to move, because what we are really trying to do is to work on our mind and not our body. It's okay to change your position if it becomes too painful, too uncomfortable and that becomes a distraction to your meditation. But if you do need to change your position, do so quietly and gently, especially if you are sitting with other people. It's best not to disturb them or to make a lot of noise or to do anything to disturb the people around you, so do it quietly.

### *Exploring Pain*

It's also useful to just explore pain. It's quite common that we have aversion to pain and we constantly do things to avoid experiencing pain, to avoid anything that is uncomfortable and painful. And we never give ourselves a chance to just explore pain and understand it, and also understand our own mind and the way we react to pain. Often we have the feeling we can't stand a feeling of pain or being cold or hungry. Our tendency is that as soon as we feel hungry we have to immediately go and get something to eat. As soon as we feel tired we have to lie down and sleep. As soon as we feel pain we have to stop it. In actual fact, the feeling of pain or cold or hunger isn't really that bad and unbearable, and we could put up with it. But we just react too quickly.

Often the problem isn't so much the pain and the discomfort, but it's our mind. It's the way we deal with it. The mind is saying "I don't like this, I don't want this. I have to stop this, it's unbearable, I

can't stand it." So it's more the mind, the thoughts, the mental response to the experience that is the problem rather than the experience itself.

The same can be true for hunger. Often when you go on a Buddhist retreat there are certain periods where you have to fast. You may have to fast for half a day or even for a whole day. We're so used to eating whenever we feel like eating that we don't allow ourselves to just experience hunger and to learn to put up with hunger. Actually we can. It's just that we don't want to. Our mind makes a big deal, a big fuss. "I'm hungry, I don't want to be hungry, I want to eat something." But we can put up with it. It can be useful to just look at what's going on, to look at the actual experience that's happening, the physical pain or the cold or the hunger or whatever it is, and then look what our mind is doing. And recognise that the problem is really our mind, not what's going on in our body. The problem is our mind, saying I don't want it, I don't like it, I'm going to make it stop. It's like a little child, in a way. As soon as she gets a little cut she starts crying. Doesn't want to have that little bit of pain.

### *Putting Up With Discomfort*

It can be very useful to learn to put up with physical discomfort. Maybe one day we won't have any choice. We won't be able to stop the pain. We might fall down a cliff in an isolated place and injure ourselves and there's nobody around to help us. No pain-killers to stop the pain. So it can be very useful to learn to extend our level of tolerance of physical pain and physical discomfort. When you feel some pain, maybe you don't immediately move to stop it. Just spend some time looking at your mind and what's going on. What we can learn by doing that is that the pain is not a solid and permanent thing. It may seem like that, so heavy and solid. But if you watch it and explore it, you see that it actually comes and goes. Sometimes it's stronger, sometimes it's less strong, sometimes it disappears, and then it comes back. We can actually see that it's changing and impermanent. Again it's another cloud, it's just some experience happening, which isn't solid and permanent. By doing this we can learn to be less caught up in our usual reactions of feeling aversion to pain and discomfort, wanting to stop it; trying whatever we can to stop it; feeling we can't put up with it when maybe we can. That's a very useful exercise.

### *Explaining the Purification Meditation*

So now we are going to do a kind of purification meditation. This meditation was taught by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It's a very, very simple one that involves using the breath. Breathing and focusing on the breath. And with each inhalation we visualise breathing in pure blissful light, and we think that this light represents all positive qualities like love and compassion. If you feel comfortable with the idea of Buddha and enlightened beings, then you can think that their qualities, their love, compassion, wisdom and so on is in the form of this light. If you are not so comfortable with thinking of buddhas, you can just think of the universe, and the good energy that exists in the universe. Love, kindness, compassion, wisdom - all of these qualities. So all that good energy appears in the form of blissful, pure light. And you are breathing that in. You imagine that going into your body and filling your body completely; going into all the cells and atoms and tiny particles of your

body. So with each breath, you become more and more filled with this blissful light and with the qualities it represents.

Then with the each exhalation, we imagine that we send out our negative energy. Our anger, fear, selfishness, pride, problems, depression, our worries, our ego, whatever we're hung up on, whatever thoughts and emotions and problems that we have, that are disturbing to us and disturbing to others. So imagine all this stuff in the form of dark smoke or pollution - when we breath it out, it goes out of the body. And when it goes out, it just disappears. Don't think you are polluting the environment, you are sending out all this negative energy which pollutes the environment and harms others. Don't think like that because actually all this negative energy doesn't really exist, it's not real. It's not something permanent and solid, it's just in our mind. So imagine breathing it out and then it just disappears. Don't think about it any more, it's gone.

So that is what's involved in this meditation - breathing in the pure white light of positive energy and breathing out the dark smoke and pollution of negative energy.

Now do Meditation Four, *Purification Meditation*.

## *Meditation Four:*

### *Purification Meditation*

Arrange your body in the most comfortable and conducive position for meditation and relax your body. Let go of any tension you might have but still keep your back straight which helps the mind to be clear and focused.

Generate a positive motivation to do the meditation.

Be aware of the breath as it comes and goes out of the nostrils. Just like the doorway or the gateway of the breath, going in and out of our body.

Imagine that as you breathe in you take in very pure and blissful light, and think of it as white in colour, the colour of purity. This light represents all the good energy and positive qualities that exist in the universe. If you can accept the existence of enlightened beings then these are the qualities within their minds. Perfect unconditional love for all beings, universal compassion for all beings, wisdom that understands the way things are and is completely unconfused. Courage, being without any fear, especially in regard to helping others, no matter what has to be done to help others, being very skilful in knowing how to help each person according to their mind and their needs.

You can think of other positive qualities that you would like to develop within yourself. Think that those qualities are in the form of this light. Imagine breathing it in again and when it comes into your body, it flows to all the parts of your body, going all the way down to your toes, fingertips and filling every tiny part of your body, down to the cells, the atoms, the subatomic particles.

Just spend some time doing that; breathing in the white light, letting it fill your body. Think of the light as being healing, having the quality of healing you, healing whatever pain, problems, sickness you might have in your body and mind. This light can heal all those things.

Have a feeling that this is really happening, that there really is this blissful clear light coming into you and filling you.

Be content with whatever visualisation comes to you and feel that it is really happening. There really is light coming in and filling you.

Your body becomes very light and clear and relaxed. The nature of the light is very blissful, very nice, so that feeling fills you up. Continue to visualise the white light coming in when you inhale.

Now begin to visualise dark smoke or pollution going out of your body when you exhale. This smoke or pollution is whatever problems that you may have, sickness, pain, physical problems, discomfort but more importantly aspects of your mind that are problematic, negative aspects of the mind, anger,

pride, selfishness and so on. Anything in your mind that makes you unhappy or disturbed. The negative karmas you've created in the past, the imprints of those actions. Anything that is negative in your body and mind, imagine that going out of you when you breathe out, in the form of this dark smoke.

And then it disappears into space and it doesn't go anywhere or pollute or disturb anything, it just becomes non-existent.

Continue to meditate like this, visualising the white light coming in and the dark smoke going out. Your body and mind becomes more and more clear and pure and blissful and free of all the problems and negativities.

Now to conclude the meditation dedicate the effort you put into doing this meditation and whatever positive energy that was generated to benefit not just yourself but others as well, as many other beings as possible. May it bring greater peace, happiness, clarity, positive energy and freedom from suffering and problems for as many other beings as possible.

# Session Five

## *Motivation*

Let's start this session by doing a few minutes of meditation on the breath to bring our minds to a more calm, peaceful state and generate a positive motivation for being here and practicing. So sit comfortably with the back straight, shoulders relaxed, eyes closed or left open a little bit, and let your body settle down and relax in this position. Breathe naturally. Let the breath be a natural rhythm.

Let your mind settle down by putting aside or letting go of any other thoughts that you may have about the past or the future, or any other place, or other people. Just let your mind be in the present, right here, right now. Be aware of the breath coming in and going out. That can help to settle the mind in the present.

Spend a few more minutes looking at your mind and asking yourself why you are here. What's your reason for coming here? If you find that you don't really have a clear idea about why you are here, then see if you can develop a positive motivation. For example, wanting to learn something that will be of benefit to yourself and to others, to help you to be more open and less confused, more compassionate and kind, less angry and hurtful and so on. Bring into your mind some kind of positive motivation as your reason for being here.

## *Dealing With Other Obstacles in Meditation*

I would like to talk about some of the other problems or obstacles that might occur when we try to meditate, and some suggestions as to what we can do about these. Previously, I talked about one method that can be useful to deal with disturbing thoughts - the idea that the mind is like the sky, and thoughts and emotions are like clouds that are not permanently there in the mind but come and go, arise and pass away. That's a general method we can use with any kind of thoughts or disturbing emotions or distractions that might arise when we are meditating - to see these as just temporary occurrences in the mind, things that come and go and are not permanent. If we take them too seriously and let ourselves get involved in them, feeding them, giving them energy, then they will stay longer in the mind. If we can just notice them and ignore them, the way we ignore external noise, then they will go.

## *Unresolved Problems*

But sometimes, something can come up in our meditation which is rather strong, a powerful feeling, emotion or memory, or an unresolved problem from the past. It could also be something from the present, like a problem that's happening in our life right now. We can try to see it as being like a cloud and let go of it, but it may be difficult to let it go - it may keep coming back - because it's too strong and powerful. In my own experience, in working with my mind and trying to meditate, I find that when these kinds of things come up it is sometimes a good time to look at them. They may be problems from the past or the present that need to be dealt with and resolved. And sometimes we

have the tendency to want to push things aside, ignore them and forget about them. Doing that isn't helpful. They don't get solved - they don't go away. They just keep coming back again and again, and so meditation can be a really useful time to look at those problems and deal with them.

An analogy might be helpful to understand this. If you see a child that's crying, you can say to the child, "Be quiet, stop crying." The child may quiet down and stop crying, but it may not. It may continue crying. And if you say to the child, "Well, go away and come back after two hours and then I will take care of you," that may not be the best way of dealing with it. If a child is crying it probably has a reason. It probably needs something - something is wrong that needs to be taken care of and that needs to be done right now. We need to put aside what we are doing and try to find out what's wrong, why the child is crying and then try to take care of it.

It's similar to what can happen in our mind. Our mind is like a child and sometimes it cries. Sometimes it has a problem that needs to be dealt with and if you try to push it aside it doesn't really work. If it's happening right now, a strong feeling coming up right now, maybe now is the time to look at it and try to understand what it is, and find a solution. For example, you might realise that you're upset with somebody. It could be a family member or friend or somebody you work with. And maybe you've been upset for a whole day or even a week, but you've just tried to ignore it and keep yourself busy doing other things. Then when you're meditating, feelings of hurt, or anger, or disappointment come up. Lots of different feelings can come up.

So it's important at some point in time to look at this situation and try to come to some resolution, so that you can get beyond it. One thing you could do is to say to yourself, "Right now I'm meditating on something else - I'm meditating on the Buddha, or I'm meditating on impermanence, so I am not going to deal with that now. I realise there's a problem that I need to look at and work on, but I will do it later after I finish with my meditation. I'll make some time later to think about that problem and deal with it." That's one thing you can do, just postpone dealing with it until a later time. But again sometimes that doesn't always work because the problem is too strong, it won't go away; it doesn't want to wait, it needs to be looked at right now, just like the child crying.

### *Dealing With It Now*

So sometimes right now is the time to look at the problem. You can put aside your meditation object for a while, and spend some time trying to work with this problem - you can bring in whatever understanding you have about the mind and emotions, and about the spiritual teachings that teach us how to work on our mind. And you can bring in any other knowledge or resources you might have to try to understand this problem and find a solution to it.

The point is not to get all caught up in the problem and become involved in it. That would be like a mother who is trying to help her child and then she starts crying too. If she gets caught up in the child's problem and gets angry and cries, then she's not going to be very helpful. You have to be able to stay objective and cool and calm and be able to use your intelligence to understand what the child needs and what is the best way to help him.

It's the same way when we're working on a problem in our meditation - we need to have some distance from the problem. We need to be able to step back from it and look at it objectively. Okay this is the problem, let's try to understand what it's all about and what I can do about it. How can I solve this problem? We might be able to do that quite easily with whatever knowledge and experience we have, and be able to find a solution. Or we may not be able to do that but we can at least realise that we need to do other things. For example maybe we need to learn more about anger. If we realise we are really angry and we want to change our anger into something more positive, then we need to learn more about how to do that.

There are resources that teach us how to do that. For example, there is a book by His Holiness the Dalai Lama called *Healing Anger*, and it's full of methods for working with anger. And there are other books that contain information on how to work with anger. So we might come to the conclusion that that's what we need to do - we need to learn more about anger and how to work with anger. If you have access to a teacher you can go to your teacher for advice about the problem. Or if you don't have a teacher, you may have friends who are more knowledgeable and more experienced than you are in meditation. So you can go to them and ask their advice, or go and see a therapist.

Sometimes a problem can be quite complex and may take a long time to work on. Maybe many years.

Maybe our whole life - to be able to get beyond a particular problem and solve it. But that's okay, however long it takes. You just do the best you can.

### *Obstacles to Concentration*

Now I'd like to go through a list of five obstacles to concentration and some antidotes that we can use to deal with them. This explanation comes from teachings on the bodhisattva vows. One of the bodhisattva vows has to do with working on overcoming these five obstacles to concentration. I think some of this information could be very helpful for us as well.

### *Excitement and Regret*

The first of the five is excitement and regret. Excitement is when our mind becomes distracted by memories from the past - pleasant experiences that we've had in the past that we want to re-experience and relive. This may sound familiar. You may have already noticed this happening in your mind. It happens a lot - memories of things we did in the past, or movies that we saw, or music that we heard, or delicious food that we've eaten, and beautiful places that we've travelled to, experiences we've had in our relationships or love affairs. All kinds of things from the past can come up, and our mind becomes distracted by them and it's no longer concentrated.

We can use the method I explained earlier, where we see these as like clouds, not permanent things in our mind, but as mental events that come and go. This way, we might be able to let go of them. But that may be difficult to do because of attachment. We're usually very attached to these pleasant memories and experiences and we don't really want to let go of them. So it might be useful if we try to understand why we are so attached to our memories. What's the reason we don't want to let go

of these and want to continue thinking about them again and again? Also we can ask ourselves is this really useful to keep thinking about the same things over and over again, like playing a tape. What benefit is there? Does this help me to be a better person?

It can be useful to analyse why this is happening and ask is this really what we want to be doing with our time, with our life? And one thing that should be helpful too is to realise that when we have attachment in our mind, one quality of attachment is that it tends to exaggerate things and makes them feel much more pleasant than they really are. For example, maybe you went to some beautiful place and you have a memory of this place being wonderful. You had a very good time there and you think I'd really like to go back there and have another wonderful experience there. And so then you do - one day you do go back to that place but somehow it's not the same. It could be that they have actually changed things. But maybe the place hasn't change, maybe your mind has changed, and you're not in the same state of mind now as you were then. So then you don't enjoy this place as much as you did the first time. You have a memory of this place being so wonderful, but when you go back there you kind of wonder, well, why did I think that way? This place isn't really that great and maybe it wasn't that great the first time. This is what our mind does. When we have attachment for something, our mind tends to focus on certain good things about the object we're attached to and then make them much bigger and better than they are. And we tend to overlook or ignore anything that isn't good. Attachment causes our mind to be selective. We only focus on certain things and think they're wonderful. Our mind exaggerates them and then doesn't focus on things that aren't so good.

It can be useful to realise that our memories may not be that reliable. Maybe we didn't have such a good time, maybe we weren't really that happy; maybe that place wasn't so fantastic or that food that we ate wasn't really that great; or that person wasn't that great. But our mind makes this object into something much more than it really is, trying to get some pleasure from it. If we can do that kind of analysis, it can be helpful.

And another thing is to realise that the past is the past and it cannot be relived. So even if there was a wonderful experience, it's gone. You cannot relive or regain that experience. Just leave it in the past and be happy that you had that experience. I am not saying that we should discredit our past experiences. But there is not really much point to keep thinking about them, to keep going through them again and again, especially if we're trying to meditate. We're trying to develop concentration, to develop good qualities in the mind, and there is so much we can do with our mind that's very beneficial instead of spending our time dwelling on memories of the past. It's not such a wise use of our time.

### *Remedy for Attachment*

It's said in the teachings that the best remedy for attachment is actually impermanence. And we'll do a meditation on impermanence so that you can see what that is all about, and how that can be helpful. Impermanence means things change. Things are subject to change and this is the nature of everything we deal with. Our own bodies, our mind, people, all these things around us, the world

itself, planet earth - the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky - all are impermanent and changing all the time.

The Buddha said that all produced things (that is, things that come from causes and conditions, which includes just about everything we perceive and deal with) do not stay the same from one moment to the next. They are changing every moment. And this isn't just because Buddha said so. This isn't just a philosophical thing, it's a scientific reality. We don't normally see things as changing. We tend to see things as if they stay the same, and do not change, that they will always be there, somehow solid and permanent. So to realise the impermanent, changing nature of things can be very helpful for us not to be so attached, and to be able to let go of things. They are not permanent, and trying to hold on to them isn't going to make them permanent. It's only going to make us frustrated and disappointed when they do change or go out of existence. So it's much better to have a realistic view, understanding that they are impermanent, accepting that and letting go of things. This isn't something that will happen immediately. But the more you become familiar with the impermanent nature of things, the more it can help you to accept changes when they do happen.

As an example of this - one time I was living in Los Angeles. We had a small meditation group and we met each week and meditated together on different aspects of Buddhist teachings. We talked about impermanence and meditated on impermanence. In some places in Los Angeles, like Beverly Hills, people build houses on the side of hills, which is not stable. The earth isn't very solid or stable. When there are storms and very heavy rain, sometimes the houses crack or fall down. That happened with one of the members of the group - his house collapsed. After it happened he came to the group and told us about this and said, "You know, I didn't get upset because we had been talking about impermanence and meditating on impermanence, so when this happened I just thought, Well, that's impermanence." But his wife - who hadn't been coming to the group and hadn't done any meditation on impermanence - she was pretty upset. So it can be helpful to make ourselves familiar with impermanence. Then we can be more accepting when this kind of thing happens in our life, and we have a head-on collision with impermanence.

### *Regret*

The other part of this first obstacle to concentration is regret, and this is when we remember past things that we feel regret about. For example we may remember some bad thing we did or some mistake we made. It's an unpleasant memory, and we tend to feel very disturbed about it and sometimes we might even get obsessed, thinking I did that horrible thing and I'm so bad. Then we get caught up in feelings of guilt. This is another thing that our mind can become disturbed and distracted by when we try to meditate.

Actually, this kind of regret is a good thing. It's good to recognise things that we have done which were mistaken or harmful, or which disturbed other people, and created bad karma. It's good to recognise that and feel a sense of regret - not guilt. The healthy kind of regret which I'm saying is a good thing isn't guilt, but rather it's a kind of intelligent recognition that something we have done was wrong, was mistaken. And it's based on understanding karma, understanding that the actions

that we do bring about results that will be experienced by ourselves. We're creating our own experiences by the actions that we do. If we do something wrong or harmful, we're actually creating problems and suffering for ourselves. And we don't want problems. Who wants problems?

So realising that, we wish we hadn't done that, it was a dumb thing to do - and that's regret. It's no good to become obsessed and keep thinking over and over again about these things we've done. Rather, what we can do is a practice in the Buddhist tradition called purification.

### *Purification - The Four Powers*

Purification is something we can do to clear up the bad actions or negative karma that we've done in the past. So we don't have to experience the sufferings and problems that would come otherwise.

I'll just mention this briefly now but it's something you'll probably learn about later. There are four steps in the process of doing purification called the Four Powers. And **regret is the first** of those four - you realise you did something that was a mistake and created bad karma and you want to do something about that and purify it.

**The second power is reliance, and this has two aspects - the first is taking refuge.** For a Buddhist, refuge is a sense of relying on the Buddha and his teachings and those who are following his teachings. It's putting ourselves under the guidance and care of the Buddha, his teachings and followers. If someone is not a Buddhist, refuge could mean renewing whatever sense of spiritual practice or spiritual commitment you have in your own tradition or path, which usually involves some kind of ethics. You avoid doing bad things and do good things. There is always a system of ethics in any religious tradition. When we do something negative, it is like falling off the path or falling down by the wayside, and taking refuge is like picking ourselves up and getting ourselves back on track, back on the path that we feel some kind of commitment to.

If you are not a follower of any particular religious or spiritual tradition, you might have your own system of ethics, your own ideas about what you want to do with your life and what's meaningful to you. You need to put yourself back on track and renew your commitment to your spiritual goal, your spiritual practices and spiritual life. That's what is meant by refuge.

The second aspect of the power of reliance is generating compassion. When we do negative things most of the time it's in relation to others - we do things that are harmful and disturbing to others. That means we weren't compassionate. We weren't caring and considerate and compassionate to those people or beings, but instead we hurt them. And so we need to renew that sense of compassion - not wanting to hurt others or be a source of problems and suffering for others, but wanting to help others as much as we can.

**The third power is sometimes called the remedy or antidote.** And this is when we do something positive to counteract the negative thing we've done, to create some good karma and balance things out. There are a lot of different things you can do here - meditation, reciting prayers, reading spiritual texts. Doing something that will be helpful to others who are less fortunate, who are needy - giving

food, giving money or actually helping out where help is needed. Almost any good thing we do, any positive, helpful thing can be used as this third power of remedy.

**And the fourth power is resolution.** That's where we make some kind of resolution for the future to either never do that action again - if we can make such a commitment - or, if that is not possible, then we can make a more short-term resolution. For example, for the next hour I'm not going to get angry and yell at my kids. That may be more realistic than to say I will never again get angry and yell at my kids. You wouldn't be able to keep that.

So we can make some kind of short-term resolution, even five minutes or one hour. And then gradually if we get used to not doing that thing for a limited period time we can increase the amount of time, maybe to half a day and then a whole day. In other words we are getting familiar with refraining from that particular behaviour. Instead of increasing and strengthening the habit, doing it again and again, we're trying to go against that and do it less and less. And we need to have some kind of resolution about that, to refrain from doing it again.

By doing these four powers, we can purify any negative action we're done, even something really horrible like killing somebody. There is nothing that can't be purified.

And so this is a positive way of dealing with regret. When we remember something we've done in the past that was negative then we can do something positive about it. We can purify and then let it go, rather than thinking about it again and again. Worrying and feeling guilty just makes the mind disturbed. Remind yourself that the past is past, and we can't change the past. So we made a mistake, we can't change that - we can't go back and do it again. But we can change ourselves from now on. Now that we've realised the mistake we made, we can try to do things in a better way. Even if we can't stop doing that thing altogether, at least we can try to do it less, and eventually we can get to the point where we don't do it any more at all, we are free of that.

If the memory does keep coming back even if you've done some purification, just think this is like a cloud. This is just a thought in my mind. Let it go and bring your mind back to the meditation.

### *Dullness and Sleepiness*

The second obstacle to concentration is dullness and sleepiness. I spoke previously about sleepiness and things we can do to wake up and make ourselves more alert. So I'm not going to repeat those. Dullness is not quite the same as sleepiness. We don't completely fall asleep, but our mind becomes kind of dull and dark - not clear and alert. One remedy to that is to think of light, and to visualise light. It's just like when the room is dark and we can't see anything. If we turn on the light, the darkness goes away and the room becomes bright and clear, and we can see things clearly. So if we visualise light and imagine turning on light in our mind, that can be a helpful method to clear away this kind of dull, dark state.

Another remedy recommended in the teachings is to bring to mind something that will help you become happy and enthusiastic, because dullness can be associated with a lack of enthusiasm and

joy - and even depression. So if we can think of something that will make us feel more joyful, happy, and enthusiastic then that can help us get out of this state. One thing that could be helpful is thinking about Buddha nature - the idea that our mind is basically clear and pure and has the incredible potential to be free of everything that is negative and disturbing. All of that can be cleared away. We can get beyond it. We can be free of it and develop our potential to be fully aware, awake, loving, compassionate and beneficial to others. The more you learn about enlightenment and what it means to be a buddha, the more you can understand what is possible for you, the potential you have to become enlightened.

This mind right now may be very dull and dark, but it has incredible potential that can be developed. So spending a few minutes thinking about that can help you get out of the dull or dark state. It can also be helpful to think about the preciousness of your human life, which is also tied in with realising the potential that we have. It's useful to look at the good conditions that we have in our life compared with other people and other beings. If we realise that not everybody has such good conditions, that can help us feel more appreciative and joyful and happy.

### *Dealing With Depression*

Meditating on appreciating our human life can be an antidote for depression, if we ever find ourselves feeling depressed. People can be depressed for different reasons, but in some cases depression can happen because our mind is focused on the negative aspects of ourselves and our life. Looking only at the bad things and ignoring the good things. Even though we want to be happy our mind works in a way that makes us unhappy. If you are suffering from that kind of depression and you can see that this is what is happening, it can be very useful to remind yourself of the good things you have - your potential and the good conditions you have in your life. Especially compared with other people who are homeless or poor, who are even starving, who are living in a country that is torn by war and violence. Or compared with those who are suffering physical illness or disabilities or mental illness or disabilities, or who are caught up in a horrible addiction that's totally self destructive.

We can appreciate the fact that we have feet and toes and that they work. Normally, we don't think about that but we can. There are people who don't have feet and toes, whose feet have been blown off by a landmine or amputated because of some injury or frost bite. Other people have their feet but they don't work, they're paralysed, so there are no feelings, no movement. Life would be very difficult if you didn't have feet or if you had them but were paralysed. That's something we can appreciate, just the fact that we have feet and toes and legs and that they work.

Even something simple like that, if we think about it, can give us a sense of how fortunate we are. Even the fact that we're alive, that we have our life. If you've ever nearly been killed in an accident, a plane crash or a car crash, or had an illness or operation where you could have died, afterwards you have a sense of great joy and great relief. "I'm still alive, isn't that fantastic?" Why don't we feel that way all the time? It's incredible that we are still alive. So many people haven't made it to this point in life, the point that you are at now. Many people die through accidents or sickness before

they reach your age. The fact that you are still alive and that you made it to this time in your life is amazing. We could actually feel that way every day - we are still alive, we can still do so many things.

This is something we can do when we find ourselves feeling depressed in our normal life. In meditation also you can bring to mind some of these ideas to get a sense of how fortunate we are and how we can do so much good for ourselves and for others.

### *Explanation on the Meditation on Impermanence*

Now I'd like to lead a meditation on impermanence, which is a really important topic in Buddhism. It's not just a philosophical idea that Buddha made up but it's a reality; it's important that we try to see things in a more realistic way rather than in a fantasised way. Wishing things to be permanent, wishing ourselves to be permanent, wishing other people to be permanent, wishing that the things we're attached to will never change or go away is self-deceiving, because eventually, inevitably change does happen.

We're all going to die one day and even before we die other people will die - people we are close to, our family, our friends. We are going to have to deal with that. We have to learn to deal with change. It's much better to start making our mind more familiar with the reality of things. Whether we like it or not, we can't change it. It's much better to just accept it and then when change happens, when death or loss happens, we won't be so upset. Some people even get upset when they lose their money. I hear about people - when the stock market crashes, they crash. They jump out of the twentieth storey of a building. They can't handle the loss of money. The same happens with the loss of friends and family - people can sometimes totally fall apart. This is not helpful and also not necessary.

So becoming more accepting of the reality and truth of impermanence helps. When we experience impermanence in our life, we'll be able to accept it and not be so upset and devastated, so caught up in very painful emotions that we can't handle. It can also help in meditation. To deal with disturbing thoughts and emotions that come up, being aware of impermanence can help us to let go of these things more quickly and more easily.

Now do Meditation Five, *Meditation on Impermanence*.

## *Meditation Five:*

### *Meditation on Impermanence*

Sit yourself down in a position and focus your mind on your breathing for a few minutes to settle your mind in the present, the here and the now. Let go of any other thoughts and generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation.

Now bring your awareness to your body, this body sitting on a meditation cushion, in a meditation position. Just be aware of your body. And mentally think about what your body is made of: the different parts like skin, blood, bones, organs.

Then think about how each of these parts of the body is in turn made up of yet smaller parts, for example cells. We can't see cells with our eyes but we know how they work, that they are moving, changing, reproducing, dying. So on that cellular level there is constant change and movement. Even though we are sitting still, not moving, every minute, every second, every millisecond, there is constant change, constant movement - movement taking place through every part of our body, down to the tiniest most subtle level.

Now take that awareness outside of yourself and see if you can realise that the same is true for the things around you. The physical things in the room - the cushion we are sitting on, the floor, the walls, ceiling, windows, all the things in the room. All these things around us are also made up of tiny particles. They are changing every second, every millisecond, not staying the same, from one tiny second to the next.

Then take that same awareness further outside of this room and think about other things. There are people whose bodies are also at a very subtle level constantly moving, changing, not staying the same, from one millisecond to the next. The earth and trees, mountains, buildings, houses, cars and roads. And the heavenly bodies in the sky - the sun, moon, stars, the clouds. Everything in this physical world is the same, made up of tiny particles. They are not static and frozen but constantly moving and changing, every second, every millisecond.

And then think about how as these things are changing, they are also gradually, slowly, disintegrating, becoming older, worn out and eventually at some point in time things will go out of existence. They are not going to be there forever. Everything has its end.

Now spend a few minutes thinking about the impermanent nature of some objects that you are attached to. Bring to mind some different objects - they could be people, or other things like possessions that you have, or food or your car or your house, things for which you have attachment.

And then imagine how these objects will appear ten years from now.

And now imagine how these objects will appear fifty years from now.

Now imagine how these objects will appear a hundred years from now.

Now to conclude the meditation, whatever you have come to understand or experience during the meditation, make your own conclusion as to what you would like to do with this experience. What are some positive ways that you can use this experience and this understanding?

Finally, mentally dedicate the merit or positive energy of doing this meditation to help both ourselves and others to be more realistic, to develop more wisdom seeing things as they are and in that way become less under the influence of deluded and disturbing thoughts, misconceptions and emotions. In that way free ourselves from suffering and its causes and develop our potential to be peaceful and happy and eventually enlightened.

When you are ready to end the meditation, you can relax your concentration, relax your body and open your eyes.

# Session Six

## *Motivation*

Take a few moments to settle down your body and mind. Sit comfortably, keep your back straight, and focus your mind on your breathing. Let your mind ride on the breath, in and out. Let go of any other thoughts that might be in your mind. They are like clouds, impermanent, not solid. Just let them go, let them flow out of your mind. Let your mind be in the present and be aware of the breath. Then generate a positive motivation or reason for being here, listening to this talk. For example, you can think that you are doing this to learn something that will be beneficial for yourself and others, as many other beings as possible.

## *Obstacles to Meditation - Anger*

I'd like to continue talking about the five obstacles to concentration, and the antidotes to them. The third obstacle is ill will or anger. This can happen in meditation if, for example, we remember someone we don't like, someone who may have harmed us, or an argument that we've had. The mind gets caught up feeling angry, and becomes disturbed and distracted from our meditation object. We could also become irritated or angry with someone or something that may be disturbing our meditation - for example, someone nearby who is making noise, or noise that is happening outside, or an insect that is flying around our nose or ears, or pain or discomfort in our body. We may also become angry at ourselves, if, for example, we are feeling restless and can't sit still, or if our mind is being very uncooperative and won't stay on the object. Dealing with anger is a whole subject in itself. We could spend weeks or months just talking about anger and how to work with it. One thing that's important is to see anger as something harmful.

There are some harmful effects of anger that we can see in our own experience. For example, when anger arises in our mind, our mind becomes unpeaceful, unhappy, disturbed. It becomes nearly impossible to be happy, to enjoy anything - we may even lose our appetite and our ability to sleep well. It can have harmful effects on our health as well. Research has shown that anger raises our blood pressure and increases the chances of heart problems and even cancer. Then there are the effects on others - anger usually motivates us to speak or act in ways that disturb or even harm other people or living beings.

There are other harmful effects of anger that are mentioned in the Buddhist teachings, but we may not be able to see ourselves. One is that the karma we create when we are angry is very heavy, very damaging and destructive. We create the cause to experience problems and suffering in the future. Anger also destroys our merit or positive energy. It's helpful to think of anger as being like a fire. Sometimes in nature there are forest fires which can be started by something very small, like a match or the end of a cigarette that was thrown on the ground. Something very small can cause a whole forest to burn, destroying thousands of acres of trees and killing many beings. Even a small spark of fire can be incredibly destructive. Anger is similar to that. Even just a little bit of anger can be very,

very destructive in our mind, destroying so much of the good karma or merit that we have accumulated.

### *Finding a Solution to Anger*

So it's very important to understand the harmful effects of anger so that we come to see it as being like a poison, or a disease. Then we will not want our mind to become caught up in anger, and instead we will want to find a solution to our anger. There are lots of different solutions, or antidotes. The main antidote to anger is patience. Meditating on compassion and loving kindness is also very helpful.

One way we can learn to be more patient, and less angry, with another person is to understand that they also have buddha-nature. We realise that no matter what they have done, or may be doing, the underlying nature of this person's mind is just like ours, clear and pure like the sky. And whatever is causing them to engage in this bad behaviour are delusions - which are like clouds. Their anger, pride, greed, selfishness, and so on are not permanent parts of their mind but are temporary, and are not who or what they really are. The person may sometimes behave very badly and manifest very negative behaviour. But we need to remember that underlying the negativity is the clear, pure nature of their mind - the mind that has the potential to transform and become enlightened. Contemplating that can be helpful to lessen our anger and hatred towards this person.

The person we are angry at is actually very helpful for us. Anger is a delusion, a hindrance, something we need to reduce and overcome in our mind. And the person we get angry at gives us the opportunity to see our own anger, to recognise how much anger we still have and how much work we have to do. This person gives us the opportunity to work on decreasing our anger and increasing our patience. It's said in the teachings that the enemy - which means the person who stirs up our anger - is actually a very precious teacher. This is not what we normally think. This is not how we normally see the person. But if we can understand the importance of developing patience and overcoming anger then it makes sense. Here is a person giving you the opportunity to do that work.

Those are just a few ideas we can think of when the mind is disturbed by anger. There are many other methods for anger that you can learn about from other courses, other teachers or other books. In some cases, if our feeling of anger isn't very strong, we might be able to simply let it go. Remember it's just a thought in the mind - it's not permanent, it's not you. It's like a cloud - just notice it and let it go.

### *Attachment to Sense Objects*

The fourth obstacle to concentration is attachment to sense objects. This is when we think of people, food, coffee, music, and so on that we derive some pleasure from, and then feel attachment, wanting to experience these objects. This is similar to the first of the obstacles, excitement, except that excitement is more about the past, remembering pleasant experiences, whereas attachment is not necessarily to do with the past, it could be in the present. We might suddenly feel hungry and start

imagining what food we'd like to eat and where we can go and get it. Or wanting a cup of coffee or thinking of a person that we'd love to go and talk to.

Another activity that our mind engages in is fantasies about the future. We get caught up fantasising about things we'd like to happen. We can go into great details with our fantasized plans - and this has to do with our attachment.

Attachment is a big problem, it's one of the main delusions that disturb our mind and cause problems, and there is a lot of material in the Buddha's teachings on how to deal with it. So if you are interested, you can look into this and learn more. Again, it's very important to see attachment as something harmful, so that we want to work on it rather than let our mind get caught up in it. And one way we can see attachment as a problem is to bring to mind past experiences when we got caught up in attachment, and had unrealistic hopes and expectations - and then our hopes and expectations were smashed and we became very disappointed.

### *Fear and Attachment*

Another problem with attachment, which we can see in our experience, is that it can lead to other delusions or disturbing emotions. For example, fear and worry. When we have attachment to a person or an object, it's inevitable that there will be some underlying fear about losing this object. An example of this is the experience of a friend of mine who was married for a number of years and later became a nun. While she was married, she was constantly worried that something might happen to her husband - he might fall in love with somebody else, or he might stop loving her, or he might get in an accident, or get sick or die. So there was the worry, the fear, that something would go wrong and she'd lose him and the relationship. She wasn't aware of it at the time, but later when she started meditating and looking more deeply at her mind, she realised that the whole time she had been married, she wasn't really happy, but instead was always suffering from fear and worry, due to attachment.

You can't be really happy and peaceful and enjoy anything as long as there is fear. This is something you can look at in your own mind with regard to the things you are attached to. You can see a kind of fear and tension. What if I lose this person or this object? What if something went wrong? That comes with attachment and makes us want to grasp even more.

Meditation on impermanence helps us to become more realistic in our thinking and realise that things are subject to change and won't last forever. Eventually at some point, something is going to happen. You can't keep this person or object forever. It's impossible. So we can see that what we're hoping and wishing for is impossible.

### *Accepting Impermanence*

It's better to accept the impermanent nature of things. We can still enjoy the object while it's there even if we know it's not going to be there forever. In fact, we can enjoy it even more, because we've accepted that it's going to change and go out of existence, so we are no longer caught up in fear, which is not accepting change and loss. We know it's going to change and disappear, and we accept

that, and then we can enjoy it now, while it exists. So in case you feel some resistance to the idea of impermanence and think, 'if I accept impermanence then I won't be able to enjoy things any more' - that's not true. The exact opposite is true. You can enjoy things even more.

Impermanence is said to be the best antidote to attachment, but it takes time for our mind to get familiar with and accept it. The ability to let go and accept the impermanent nature of things takes time. So don't expect it to happen immediately. Slowly, slowly the mind gets used to the idea of impermanence and then is able to let go.

### *Seeing the Parts of an Object of Attachment*

Another thing that can be helpful in dealing with an object of attachment is to mentally take it apart. Everything is made of parts, but we don't normally see things in that way. We see things as whole. So with your imagination visualise the parts that make up the object. This is especially good with people, with human bodies, which are actually the biggest objects of our attachment. Just take the body apart and think about what it's made of. Not just the outside, the skin and the nice hair, but also what's inside the body. You come to see the object in a very different way because actually if you look at all those parts individually, you probably won't find anything that's really worth being attached to. That can be very helpful in dealing with an object of attachment.

Try to understand how the object of attachment appears to you, and ask yourself if your mind sees it in a realistic way. With attachment the mind focuses on just the good things, the nice qualities and attributes of the object. The mind tends to exaggerate them, to make them better than they really are and it tends to overlook or deny any unpleasant aspects of the object.

For example, if you have desire for a nice luxurious expensive car, then you might think it's so beautiful and nice inside, so comfortable, and it goes very fast. And if I have this car I can do this and that, and go here and there, and take my friends around and so on. We only think about the positive side of having the car and we don't usually think about the other side of it - the expenses, the repairs when it breaks down, the possibility of the car being damaged. For example, you may park the car somewhere and go into a restaurant and when you come out there is a great big scratch on it, or the bumper is smashed. Or maybe the car's not there at all - it's gone, and the parking place is empty! These are things that can happen when we have a car, but normally we don't think about that.

Or another thing that can happen is that we buy the newest model of a car and feel so proud to have this nice, new car, the latest model. Then a year later the manufacturers come up with a newer model of that kind of car, which looks better than the one we have. Then our car doesn't look so fantastic any more, and we think, "Oh, that's a much better one, I wish I had that." So then we are no longer satisfied and happy with the one we have, we want the better, newer one, and feel unhappy if we can't have it. The same thing can happen with computers. I've heard that with computers, every six months they have something newer, better. If you buy a computer today, six months from now there is a better one, smaller, lighter, faster, more gigabytes, able to do more things than the one you have,

and suddenly this computer you thought was so fantastic doesn't look that great. This is one of the problems with attachment. The Buddha said that following attachment is like drinking salt water - if we are thirsty and we drink salt water, instead of relieving our thirst, it just makes us thirstier. The same happens with attachment. If we have attachment, thoughts of desire that say, "Oh if only I had that I would be so happy," and we follow those thoughts, we go after that object and get it, it may make us happy for a while, but after a while we become dissatisfied with it and want something better, or we want more. So instead of being satisfied, we just become more and more dissatisfied. What happens is that when we have attachment, our mind tends to fantasize and exaggerate, and build up an unrealistic view of an object, thinking it's so fantastic, and it's going to make me so happy, when in actual fact it's not like that. The reality of the object is that it's not as great as we thought. There are problems that we don't see or think about, so after some time we become dissatisfied with it.

It can be helpful to try to see the object that we are attached to in a more realistic way and realise that it's not 100 percent perfect and wonderful and satisfying. There are problems, faults, imperfections, and most probably we won't be satisfied with it forever. We need to see it in a more realistic way, not in a fantasized, exaggerated way.

### *Doubt*

The last hindrance is doubt. This can involve questioning whether meditation is really worthwhile. Or doubting ourselves: "I'm not sure if I can meditate, maybe I'm not suited to do meditation, I don't seem to be getting anywhere." Or we might have doubts about the teacher: "Is this person really authentic? Is this person really the way they appear to be and is what they say really true?" Or doubts about the teachings and the spiritual path: "Is there such a thing as Buddha? Is there such a thing as enlightenment? Past lives, future lives, karma?"

These kinds of thoughts can come up in the mind and become a hindrance because the mind is disturbed by them. And it can even cause us to become paralysed in our practice, thinking, "If all this stuff isn't true then what am I doing? Maybe I'm just wasting my time, following some path that's not going to lead anywhere - doing something that's a waste of time." Then it's hard to continue having the enthusiasm, interest, and wish to meditate.

### *Questioning*

Generally, it's okay to have doubt. In fact, the Buddha encouraged people to think and question and not blindly believe what he was saying but to check it out and question. So it's not wrong to have doubts; it just depends on how we deal with them. If we let our mind go around in circles thinking, "Maybe it's true, maybe it's not true," then we don't get anywhere. If we do have doubts coming up, we should try to resolve them. And that can involve learning more, studying more or talking with others. If you have the opportunity to talk to a teacher or an older student who has more knowledge and experience than you, that can be very helpful.

It's also the case with certain things - for example, past and future lives - that we won't be able to prove them. We're not in a position at this point in time to prove that these things are true, but we're also not able to prove that they are not true. There isn't any evidence that proves, without any doubt, that past lives and future lives do not exist. In fact, as far as proof goes, there is a lot of evidence to support past and future lives. And a lot of people who can remember their past lives and provide details about their former life that can be checked out and verified.

There are many cultures in the world, religious and spiritual traditions that do believe in past and future lives. If we have doubt, it's good to look into this material, to find evidence that can help us to resolve our doubts. In other words, learn more, do more research, find out more information. Even if we are not totally 100 percent convinced that past and future lives exist, we can ask ourselves, "Can I prove that they don't exist?" You will probably realise, "No, I can't really disprove it. Maybe it's true and I just don't see it. But if past and future lives do exist, then maybe it's important to do something about it. If my mind is going to continue after this life and isn't just going to become non-existent, then it's important to consider what is going to happen to my mind. What can I do now to make sure that it ends up in a good situation and not in a negative situation?"

### *Seeing the Qualities of People Who Practice the Teachings*

It really helps to think about the sources of this material and the people these ideas have come from, for example the Buddha and the great masters from the time of Buddha until now who have carried on the teachings. And the teachers I have received teachings from in this lifetime. I can see that they have really wonderful qualities that I respect and admire. And I can see that they've achieved some kind of peace, happiness and satisfaction in their life through studying and practicing these teachings, which I don't see in people who aren't doing this kind of practice. They seem to be more caught up in anxiety and depression and confusion and ego. These teachings and practices seem to help people become happy and peaceful, and more compassionate and caring about others.

It helps to see the good qualities in people who have been studying and practicing these teachings. Then you can think, Well, I can't prove a lot of this stuff. But if they believe it, then I am willing to consider that it's true, because they seem to have discovered something very valuable and helpful. So maybe if I practice it too, then I will be able to reach that same point, to develop the same happiness and peace and good qualities that they have.

Then when you do start doing some practices and having some experiences you find your mind is more peaceful and happy and you are able to solve problems better. You actually get a taste, an experience of the benefit of meditation, and of learning and practicing the teachings taught by the Buddha. So then you think, maybe the other things that the Buddha taught, which I can't prove or disprove, are true also. If you have your own experience of the benefit of some of the teachings that the Buddha taught, then you are more inclined to trust him and believe that the other things he taught may also be true.

These are just some ideas about how we might resolve doubts that come up in our mind. Also, sometimes we might be able to just let them go, to see them as thoughts in our mind, and understand that the reason they come into our mind is because of past karma. Maybe in the past we had the same kinds of doubts or we were followers of some other religious or spiritual tradition and we had different ideas to those taught in Buddhism. We may be more familiar with those ideas and that's why it's harder for us to change our way of thinking and accept these ideas. If we understand where the doubts come from, the reason that they arise in our mind, we may be able to just let them go.

Those are the five obstacles to concentration and some suggestions on how to deal with them.

### *Explaining the Meditation on the Buddha*

Now I want to teach you another meditation; this one involves visualizing the Buddha. There are different ways of doing it but I'll do it in a simple way since some of you may not be so familiar with visualising the Buddha. If you feel that you are not able to visualise, well, don't worry about it. Don't feel, "I can't do it, it's not working," and then get upset. The important thing in visualisation is to try to feel that what we are visualizing is really there, that it's really happening.

Some people might be very good at visualising and be able to get a very clear, sharp image of the Buddha without trying very hard. Other people have a hard time and are not able to get anything - just emptiness or darkness. Sometimes we can get just part of it but not the whole thing, just the head or just the legs but nothing else. We shouldn't get upset with ourselves if we are not able to have a perfectly whole and clear image when we try to visualise. It takes time to learn how to visualise and as we are just starting to learn how to do this practice we can't expect to do it perfectly in the beginning, but with more familiarity and more practice we will be able to do it better as time goes on.

It may have to do with how clear and pure our mind is. If we work on our mind and make it clearer then our ability to visualise will improve. It may just be that our mind isn't clear enough right now to be able to have a perfect whole complete visualisation. Accept that and don't get frustrated or upset with yourself. Just accept whatever you are able to do and be happy with that. The most important thing is to really feel that the Buddha is there in front of you. Do the meditation on that basis.

The meditation I will describe is a visualisation of the Buddha and as you meditate you need to create a mental image. You are using your mind to paint or draw a picture, an image. Hold that image as long as you can, keep it there in your mind as long as you can.

And now do Meditation Six, *Meditation on the Buddha*.

## *Meditation Six:*

### *Meditation on the Buddha*

Begin by spending a few minutes settling your body in a comfortable position for meditation. Let the mind ride on the breath in and out and let go of the thoughts that might be in your mind. Anything that your mind is distracted by rather than the breath - let all these thoughts and distractions go.

Then generate a positive motivation for doing the meditation, thinking that you are doing it to bring spiritual benefit, not only to yourself but to others as well. To increase positive energy such as love, compassion, kindness, wisdom in your mind and then to share this with others, to bring more positive energy to others and to the world.

Now begin the visualization of the Buddha. When you visualize you use your mind to draw or create the image so it's not an activity of the eyes. Your eyes should be relaxed, and closed or partially opened. Use your mind itself to create the visualisation.

The entire visualization is made of light. Every aspect is made of light so that means it's transparent, not solid. You might think of a rainbow. When a rainbow appears in the sky, you can see the colours and it can sometimes be very bright, but there isn't anything solid there. If we were to try to touch or hold onto a rainbow there will be nothing there to hold on to. So our visualization should be similar to that, it appears but it's not solid. And it's just pure, transparent radiant light.

The visualization of the Buddha is in the space in front of you, about the level of your forehead and about two metres away. The Buddha is seated on a seat consisting of a lotus with its petals spread out flat, a very large lotus, and on top of the lotus there are two flat discs of light, like cushions. These represent the sun and moon. They are round and flat and made of light - radiant.

Upon the lotus, moon and sun is seated the Buddha, with his legs crossed in a full lotus or vajra position. He is wearing the robes of a monk, which are saffron coloured. His right hand is on his right knee in the gesture of touching the earth. The palm of his hand is against the knee, and his fingers are outstretched, pointing downwards, touching the seat beneath him. In his left hand he holds a bowl, filled with nectar - medicinal healing nectar. So his left hand is resting on his lap in a meditation position, with the palm facing upwards, and the bowl resting on the palm of his hand.

The Buddha's body is made of golden light - transparent, radiant, and completely pure. The Buddha's face is very beautiful. His smiling compassionate gaze is directed at you and at the same time towards every living being. His expression shows that he is free of all judging, critical thoughts, or anger. There are no negative thoughts at all in his mind towards you or towards anyone else. He completely accepts us just as we are, with pure, unconditional loving kindness and compassion. The hair on the

Buddha's head is dark blue-black in color, with each strand of hair separate from the others and individually curled. On the very top of his head is the ushnisha, the crown protrusion, which is a symbol of his enlightenment. His ear lobes are long, and his lips are cherry red in color - a symbol of his great compassion.

Do your very best to visualize the Buddha, but don't worry if you can't visualize every detail, or if the visualization doesn't appear clearly. Just do the best that you can and feel content with whatever you're able to do, even if it's not clear and perfect. The most important thing is to feel that the Buddha is really there. Feel the presence of the Buddha with all of his qualities - universal unconditional loving kindness and compassion and wisdom and skillful means, and all the other enlightened qualities, existing there in the space in front of you. And you can feel those qualities - feel the loving kindness radiating towards you. Not only is every aspect of the visualization made of light, but it's also a radiating light. Rays of light emanate from each pore of the Buddha's holy body and reach every corner of the universe.



*Artwork by Jane Seidlitz*

Feel the living presence of the Buddha in front of you. See if you can feel a sense of trust and confidence in his ability to help you and in his willingness to help you, being completely dedicated to helping you and guiding you, for however long it takes until you and everyone else has reached enlightenment.

Now in your own words make a request to the Buddha asking to receive his blessings, to help you become free from all your negative energy, misconceptions and other problems, and to receive all the realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Imagine that the Buddha joyfully accepts your request, and a stream of pure white light and nectar, which are in the nature of the enlightened mind, flows from the Buddha's heart and enters your body through the crown of your head. This light and nectar has the function of purifying all of our negativities. Imagine that the light flows into you filling your body, from your toes and fingertips to

the top of your head, from every cell and atom and tiny particle of your body. This has the effect of purifying your mind of all negative qualities, delusions and negative karmas, as well as purifying any sickness or physical problems in your body. All negativities are purified. Just as the darkness in a room is instantly dispelled the moment a light is switched on, in the same way the darkness of your negative energy is dispelled when this radiant white light and nectar fill your body.

Then visualize a stream of yellow light and nectar flowing from the Buddha's heart and entering you through the crown of your head, filling your body. The yellow light and nectar are in the nature of the enlightened mind - all the knowledge, qualities and realizations of the enlightened mind. And when it fills you, you receive all of these qualities. Infinite good qualities flow into every part of your body. Your body feels completely light and clear and blissful. Spend a few moments concentrating on this blissful experience.

Now imagine the Buddha comes to the space above your head, turning to face the same way that you're facing, and melts into light. The whole visualization melts into pure light, and this light dissolves into you. Your ordinary sense of I, me, myself - unworthy and burdened with faults - and all your other wrong conceptions disappear completely. In an instant you become one with the Buddha's blissful, omniscient mind in the aspect of vast, empty space.

Then imagine from this empty space there appears in the place where you are sitting the throne, lotus, moon and sun, and upon these you yourself as the Buddha. Everything is of the nature of light - your body, the seat you're sitting on, everything - pure, radiant, transparent light. Feel that you are Buddha. Identify with his enlightened wisdom and compassion.

Now generate the wish to help all beings reach this state as well. Imagine from your heart rays of light go out, like the rays of light that go out from the sun in all directions. These rays of light from your heart go out in all directions to all beings, or as many as you can imagine. So a ray of light goes to each being - each human being and any other kind of being - and they become filled with light and it purifies all their negativities, their disturbing thoughts, emotions, negative karma, all their hindrances and obstacles.

All their suffering and its causes are completely purified. The light transforms their minds so that they attain all the qualities and realizations of the path to enlightenment. They attain universal love, compassion, perfect wisdom and skillful means, knowing how to help other beings and all the other qualities of enlightenment. All these qualities are attained in all the minds of all the beings. Also, if you wish, you can imagine the beings transforming into the aspect of a buddha. They all appear as buddhas.

Feel a sense of joy, rejoicing, that you have been able to bring your own mind to this state of enlightenment, the highest potential it has. And you have been able to help all other beings to do the same. You've brought them to a state of perfection, perfect peace, bliss, happiness, the perfection of all positive qualities, freedom from our negative qualities. Feel how wonderful it is that you've been able to do this.

Finally, dedicate the positive energy or merit from having done this meditation that you will be able to one day do actually what you have just visualised. That you will be able to transform your own mind, free it from everything negative, perfect everything positive and bring your mind to enlightenment, and then help all other beings to do the same, to be free of everything negative, to develop all the qualities and realizations so that they can be enlightened as well.

To end the meditation you can relax your body, relax your concentration and gently open your eyes.



So that meditation, as you can see, involves more than simply visualising the Buddha. When we want to develop concentration, one object that we can use is the image of Buddha. You visualise the image of the Buddha and then concentrate on that, not thinking about anything else. That's one way of doing visualization, but this practice is more than that because we make prayers, we visualise light, bring Buddha into ourselves and so on.

This is the kind of practice you find in the tantric tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. In tantra there is a practice that's called taking the result into the path. What it means is that when we meditate, we imagine the future result. We imagine that what we are going to attain in the future is happening right now. That's why we imagine ourselves transforming into the Buddha and then sending out light, helping other beings become buddhas as well. This kind of practice is very powerful. It creates the cause to bring us closer to that future result.

It also helps us overcome our usual sense of seeing ourselves as poor, ignorant, deluded sentient beings who could never become like the Buddha. This isn't true, but we get stuck with that image of ourselves. Meditation in tantra is to overcome that view and then to identify with our buddha-nature, the enlightenment potential we have right now within us. By starting to identify more with that than with our old "poor, hopeless, useless, deluded stupid me" we can transform our mind and transform our view of ourselves. We can move away from what Lama Yeshe called our "poor quality" self-image. We identify ourselves as "poor quality" and think "I'm always going to be like this." If you find that meditation rather strange or hard to relate to, that's the reason behind doing it. You can get a better understanding of this if you read Lama Yeshe's book, *Introduction to Tantra*, which explains the philosophy of tantra and why we do things this way.

### *Practicing at Home*

So since this is the last session of the course, I would like to give some advice on what you can do from now on with the things you have learned in the course - how you can continue to practice on your own. With regard to practicing on your own at home, the first chapter of part 2 in the book *How to Meditate* gives some advice on that - it's called "Advice for Beginners." One thing you might be wondering is which meditation to do, as there are so many different kinds of meditation. When

it comes to choosing a practice, that's something personal and individual, because each of us is different. For some people meditation on the breath is really right for them. It's what they like to do and what they find helpful. So if you like that practice, then you can do that. For others, maybe the meditation on visualising the Buddha is something they really like to do. So it's up to each person to find what practice you are most comfortable with, that you feel is most suited to you. But don't think that you have to stick to only one practice. Some people may do one practice everyday on a regular basis and don't do anything else. But you can also do a variety of different practices, in different sessions of the day, or at different time, like if you want to do retreats. In one retreat, you can focus on one practice, and in another retreat, focus on a different practice. In one sense, the different practices are like different kinds of medicines to cure different illnesses - but in the case of meditation, they are to cure different problems in our mind, and help bring about a truly healthy state of mind.

Just remember that the real point of meditation is to work on the mind, to decrease the negative aspects of the mind and increase the positive aspects. That's what we are trying to do in Buddhism. So choose a practice that will help you to do that.

### *Regular Practice*

Then, it's important to practice regularly. It's best if you can practice everyday. If you can't manage to do it everyday, do it at least a few times a week, because if we let a long period of time go by without meditating then we get out of the habit of doing it. And when we start practicing again it's almost like we have to start all over and learn things from the beginning. So it's much better if we can practice regularly and make it part of our life. It's actually best if meditation becomes something that you wouldn't let a day go by without doing, just like brushing your teeth. If we don't brush our teeth at least once a day, we feel kind of funny. It's good if meditation can become like that, a part of your life that you do at least once each day.

It doesn't have to be for a long period of time. In the beginning when we're first practicing it's better to have short sessions, even ten or fifteen minutes. Again, it's an individual thing and depends on what works best for you. For some, ten minutes it's good, for other people thirty minutes is good. So it depends on you, your ability, your schedule, the other things you have to do in your life.

Morning is usually the best time to meditate because the environment is quieter, and our mind is quieter after having rested. There are fewer thoughts in our mind. Meditating in the morning is also a good way to start the day and get into a good state of mind before you face the world and deal with people. But if morning doesn't work for you then any time is okay - whatever works best. Some people are night people and they meditate better at night. That's something you can work out for yourself.

### *Meditation Place*

It's also good if you can have a place where you do meditation. Some people actually have enough space in their home to have a whole room that they reserve for meditation and spiritual practice.

But if you don't have a whole room at least try to set up one corner of a room with your meditation seat. You might want to have an altar on which you can put some pictures and images of teachers, or the Buddha, or whoever is inspiring for you - to remind you of what you are trying to achieve in your meditation practice. You can put flowers, fruits, incense, candles, and so on as offerings. And this sets up a nice atmosphere and helps you get in a meditative state of mind. It's good to keep meditating in the same place rather than one day here, next day there, and another day over there, because you build up a certain energy in that place and it becomes easier. As soon as you sit down, it's easier to go into a meditative state of mind.

### *Meditating with Others*

Many people find it difficult to practice on their own, to have the discipline to do it. So it's good if you can have contact with other people who meditate. If there is a Buddhist center or a meditation group that you can join, that helps you to keep going in your practice and not give up. It helps to recharge your energy and recharge your enthusiasm to keep practicing. Also there are many books, tapes, and CDs that you can also use - you can spend some time each day reading or listening, and studying to learn more. Teachers are important, too - to ask questions of, learn more from, and be inspired by. Normally in Buddhism you don't just meditate on your own without teachers to learn from. It's very much emphasised that we follow the guidance of teachers because things can go wrong and we can make mistakes in our practice, and we need the help and advice of those with more experience than ourselves.

There are actually many ways that we can go wrong on the path. Instead of going to enlightenment, we go somewhere else. If we want to go on a journey - for example, trekking in the Himalayas or down the Amazon River or through the Gobi Desert, some place that's quite wild and dangerous - we need to take a guide, someone who's been there and knows all the dangerous places, and can guide us away from those and make sure we stay on the right track to end up where we are trying to go. A teacher is like that. They know the way to enlightenment and can guide us and make sure that we get there, rather than end up in some other place that we don't want to go to.

### *Being Natural*

One last thing. It's important to be natural. Sometimes when people take up meditation practice they think have to make big changes in their lifestyle - the way they dress, the way they talk, the way they do things. And that's kind of artificial.

Meditation is something that happens in our mind, something internal. So externally we should just remain the same as before - but that doesn't mean keep the same bad habits we had before. Of course, we should try to behave more ethically and become kinder and more compassionate - but don't be artificial. Just try to be the same person as before, natural and relaxed.

Also, keep the understanding, realisations and experience that you gain through your meditation inside yourself. It's recommended that we don't talk a lot about our experiences. If you are having some good experiences or realisations in your meditation it's better to talk about these only with

your teacher, or with a few close spiritual friends. Not just go blah blah blah to anybody, anywhere, because doing that is a bit like talking very openly about all the money and jewels that you have in your house. You don't go to the market or the bar and tell everybody how much money you have in your house. That wouldn't be very wise because that money might quickly disappear. It's similar with our meditation experiences. It's not that people can steal our meditational experiences, but the energy can dissipate if we talk too openly about them. Talking like that is probably the ego wanting to impress people, wanting to brag to people and that's not wise to do. That can cause our realisations and our insights to degenerate, to decrease, maybe even disappear.

So this has been a rather brief introduction to meditation in the Buddhist tradition. I really hope and pray that it has been beneficial to you, that you have learned something from this course that will help you in your life, to become more happy and peaceful, better able to deal with the problems you might face in life, and better able to get along with other people. I wish you all the best in your meditation practice, in your spiritual journey.

*Dedication*



*Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition  
Education Department*