

KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE
SHAMATHA AND VIPASSANA



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First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

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Preface



Shamatha and Vipassana is one of four booklets that serve as readings on The Hinayana. The Hinayana is one of the main traditions of Buddhism and the subject of the first year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. There are four booklets in The Hinayana series – *The Four Common Foundations*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *Refuge and Bodhicitta including the precepts and vows*, and *Shamatha and Vipassana*. The Hinayana refers to a system of thought based on the sutras, one that leads its followers ultimately from suffering to self-liberation. Its practitioners are generally concerned with the achievement of nirvana as an arhat or pratyekabuddha.

In Buddhism, meditation is about training the mind, specifically positively

transforming the mind to reduce its afflictions or negative qualities and improve its positive qualities. To train our minds in meditation we need to cultivate a practice that unites a calmly abiding mind with special insight. Calm abiding, or shamatha, is the foundation, base or ground from which to establish and progress to the more advanced meditation of special insight or vipassana. This is the topic of the *Shamatha and Vipassana* booklet.

The booklets are based on the recorded teachings of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe. Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe is one of the most highly qualified Tibetan Buddhist Sakya Lamas in Australia. He is highly respected in Australia and internationally for his profound knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the clarity and inspirational qualities of his teachings, and his understanding of the western mind.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has been a monk for more than 40 years. At the age of nine, he entered the Sakya monastery in Bir, India, and remained there for 10 years. When Khenpo was 19, the principal of Sakya College in Dehradun, His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, asked for the Sakya monastery to send senior monks to join the Sakya College. Sakya College is one of the most famous Tibetan Philosophical Institutes in India. It was established by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche.

Khenpo was chosen. He studied at the Sakya college for just over 10 years, from 1979 to 1990. In his sixth year he was nominated as the Discipline Master. This was a challenging role, as some of the monks, including his peers, were older than him. In Khenpo's seventh year he was appointed a Teacher's Assistant, and in the eighth year he studied for the degree of Kacho Pa – the equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts, requiring intensive study. In Khenpo's ninth and tenth years he studied for the degree of Loppon, equivalent to a PhD degree. At the same time he taught and conducted examinations at the college.

In 1994 His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin appointed Khenpo as resident teacher at Sakya Tharpa Ling, a Buddhist centre in Sydney, following the passing of the 14th Gyalsay Tulku Rinpoche. In 2002, His Holiness bestowed on him the title of khenpo, or abbot, in recognition of his teaching ability.

The bestowal of the term Khenpo recognises something considered rare and precious as in the name Rinpoche. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin recognised Khenpo's special qualities and deep understanding of Buddhist philosophies, both in sutra and tantra, and held an Enthronement Ceremony in the Bir Monastery Northern India, promoting Khenpo from the term Loppon to Khenpo in March 2002.

The term 'khenpo' has at least three meanings in Tibetan Buddhism: a scholar who has completed an extensive course of study in sutra and tantra, a senior Lama who can give ordinations, and the head of a monastery. The khenpos have been the main channels for keeping the purity of Buddha's teachings alive from generation to generation within the Tibetan monastic tradition.

Since 2017 Khenpo has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales. He travels to many countries to spread the Dharma.

From 2017 to 2019, Khenpo taught the first component of the Seven Year Complete Path for senior students which was coordinated by the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu under the strict guidance and the program developed by His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin. In 2019, he began to develop The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course, a three-year program teaching the main concepts and practices of the three main traditions of Buddhism Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The inaugural program is scheduled to start in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Hinayana Booklets* but here we would like to thank Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe for his precious teachings which he has given so generously and diligently to his students over so many years. They have greatly helped his students to understand and apply the Dharma in their lives.

*May the precious Dharma continue down through the ages
to guide countless beings on the Path.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have many to thank for their work on the series entitled The Hinayana Booklets. *Shamatha and Vipassana* was prepared over two years and with many hours of work by both transcribers and editors. *Shamatha and Vipassana* was transcribed by Lara Donohue, David Tran and Vasi Alvanos and edited by Jane Bodle, Lara Donohue, Robert Garran, Lael Morrissey and Carole Kayrooz.

Transcribers painstakingly noted down the words of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe which were drawn from different recorded sessions. This took many hours and sometimes weeks of work. Editors then substantively reviewed the overall structure, content and flow of the manuscript. The Hinayana Booklets will be updated again at the end of 2022 to include a Glossary and Index.

SHAMATHA AND VIPASSANA

INTRODUCTION

In Buddhism, meditation is about training the mind, specifically positively transforming the mind to reduce its afflictions or negative qualities and improve its positive qualities. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso in his commentary on Kamalashila's *Stages of Meditation* has said:

“Through meditation we can train our minds in such a way that negative qualities are abandoned and positive qualities are generated and enhanced.”

To train our minds in meditation we need to cultivate a practice that unites a calmly abiding mind with special insight. Calm abiding, or shamatha, is the foundation, base or ground from which to establish and progress to the more advanced meditation of special insight or vipassana.

His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin calls shamatha meditation ‘concentration’ as it overcomes distraction by focusing on a single object. Kamalashila, in the root text of *The Stages of Meditation* said that shamatha:

‘...is the mind which has overcome distraction to external objects, and which spontaneously and continuously turns toward the object of meditation with bliss and pliancy.’

After developing shamatha or calm abiding meditation, the meditator

begins to examine the nature of reality or suchness to cultivate the state of vipassana or special insight. The object here then primarily is ultimate truth. Kamalashila said, again in the root text of *The Stages of Meditation*:

“That which properly examines suchness from within a state of calm abiding is special insight. The Cloud of Jewels Sutra reads, “Calm abiding meditation is a single pointed mind; special insight makes specific analysis of the ultimate.”

Many great Tibetan and Indian masters have told us that they have little knowledge from which to instruct us to meditate; they base their teachings on what Buddha taught in his sutras. Likewise, I myself am an inexperienced meditator. I lack great knowledge about meditation, and so cannot instruct you well on how to properly meditate. The best thing I can do to help you is to base my teachings on authentic Tibetan and Indian masters. I will try to explain shamatha and vipassana meditation based on their teachings, and then I will try to make it a little bit easier for you by giving modern day to day examples. With this combination, you may benefit from this instruction and receive some help to progress with shamatha and vipassana meditation.

First it's always important to establish the right motivation for meditation. There are three types of right motivation to do this meditation.

The first right motivation is to benefit you in this life and to help you to have a better rebirth in the future. The second right motivation is for the sake of your own liberation. This needs some explanation. When we look into our emotions, whether they are positive, negative or neutral, we see that every emotion is suffering. There's not just one type of suffering. Negative emotions involve the suffering of suffering, positive emotions involve the suffering of change, and neutral emotions involve all-pervasive suffering. This means that even though we might be experiencing positive emotions, these positive emotions are not going to last. They are at first sweet and then sour – this is the nature of emotion. In this way, the prime Buddhist practice is to be free of these emotional states. Once you are free of these afflictions, there will be nothing that brings you suffering in your entire life. This is liberation and it is the second motivation for doing this study or retreat.

The third and supreme motivation to do this meditation is to gain

enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Rather than just reflecting on yourself and wishing yourself to be happy, it's best to focus on ending everyone else's suffering. It's not right to just focus entirely on yourself; far better to act to help countless other sentient beings.

We are not saying you should cultivate this motivation or that motivation – it is entirely whatever is suitable for you. In the beginning, there are no restrictions on how you enter the path. It's with whatever motivation makes you comfortable. If you think you do this for the sake of this life or future lives and you think this is more important than anything else, it is completely acceptable to enter the path that way.

However, some of us may think practising Dharma for a future life alone is not good enough. They know that still they will be suffering. They realise that right now they should start to liberate themselves from these emotional states. These people are suitable for the second motivation.

The third type of person might think 'I'm not so interested in practising Dharma for my own life and future happiness nor for my own liberation, rather I wish to do something to help everyone to attain enlightenment'. Here the third motivation is most suitable.

In this way, it is important to reflect on what is most suitable for you because when you enter the path you must feel comfortable. If you are comfortable then there are fewer obstacles to arise that will block your path. If you don't feel comfortable then somehow it triggers your mind and becomes an obstacle to progress your path. It's important to find whatever is suitable for you and just go with it.

It is a little like receiving medical treatment. There may be one sort of medical treatment that is perfectly suitable for you to cure your disease, but that does not mean it's right for you from the beginning, because of your physical condition. Your physical condition may not be strong enough so that even if you are given the right medication it may be more harmful than beneficial. To take the more powerful treatment first you might have to fix your immune system. Once you are physically strong enough to cope with that strong medicine, then it is right to take.

Similarly, these three motivations are like three kind of doors to meditation.

SHAMATHA AND VIPASSANA

In the beginning, it's not right to take strong medicine if you are not mentally strong enough. It's good to choose what is suitable for you and then gradually strengthen that motivation. Your motivation is like the root of the tree. If the root of the tree has been poisoned then everything that grows from the tree will be poisoned and that will not help you. Conversely if the root of the tree is medicinal then everything that grows from the tree is helpful not harmful. The rest of the tree of our practice of meditation depends on how we create our motivation right at the beginning. For this reason, having the right motivation in the beginning is very important. Even from the mundane point of view some of us want to be a certain type of person. Our motivation will make us achieve this state and will ultimately take us to our destination.

With this right motivation, in the first section of this booklet we will explain about shamatha. We will discuss about the four preparatory stages of shamatha meditation and its six conditions. Then we will turn to vipassana.

SHAMATHA MEDITATION

FOUR PREPARATORY STAGES OF SHAMATHA

We need to follow the right stages in preparing for meditation. It's not advisable to jump straight into meditation. It's a little like going for a swim in the ocean in very hot weather. This may help you to cool down, but without knowing how to swim, instead of cooling you down, you might drown in the ocean.

Likewise, meditation is very helpful to bring calmness into our mind, and peace and happiness into our everyday life. However, if you meditate in the wrong way, it may create a negative habit in your mind. This negative habit can do more harm than benefit. This is because whenever we meditate we are dealing with the mind. Mind is very sensitive. Whatever you put in your mind – no more, no less – according to what you put in your mind, you will receive the commensurate result. Therefore, we need to be careful how we actually influence things in our mind, because at the end of the day, your life is your mind. Beside mind there's no life.

There are four preparatory stages for shamatha meditation:

- live an ethical life to discipline the mind
- study to develop clarity of mind
- cultivate contemplation
- understand the purpose of meditation

LIVE AN ETHICAL LIFE TO DISCIPLINE THE MIND

We need to live an ethical life to train our mind. Our ordinary mind is an undisciplined mind which has no rules, no regulation, no system. Whatever you see, hear, touch will bring different thoughts one after another. These thoughts take you to different destinations and in their wake create much confusion, doubt and negativities. This undisciplined mind is not the right mind to understand the profound meaning or the instructions of meditation.

In order to create the right state of mind to hear clearly the meaning of the purpose of meditation and to practise the spiritual path, we need to have a certain clarity of mind. We all have this wish to have this clear mind, but just to wish to have a clear mind is one thing and the reality of having it is quite another. We can wish that for everything we want, but everything that you wish is not going to manifest without the correct causes and conditions. If everything came to you as wished then none of us would struggle, none of us would face difficulties, challenges. The reason we are not achieving as we wish is because of the lack of causes and conditions. So right at the beginning I usually say that to live ethically is not a belief system or a religion that you follow – it is very practical, very logical – so practical and logical in the sense that what we are describing is everything that we experience, everything that comes in our mind, it's not just manifested by itself, nor is it just falling out of a blue sky. Everything that we see and experience is created by its own cause and conditions.

Therefore, to develop this clarity of the mind we need to prevent our mind from wandering, from negative and unnecessary thoughts. The more you rescue your own mind, the more you protect your mind, and then naturally it will create more clarity in your mind. When you have such a clarity of mind, ten minutes of that clarity of mind with whatever you do such as study, contemplate or meditate is more effective than going the whole day with a distracted mind. A distracted mind achieves very little even if you stay at your desk to study or even if you sit still meditating. Your achievement is not as dependent on how much time you spend, it's more dependent on the quality or state of your mind. So therefore, leading an ethical life helps to

cleanse the mind and creates a quality of mind capable of meditating.

We need to be aware of the importance of living an ethical life by taking care of ourselves. Someone who doesn't have any idea of how to take care of themselves will not be able to take care of others. It is logical that before you do something that can help others you must help yourself. If you do not lead an ethical life, you are constantly and intentionally hurting yourself and causing difficulties for others. Inevitably, you will become a victim of your own mind, your own actions. If you beat yourself up in this way, you won't have any strength or power to help anyone else. It's logical that firstly you should establish your own ground, your own foundation.

By ethical, we are not saying you should live completely in the positive. This would be impossible. What we are saying is we want you to be aware when you commit unhealthy actions, speech or thoughts. Ask yourself where this unhealthy commitment or action will take you? Try to understand. In this way, bit by bit, you can rescue yourself. It's a life-long commitment, a life-long practice that is over days, weeks, months and years. Success in only one thing a day sets you up tomorrow for the same success. In this way, by the end of the year, you may have success over 365 days. That's a great achievement, and you have not wasted your days, weeks and the year. If we contrast this approach with what we achieved last year and the years before, when we were not acting ethically, most of that was just wasted. Do you really want to just waste the rest of our life, or do you want to do something that is helpful to myself and others?

There is no one out there who is going to fully take care of you. To think otherwise is completely mistaken. That has never happened in the past, and it's never going to happen in the future. Of course, there are many, in the past and the future, who created helpful conditions for you, and gave you guidance and support. These things that exist in the past are going to happen in the future. But the primary agent who is really going to help you is yourself. Therefore, you should not expect someone else to fix your problem. As Buddhists, we believe that if anyone can fix your problems, it is the Buddha. Buddha is not just one Buddha – there are countless buddhas that came before but even they cannot fix your problems. It's the same in

other religions if they hold that such beings exist, such as God. They can only guide you, provide you with the right environment, explain to you the right conditions. The prime factor that can really help you is your own mind. In this way, everything you do to lead an ethical life is not to please Buddha or God, nothing to do with your religion or your belief. The whole idea is that everything you're doing protects your mind from the negative. So that's the first, one needs to be aware of the importance of leading an ethical life. If you lead an ethical life we have a positive mind; the moment you have a positive mind, that very moment you feel secure, that very moment there is peace, that very moment there is happiness. Instantly you are aware of the reaction and the result when you're in a positive state of mind.

When you're in a negative state of mind, that very moment when you look at the mind it feels insecure – there is lots of fear, lots of doubt. So many unhealthy things, then why are we allowing ourselves to get into such a miserable state? Many great masters say we do not realise that it is ourselves who cause our own problems. This untrained, uneducated mind is a very foolish mind but the true nature of mind is not foolish or stubborn. The nature of mind has huge potential to grow and blossom with great knowledge and wisdom. So when we have such a great mind we should not waste it; we should take advantage of this opportunity.

This basic method to develop a positive mind is to cultivate more positive thoughts, and commit to using more positive speech and doing more positive actions. Just undertaking these positive thoughts, speech and actions will build the right kind of preparation for meditation. At the same time, don't expect acknowledgement that you're doing positive things. This would mean that the way you are living a positive or ethical life is not genuine, because you expect someone else to acknowledge you. That's not authentic.

STUDY TO DEVELOP CLARITY OF MIND

We need to develop a clean mind. In this 21st century, everyone is concerned with global warming and the environment. A healthy environment is not going to start just when the factories close down and they stop taking timbers

from the forest. A clean environment starts when our mind is clean. Without a clean mind, we cannot clean our environment. The environment is a manifestation of our mind. From that point of view the ethical life is not only protecting your own peace and happiness, it's also protecting the entire environment because that ethical mind is not going to go out and harm the environment. So, from a spiritual point of view, economic point of view and environmental point of view, the ethical life is so valuable for these things. Firstly, one needs to establish this.

Based on this ethical life we develop this clarity of mind. When our mind is influenced by attachment, anger, jealousy and arrogance, it is impossible to see the reality of how things exist. You're not going to be able to hear the reality of the wisdom teachings, because you have delusion mind. This mind obscures you from understanding reality. The less you have delusion, the clearer state your mind will be in. This clarity of the mind has mere understanding.

For this reason, it is important to study because if you haven't studied the mind, haven't studied meditation, then there is nothing to meditate, nothing to train your mind. Study is a very important way to progress your meditation and to increase your wisdom mind. Because of this, the teacher is very important. The teacher explains how things exist, the nature of the mind and how to meditate. All this information is your guide to show us the path to get us to the destination of peace and happiness. Without this guidance, you won't be able to see the path. Just imagine you are in a beautiful country, but you don't have any idea geographically how to find these beautiful places. You need guidance from one who knows about the country, who can take you and show you that place. Under their guidance, you will see special places and nice things. That guide cannot bring this beautiful place to you; they need to have seen it with their own eyes. They can't make you see it through your own eyes without going there but they can guide you to the path. According to Buddhist belief, Buddha cannot bring you happiness in your life - only you can experience it. Buddha can only show you the path of how to gain happiness. The person who really finds this happiness is you, with your own mind. Without your own mind involved in training there's nothing that can

give you happiness.

To study helps us to understand what is mind, what is meditation. Then once you have studied mind and meditation, we don't need blind faith, and won't get brainwashed or trapped into cult-like thinking. You need to develop your own awareness, your own wisdom. How we develop this is to not completely believe what I have said, what Buddha has said, and what other great masters have said – but to use them to exercise, investigate and to experiment for yourself. This is not a dry intellectual exercise but an experimental approach with the day-to-day reality of your own life. Simply reading about it and hearing the teachings are not going to prove to you whether it's incorrect or correct. You need to use them in everyday life. You can't simply study Buddha's philosophy, for example, in saying an unethical life is the cause of negative circumstance and an ethical life is the cause of positive circumstance. You need to experiment with living an ethical life and seeing if it brings a positive mind and noticing what happens when you behave unethically. When you live an unethical life, even though you may find it entertaining and enjoyable in that very moment, what is the outcome later on? If you take some time to experiment for yourself, your own mind is going to realise that living the ethical life is the healthiest way to live.

CULTIVATE CONTEMPLATION

In the short term, an unethical lifestyle may give you some sort of pleasure, but in the long run, it causes the most damage. That very realisation can prove what the Buddha said is perfectly true. This means that if you have that kind of mind – a very smart mind – you won't just simply believe what others say. This smart mind knows exactly what is correct or incorrect. This smart mind is never going to be trapped by some sort of cult. You have completely independent freedom of thinking. As Buddha said, you should not just believe him because he is the Buddha; you need to carefully examine what he says.

*Just as a goldsmith tests his gold
By burning, cutting and rubbing it,
So you must examine my words*

*And accept them,
But not merely out of reverence.*

Sutra of the Dense Array

You should carefully examine the Buddha's teachings for their meaning and helpfulness. Exercising your mind in this way is part of the meditation, part of the training – because it really sharpens your mind, makes you more intelligent and wise. The combination of sharp mind, sharp faculty and wise discernment all develop your wisdom mind. This wisdom is different from the intellectual mind. The definition of wisdom is to realise what to adopt and what to abandon, and to cultivate that very mind is wisdom.

What we lack in this modern world is not intelligence, we already have this because we can create so many great things. What we are lacking is wisdom. This lack of wisdom means we don't adopt those qualities that bring us genuine peace and lasting happiness, we constantly abandon them – and things that bring us lots of stress, concerns, worries and difficulties, we should be abandoning them – but we constantly adopt them. From that point of view, we are lacking in wisdom – note lacking intelligence.

What we are saying is you cannot gain wisdom just from reading a book, it cannot be gained from listening to someone's talk. Wisdom can only be gained from careful examination and then exercising your mind deeply. One day your mind is going to be aware of what is healthy and what is unhealthy. Based on that you practise training the wisdom mind.

You need to really experiment with whatever you study. That's what we call contemplation. Through contemplation, one arrives at the conclusion that the positive way of life is the cause of peace and happiness. The negative way of life brings obstacles for peace and happiness. In this way now your mind will constantly bring you a positive focus, positive concentration. So now whatever you are doing, whether you are having a glass of water, talking to someone, or doing your daily activities or washing your clothes or cleaning your house, whatever mundane everyday tasks you need to perform, your mind always remains in the positive. If you can manage that, then everyday activities are a state of meditation. The moment your mind is in a positive state it will bring you peace. The moment your mind is distracted from this

positive, it disturbs your mind. This again is important, it's not easy. That's why you need more time to study, more time to contemplate, more time to meditate, because to establish this system of positivity in your mind takes a while.

Sometimes people say 'I get bored. I listen to this often, I contemplate that often and I meditate often'. The repetition itself is not intended to be the entertaining part, it's a way to bring the positive system into your mental continuum. Once you have a system, nothing can bring you difficulties; effortlessly you can live this life. Until that time, you are going to find it a bit of a challenge. In our negative system, there exists so much delusion mind, that lots of people fail or at least a lot of people find it hard. In those moments, Buddha states that if you are close to practitioners or close to a teacher or supervisor, in that very moment they can help you to overcome that challenge.

When you first come into the spiritual world or meditate, you may find it exciting, you get some sort of benefit out of it because you're in the right environment. Then the more you study and meditate, eventually it becomes a bit dull and confusing, you find difficulties. But this does not mean you're getting worse. In the beginning, your mind is looking for something new, and then when you hear something new, you get excited about it. However then, when you bring that into your system, then all your familiar ways of acting begin to compete with it, and that makes it uncomfortable, and it's a big challenge. Lots of people can fail to progress at this point.

I call this period the teenage stage. When you first go out with your friends it's very exciting because you have lots of friends. You keep going out and then one day you get caught up with this teenage problem and then you have some challenges in your life. It feels like 'I'm too young to play with the kids'. You think 'I'm adult', but you're not old enough to go with the adults. You feel a bit lost between two worlds. At that time, parents have a big responsibility. It's the same thing spiritually, we say it's the 'teenager' stage. At the teenager stage, it's so important to have the right environment such as sangha and the teacher who can guide you constantly. This doesn't just happen to you. You need to know that everyone who comes to the spiritual path goes through

this transitional time. They need to be guided according to their experience.

Meditation is the prime method that transforms your mind from negative to positive, it's the prime mechanism. But you cannot get there without contemplation, study and leading an ethical life. These are basic sequences: an ethical life first, study second. Whatever you study, you contemplate. The insight gained from that contemplation is kept in your mind during meditation. This is the right sequence.

UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF MEDITATION

What are the purposes and benefits of meditation? To address these two questions, the first point is that you have a choice to meditate or not. If you don't meditate, where is your mind going to be? When you don't meditate, your mind is not going to stay in one place, your mind is going to go to all sorts of places, because there is no object to focus on. This wandering mind is the doorway of many delusions, or mental afflictions. When you see something out there you think of as nice, it brings you attachment mind. When you see something that's unattractive it brings anger mind. When you see something out there that is better than what you've got, it brings jealous mind. When you see someone out there who has less than you it brings ego mind.

This wandering mind constantly brings this garbage into our minds. When we do not study this mind, we are not aware who's creating this stress. We think about 'My job causes me all this stress; my family causes this tension'. We have such a fear of losing this job and possessions. But the reality is none of them are an actual factor in creating our problems. All these problems that we experience are our own mind. It is this mind that lacks focus, or the ability to concentrate on positive things. In this way, our wandering mind constantly damages our mental state.

Once you badly damage your mind, this very mind doesn't have any strength to do anything. It's like when someone who has serious physical sickness loses all their energy and strength so that they don't even have the energy to make a nice cup of tea for themselves. Exactly the same thing occurs in

our mind when we constantly bring the negatives. Then we get deeper and deeper and eventually it leads us to depression. Depression is not just an overnight kind of problem for the mind – it's day-to-day and week-to-week. This accumulates and then eventually you end up in that state. Once you are in that state it's very hard to come out of it. These are the disadvantages if you don't meditate.

Meditation is not a religious belief system. Buddhist philosophy is a universal philosophy and it's very scientific. Nowadays there are scientists working with the mind, working with positive emotions or feelings. Western philosophy and psychology talk a lot about the mind and there is much great practical information out there, but still it's very limited. The Buddha's teachings about the mind are a complete explanation of the mind. As a result, many scientists who study the mind are becoming more interested in Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophy has so much to contribute to our society. I usually say Buddhist philosophy is the medicine for the mind. When you take medicine, you don't need to be of that culture to take, for example, Ayurvedic medicine, western or herbal medicine. The definition of medicine is to cure your disease, nothing else. It's the same with Buddhist philosophy; it's a medicine to cure the disease of the mind. It doesn't make sense, if a certain medicine is going to cure your mental problem, that you don't want to take it because you don't want to be Buddhist. That's a very silly way of thinking: You've tried modern medicine and ancient medicine and then you find some other medicines that will help you but you refuse, because you don't belong to that culture. I think that's ill-advised. Medicine does not have a boundary, the only purpose is to cure disease. Buddhist philosophy is one of the most complete explanations, one of the most complete sets of medicines to cure the mind. There are disadvantages if you don't meditate.

One of the great bodhisattvas, Maitreya Buddha, who is going to become a future Buddha, composed the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, also known as the Great Ornament or Great Vehicle. In this, he says the main Buddhist enemy is defilement, or mental affliction. How we describe these mental afflictions is, whenever it comes into your mind, instantly it causes harm to you. Instantly it disturbs your peace of mind, instantly it brings negative thoughts and brings

suffering in your life. Mental affliction doesn't do you any good, it always disturbs you. That is one of the effects of mental affliction. The second effect of this mental affliction is that it not only hurts you but also causes harm to others.

It's good to experiment when somebody constantly causes trouble to you and others, not to think why he or she is causing trouble to me or others – it's good to investigate. When you investigate, you will see that that person is no different from you. That person also wants happiness and peace as you do, but unfortunately that person is controlled by his own mental afflictions. He doesn't have any power to stop them. In that way, their mental afflictions cause difficulties, cause others' difficulties, that's the effect of mental afflictions.

Mental afflictions are robbers who steal all your virtues and positive mind. There are three prime aspects of the damage – damage to you, damage to others and damage to your positive emotions. You need to identify these in our own mind, not the nature of the mind. Sometimes we say when you drink polluted contaminated water it makes you sick, we say it's the water that makes you sick. It's not the water, it's the contaminants that cause the sickness, because when you purify the water of contaminants and make the water fresh, it will not make you sick. In the same way, our mind is always pure. My mind will not cause me or others trouble, nor does it disturb my virtuous mind, but the contaminants of the mind such as anger, jealousy, ego. These are not the true nature of the mind. We are dwelling in that state of mind and that's what's causing so much trouble.

Shantideva, another great Indian master, stated that delusion or mental afflictions have four problems or difficulties:

1. The purpose of meditation is nothing but to cease your afflicted mind. When this mental affliction is in your mind, how long is this mind going to hurt you? No other enemy can hurt you this much and for so long – there's no end to it. That person can only cause you trouble for as long as this life endures, but, once you die, that person cannot come and cause you a problem in your next life. If you really compare the

damaging consequences of your inner and outer enemy, it's your inner enemy that causes you much more lasting problems than your outer enemy. When we have this outer enemy how much effort do we put into defeating him or her. We try everything and put in a great deal of effort for someone who causes very limited suffering. Why don't we put more effort into the mind that causes much greater trouble to ourselves? It is so important to identify our inner delusion; it causes more trouble long term to me than my outer enemy. We need to think, 'I need to do something to resolve this'. That's the point, that's the reason we meditate.

2. Your real enemy is your anger mind, so much so that your anger can make you suffer the hell realms. Your outer enemy can only cause limited harm. The worse thing that an outer enemy can do is cut your body or take your life, but they cannot make you a hell being. In that sense, your mental afflictions are far more dangerous than your outer enemies. Why do we get so frightened of an outer enemy that can only cause limited suffering when we have no fear of something that can cause unbearable suffering? Just think about when you see your enemy. Shantideva says it's your perception – you may think she or he is my enemy, but the reality is that that person may not have the same perception as you. It means that you are creating this negativity yourself. Even though they are your enemy, there's no guarantee they have the strength to cause harm to you. You may cause more harm or hurt to them than they to you. So why have this fear of that person? You are causing more trouble for that person than they are to you. From a logical point of view, this person who is causing you difficulty may create all sorts of conditions that make you uncomfortable, but at the end of the day it's up to you how you respond. If you respond in a negative way, it's going to hurt you. So when you get hurt it's important to ask yourself, 'Is my negative mind hurting me, or is it this difficult person hurting me?' If you really investigate, it is your mind that gets disturbed, not the other person who is disturbing you.

As the Buddha says, it's the negative mind that is the prime cause of suffering. We as ordinary beings are not aware of that. It is the mind causing me trouble rather than the person causing me trouble, that's why we always go after this person to attack. With this information, we now need to experiment, contemplate and research. We humans have intelligent minds. If we use this intelligence we can investigate the real cause of the problem. Is it me or the other person? Using that kind of investigation, you're going to find out that your mind is the prime cause of suffering and, in that moment, you're going to realise that what the Buddha said is the truth.

In the past, I always thought others were the cause of my problems, and when I reflected I realised that it's not the others, it's my mind. All that time I spent chasing out the enemy was just wasted. Now what I really need to do is investigate the way that this inner mind is the cause of the trouble. I need to investigate and challenge negative mind.

In this way once you completely become free of your anger mind then no one out there can be an enemy who can disturb you. The enemy is the manifestation of our own anger mind. Every one of us as ordinary beings all has anger, and we all have different levels of anger, which determines how many enemies we have out there. Some of us have very little anger and have few enemies, some of us have lots of anger and many enemies. From this point of view, we need to be aware that the outer enemy can do very little harm; it is the inner enemy that does great harm.

We need to become hard on our inner enemies and soft on our outer enemies. When an outer enemy causes us trouble and makes difficulties, we generally will not tolerate it. We are going to challenge, we going to attack. That's our tactic as ordinary human beings. Buddha's philosophy is that this tactic is not a healthy one, because by attacking you create anger in yourself. It harms yourself rather than others. You need to become aware that the more you attack, the more you get angry; the more you get angry, the more harm ensues. In this sense, you need to sacrifice your ego mind a little bit by temporarily acting as the loser. Try to be genuinely kind to the person attacking you, and do something that the person feels comfortable with. There's no guaranteeing it but there's a 90 per cent chance that doing

something nice for that person will enable that person to soften, to become a friend. Just think about international relations – some countries used to be great enemies historically and then later these enemies become close friends. If this is possible at a national level, then why can't we as individuals? In this way, if you are nice towards the outer enemy they will become softer and eventually they can become a friend – unlike the inner enemy: no matter how nice we are to the inner enemy, they become worse. No matter how often we are nice to our attachment mind, jealous mind, ego mind – the nicer you are the worse they become. Therefore, we should not be nice to our inner enemy but we should be nice to our outer enemy. That's the third point we should be aware of.

1. The purpose of meditation is to free us from our enemies. With the outer enemy, you do not need to kill him or her, because without doing anything one day they will die. No one lives for ever. However, with this inner enemy, if you don't apply the antidote, it will not die by itself – it's always going to be with you. All the effort you put into killing your outer enemy is not going to help you. The one you should really eliminate is the inner enemy. If you don't do anything, they are not going away and will always reside in your mind.
2. The definition of enemy is someone or a thing that always bring you suffering. But we need to distinguish between the person that causes you to suffer and your negative mind that brings you suffering. If you don't closely investigate, you will get caught up in the appearance, not the reality. The appearance of someone that abuses you or uses negative expression or gossip about you – it seems they are hurting you. The reality is, it's your negative mind. The moment you are in a negative state of mind it causes you harm in this way. It's so important to differentiate cause and conditions. The outer person who created all these problems is the mere condition, not the cause. If they were the real cause of harm to you then if they acted in this way to anyone at all that person should also get upset – even a Buddha or bodhisattva should get upset. If the outer person is the cause of trouble, then why does this person not cause

harm to Buddha or a bodhisattva? The reason is because the Buddha and bodhisattvas are completely free of negative mind. If you're free from the negative state of mind no one can harm you, no one can disturb you. This is proof that the mind is so important. In this way one needs to be aware that mental delusions or afflictions are the enemy. The purpose of meditation is to free us from these negative emotions and negative thoughts.

Let us go into more detail on these defilements. There are many types of mental afflictions. The six root defilements are attachment, anger, ignorance, doubt, ego and wrong view. It is these defilements that must be eliminated if we are to progress on the path. One of the great Indian masters, Aryadeva, the main disciple of Nagarjuna, stated in his *400 Verses on the Middle Way* that these negative emotions are rooted in ignorance. Every one of us wants to be happy. We think the way we're going to be happy is if we have this and that beautiful things – then we're going to be happy. Aryadeva stated that beauty does not exist out there, it's a state of mind. Ignorance mind is telling you: 'If you get this one thing you're going to be happy'. Ignorance has a sneaky kind of intelligent self. When we get these things, we get some sort of satisfaction out of it, but its only temporary, there's no real pleasure there. If there was real pleasure there why would we put in all this effort to get it, and then when we get it, want another one. The reason I want another is because now this object has stopped giving me pleasure. The moment it stops giving pleasure, ignorance mind tells me I need another one. In the end, we have got so much stuff we cannot fit everything in our house – but we are still not happy! If this was the true cause of happiness then the more we got then the happier we would be. We've got everything if you look in our house, but our happiness does not increase; only our junk increases. We should ask ourselves: 'Is this ignorance telling the truth or is it deceiving me'. If you really investigate, the ignorance is deceiving you.

Ignorance is the fundamental cause of our defilements or afflictions. Ignorance is the fundamental cause of all sorts of stresses and physical and mental sicknesses. It is the fundamental cause; it can economically crush us.

More than anything we need to be released from this ignorance mind. Take this information and investigate for yourself. Through investigation you're going to find that ignorance causes so much trouble. This ignorance mind tells you that this person who is telling you bad things is harming you. Then you believe it and get upset and get angry and it causes so much trouble.

In Buddhism we describe the principal mind and secondary mind. My principal mind sees things as they are. When I look at this cup, my eye consciousness sees this cup, then my mental consciousness thinks of this cup. When I just think of the cup, see it as a cup, that very mind does not discriminate whether the cup is beautiful, or ugly, or whatever. When you see this cup as beautiful or ugly you use secondary mind. Then the secondary mind comes up with the idea that this cup is beautiful or ugly. This secondary mind influences your principal mind. The six afflictions or defilements are part of your secondary mind.

You might not be having any issues with your friend or your partner. Then they tell you that something is good or bad, and then you start to have a different perception from what you used to have. The secondary mind is more like an influence on your mind. Therefore, when we meditate it is important that we just remain in the principal state of mind. Just look at the cup as a cup, nothing else. The moment your thought explains, 'this is beautiful', your mind is distracted and not meditating.

In shamatha meditation the whole idea is to deactivate this secondary mind. The less active your mind is, the more it can concentrate and stabilise your mind. The more you stabilise your mind, the less influenced it is by mental afflictions. The less influence there is on your mind, the greater opportunity this mind has to see the reality of things. Therefore, we use one single object, such as a flower, to meditate on. You can't force your mind to see the reality, it's only going to happen when your mind is in a calm and relaxed state, and then you're going to see the reality of how things exist. When you get drunk, there is a vast difference in how you see the world. How you see the world when you're hung over or not drunk is another thing. Now you realise: 'When I get drunk I see one thing and when I am not drunk I see another thing'. That proves that your state of the mind affects how you perceive and what you

project out there. When you do not get drunk you can see the reality. These two states have vast differences. Meditation is the method to overcome this delusion. These are the things we need to purify during the meditation.

SIX RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR MEDITATION

The great Indian master meditator, Atisha, said that there's very little chance of success if we try to meditate without the right conditions. If we create the right conditions then there's a great chance of succeeding. Therefore, it's so important to have all the right conditions when you start to meditate.

In the *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalashila, the 9th century Indian master, stated six conditions you should have when you meditate. These are very important. If you have all the right conditions then you can have success in meditation. If you miss one of the conditions you can still achieve something but it's not going to be complete. When you mediate, the main view you should hold is interdependent origination, which means that every result is dependent on a cause. If you have the complete causes and conditions then you are going to have a complete result. If there are only partial causes and conditions then you will only have a partial result.

The six right conditions to start to meditate are to live in a conducive environment, to limit our desires, to practise contentment, to reduce our activities, to live an ethical life and to reduce attachment.

RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

We should have a conducive environment for meditating. The right place is the physical environment that really accommodates or supports your meditation. The great Indian master Kamalashila said when you meditate it's important to have the right environment so that no one disturbs you physically and internally. It's good to plan the place where you meditate so that there is nothing much there. This is because as a beginner we always have 'monkey mind', so-called because the mind is always jumping from one thought to the next. While we are having one thought another comes up. Why

we call it the monkey mind is because it cannot sit still, it is always jumping from one tree to the next. This ordinary mind cannot concentrate. While we think one thought another thought comes up. That takes us to another place, and within a few minutes our thoughts are everywhere. Because we have this very wandering, agitated mind, if you're meditating in a place where there is much going on then you cannot concentrate. When the mind is already wandering and the conditions are distracting then you cannot concentrate.

Two conditions are needed – a physically secluded place and a mentally secluded place. Physically the place is an environment where no one disturbs you – it is serene, tranquil, peaceful and your mind can naturally relax. Mental seclusion means that while we meditate it's not right to bring into the meditation what we did before meditation or what we plan to do afterwards. The reason you're there is to refresh the mind. To bring clarity of mind, we need to fully concentrate on the object of meditation. If you bring your mind into the present and concentrate on what you're learning or what you are meditating on, that secludes your mind from everyday life.

As a beginner, you need such a place to meditate. Once you are very advanced then it doesn't matter. Even if you are in a crowded place your mind is not going to get distracted, it's a well-trained monkey that even in the forest no longer gets distracted.

LIMIT DESIRE

We need to aim for a less desiring mind. When we have a less desiring mind, that mind is easy to place on an object. Our habitual tendencies are to think that: 'The more I have, the happier I am, the better I am, the happier I will be'. That's intrinsic to the nature of the way we think, but the reality is, it is not true. If I look in the past you have had that thought: 'The more I have and the better things I have the happier I will be'. But that didn't work. So, if it didn't work in the past how are you going to have confidence it is going to work in the future? We don't realise we are caught up in a kind of illusion. So, if you are caught up in that illusion you are never going to find happiness. The cause of happiness is our mind. If our mind is not in the right condition,

no matter what you've got it is not going to make you happy. The moment you realise that, instantly you are going to detach yourself from those things. That realisation is the beginning of the journey to liberate yourself.

You have to reconcile the difference between your ordinary mind, which is going to come and tell you that you need more in order to have a better life, and your awareness that is going to tell you don't really need these things. In the past those things have never been the source of happiness. You realise that happiness can only be found in your positive state of mind. Eventually you become more positive and this positive mind brings you more joy, more happiness and you naturally have less interest in wanting more and better things. People may think you are trying to adhere to a religious concept that you should not be attached, that Buddhists should be detached. That's not true. Buddhist belief should be based on wisdom. With wisdom, you realise that things that you used to believe were the cause of happiness are not the cause of happiness. The cause of happiness is your mental state. So, the more you become positive, the more you become kind – that is what makes you happy. When you realise that these are the things that make you happy, why do you depend on other things? When you realise this, naturally you lose interest – you become detached from desires that makes you miserable. You need to implement this less desiring mind.

It's important to be practical when you study or meditate. As this ordinary mind has very limited concentration, once you go beyond that then your mind wanders back to normal things. At that moment, you should not be discouraged by the thought: 'Oh my mind goes wandering off', as it is common. What you need to be aware of is that this mind has the potential to extend your concentration – not by force, that's not the right method, it may cause stress and discourage your meditation. You have to be aware that what you're doing here is something valuable. The more you think about all the benefit and greatness of what you are doing then naturally you're going to enjoy it more. This enjoyment helps you to extend your concentration, because how long your concentration lasts is dependent on whether you enjoy or not. If you're not enjoying it then your attention is going to be very short. You have to create an atmosphere or environment that you're going to very much

enjoy.

When your mind loses concentration, think about your life. Think about how much effort you put into getting more and more than you have now, better things than you have now. The moment you think: 'I want more, I want to have better things' – these are obstacles to your meditation. It's good to reflect that if you do get more and better things, there is no guarantee they will bring happiness. If you get better things than you have now from a material point of view, it's not going to make you a happier person. If having more and better things were the cause of happiness, how do you explain that someone who has lots of things compared to someone who has very little is not necessarily happier – how can you explain that? If it is having things that causes real happiness then the person who has less should be less happy and the person who has more should be happier. But the reality is that the person who has less is often happier. So that means that the two persons have a different state of mind. The person who has got everything is still not satisfied in his or her mind, so mentally they are more impoverished. Another person who has less materially may be mentally richer – they say: 'I'm happy with what I've got'. Mental richness is healthier than material richness. You can have so much concern with your material state that it causes you mental poverty. When you experience mental poverty, you may have everything materially that you want, but mentally you have no happiness at all. If you think: 'The more I get the better things are' – that's not the cause of happiness. What I'm really lacking is mental quality. I need to improve this quality. I need to increase my positive virtuous qualities.

We need to change the object of our thinking. Instead of thinking about material possessions, we can think about the quality of the mind. We should have less desire for the mundane material things, we should have less desire mind.

PRACTISE CONTENTMENT

When we meditate its very common and very easy for our mind to wander. The moment you lose interest then your mind starts to wander. If when you meditate you're in the middle of a task, then whatever you do, at that very moment it's very rare for your mind to run away from that. The moment you have appreciation and gratefulness, your mind won't wander everywhere seeking something that will give you more pleasure. So, the third condition for right meditation is to have more gratefulness.

We need to learn to be more grateful, even if we are sick physically or mentally. Normally we don't say: 'I am grateful for being sick' – it's a miserable state. As we live in such a rich nation, when we get sick it is very easy to get treatment. In a poor country when you get sick it's not so easy to get proper treatment from a reliable hospital, to find the reliable doctor, to get the reliable medicine. So, from that point of view we in the West are so fortunate. If when you get sick you can be grateful, then you can learn to bring that gratefulness to other situations in your lives.

If you know how to train your mind, it can bring vast difference to your life. As Buddhists, if you lack something, for example, you have no food to cook because you're busy, you have no time to buy things – don't be disappointed with yourself. It's not that you haven't got enough money it's just that you don't have enough time to buy food. Just think how many people out there haven't got money to buy food. So, from that point of view we should be grateful. In this way, we should not take things for granted but appreciate them. If we can't do that we will be miserable. So we should appreciate everything we have in this country and be grateful.

To put this into practice, whatever you have in your life, just think: 'I'm grateful I have these things'. This appreciation helps to ground you, helps to make you solid. When you don't appreciate such things, nothing makes you happy. The great Indian master Nagarjuna stated: 'What's the definition of wealth? Things that make you happy'. That's the definition of wealth. In our ordinary life, we may have everything but that does not make us happy. The real wealth that makes us happy is gratefulness and appreciation. The

moment you have appreciation, even if you only have a simple glass of water, that is enough to create immense happiness.

We live in such a wealthy country; sometimes we pay much for a drink we do not appreciate. Just think about how much one fresh glass of water would be appreciated in a third world country – they would be so grateful. Just paying extra does not mean you're going to have extra happiness. Yet the whole of society tells us the more you spend the happier you will be. For the consumer, there is such focus on how to make things perfect. We are encouraged to have more things and spend more money. The reality is we are all victims of overspending. Things become more expensive because we want more and more. That increases demand and causes destruction to the environment. If we look at our society, our houses, our food – this food and housing can actually accommodate ten times this population, but we selfishly hold on to it all because of the lack of satisfaction it brings. Think about and assess yourself how our lack of satisfaction drives us to keep buying and spending; it drives the economy and makes our lives expensive. What we require as humans is not that much. How many clothes do we need for this life? As a monk, I wear one maroon robe and it lasts for a few years! I'm human as you are human. Food, clothes, a place to live give us some security; they help us live some sort of comfortable life. But these are not the causes of happiness. If in our ordinary world, we think spending more is the cause of happiness – that is a mistake. If you look carefully you will find you only need so many clothes for this life, for a maximum life of say 100 years. In 115 years how many clothes do we need? It's not really that much, but yet we keep buying and in the end, we look in our closet and we have so many clothes we could open our own clothes shop! So still we are not happy, and then when another product comes along we want that one. That's one kind of unhappiness.

Another kind of unhappiness arises because we humans buy more food than we need. In the west, we sometimes say our eyes are bigger than our stomachs. Even though we only need to eat a limited amount we buy like we going to feed an elephant. We waste so much. Think of all the wastage of food from all the supermarkets – tonnes and tonnes of food. I'm not saying everyone

should be Buddhist, but the ideas of Buddhism have so much to offer. Any Buddhist philosophy that can help you, you should adopt. There's no need to be Buddhist. As I mentioned earlier, when I get sick I can take Chinese herbal or Indian ayurvedic medicine but I don't have to be Indian or Chinese, it's just simply medicine to cure my disease. It's the same thing with Buddhist philosophy. If it helps your mind and makes you happier then why not take it? Buddhist philosophy is not just religion; it's the science of the mind. You should take it, because no one owns it, there's no copyright – anyone can take it. Gratefulness is so important. In this world think how often do we complain about our drinks and our food? It really is a lack of appreciation, a lack of gratefulness. Think about the hunger in poor countries; when they find something to eat they are so grateful.

Lots of food can cause sickness because we eat with the wrong motivation. We use a negative state of mind. I usually say the mind is more important than the food itself. In medical science, they sometimes talk of food as a cause of ill health. My younger relative lives in New York and has a modern way of thinking. She tells my parents they should eat more greens, not take so much butter, don't eat carbohydrate food. 'These are all bad for you,' she says. She gives all this nice advice. My aunt is very outspoken and she says: 'We are almost 90 years old and we eat all the time what we want to eat. Nothing makes us sick. We are not going to last long anyway so we are not bothered with what you are telling us.' They are always eating what the medical world says is not good – lots of carbohydrates, lots of butter, lots of salt – everything they say is bad for you – but they are still healthy. The mind is more important than the food. If that food is the cause of suffering then why don't they get sick? Perhaps we need a combination of eating the right food, and also the right mind. The most important thing, each and every time we are having food, is to be grateful. But we take everything for granted. The reality is that to find food and drink is not very simple. If you don't have the karma, these things are not always going to be available. In this life, you are fortunate to have an abundance to eat and drink. When this karma runs out in the next life, you may not find any of these things. Then where are you going to go and complain?

In this way, it is important to realise what we see is different to what is reality. While we have everything that is excellent, we should be grateful. What Buddhism is saying is that happiness is not far away somewhere else, happiness is right in front of you – but we do not recognise it. That means that right now when I am grateful and appreciate what I have, the moment I have gratefulness I have happiness. If I've got everything but no longer appreciate that, then the happiness is gone. It's the state of the mind. Whenever, whatever we do we should be more grateful. This helps you to have a less distracted mind.

PARTICIPATE IN FEWER ACTIVITIES

It's important to reduce the extent of our activities in our lives when we come to meditate. In our everyday life, we are busy doing so many things, and that very attitude or frame of mind affects you when you come to meditate. The habit of busyness is so powerful that it dominates your mind. Then the moment you go to meditate, in the beginning you may only be able to concentrate for a few seconds or even a minute. Then that habit of busyness comes back and that takes you everywhere. To prevent this, one needs to reduce the number of activities in our everyday life. You need to give yourself more time to relax your body and relax your mind. If you have a relaxed state of body and mind then that body and mind is in the right condition to meditate. So, it is important that we reduce unnecessary or negative activities.

It's important to be aware that so much of what we do is out of our desire mind telling us: 'Do this, do that'. When you run a company or government or society there are so many activities you undertake. Some of them are necessary; some of them unnecessary. If you carefully reflect, you may see that you spend most of the time on unnecessary things, wasting time, energy and money. Similarly, in our lives we do so many things from when we wake up until we go to bed. It's good to reassess how many of them are useful or harmful things. If we look into it there is a very small proportion of things we do that is useful, the larger proportion of what we do is harmful. In this way, we don't have to do things all day to make ourselves happy. Just think

about whether all that rushing about really causes happiness? If it did, then someone who does very little should have less happiness than someone who does many things, who should have more happiness. But at the end of the day, if we're too busy, we feel so exhausted, so tired. It's important that we tidy up. The things that we do that give us a good feeling, like helping others, should not be limited. However, things that cause us stress and unhappiness, why should we commit to these things? We should cut them down. I'm not saying you should not force yourself to stop doing certain things because you think it's going to make you happy, that's not going to work. It is better to reflect more on the outcome of doing certain things. The more you think: 'What are the outcomes of these activities?', that will encourage you to do the right thing. What is the outcome when you do harmful or unnecessary things? It discourages you. Rather than forcing yourself to stop doing certain things, deal naturally with what is valuable and invaluable and reduce the activities that are wasting your time or harming others.

We tend to trust our desire mind, but really it causes us so many problems if you really think about it – mental problems, physical sickness, emotional upset. They cause us so much distress, but if you really investigate where this root problems come from it's from desire mind. So, if every problem is caused by desire why do we believe in it so much? Instead of listening to desire mind you should develop the wisdom mind and then later reflect: 'Does what I'm doing genuinely bring me happiness and help others?' If it does, those activities should not be limited. If the things that we do bring distress and worry instead of bringing us peace and happiness, why do we spend so much time on them? It is unnecessary. We should reduce these things.

LIVE AN ETHICAL LIFE.

When we live an ethical life at least there is nothing to regret. With the absence of regret at least you have tremendous peace in your mind. For instance, you may work hard unethically and get promoted. You may work unethically and become rich. But this wealth and these possessions are not going to make you

happy, because underneath it you will know you achieved them unethically. That is enough to disturb your mind. You may have to live less, but as long as you're ethical there is nothing to regret, nothing to disturb you. In that way having less is more peaceful, it is worthier than having everything.

Peace comes when you lead an ethical life. Disturbance comes when you lead an unethical life. These are again not just Buddhist beliefs. You can experiment yourself. When you lead an ethical life, you will find you have lots of sense of peace in your mind. Then when you live in a very unethical way, you may achieve a lot from a worldly point of view but mentally you will have no peace. Living ethically brings you peace in your mind, and ultimately helps you to succeed in your meditation.

It is important to have a sense of clarity and solidity. When you are not living such an ethical life, while you are controlled by a desiring, angry, ego mind, you may feel you are not on solid ground. Then later, when the desire or anger has subsided, you will feel guilt and regret. This guilt and regret again disturb your mind. When you're in this disturbed state of mind, there's no clarity. When you lack clarity, even if you try hard you will have no success in gaining stability. Therefore, in everyday life it's important to live a more ethical life.

An ethical life is like a form of diet; we restrain ourselves physically and mentally to live more ethically. We often emphasise our wellbeing. In our ordinary world, we talk about how food can benefit us, about how much exercise we do. It may seem that's enough to look after our wellbeing. Buddhist science says that just having the right diet and exercising is not enough to look after our wellbeing. The most important thing for our wellbeing is living an ethical life. Living an ethical life is not only important in terms of our spiritual practice, but also in terms of our everyday life. A person who doesn't have any spiritual practice and is living an ethical life it still has enormous benefits, both physically and emotionally. An ethical life is the prime cause for success in one's meditation.

When you are unethical – you are committing something that is unhealthy mentally, physically or vocally. The moment you commit these acts you feel bad, and afterwards you feel regret and this regret disturbs your mind. This

very disturbed mind is not the right condition for meditating. When you meditate, you need to have a good foundation so that you feel so calm and relaxed. This is important. What grounds us is to live an ethical life. Then there's nothing to regret, there's no guilt. The absence of these gives you come clarity of mind. When you have a peaceful and grounded mind your meditation will go further.

This is why ethics is so important. It helps you relax and bring you peace of mind. The cause of an unethical mind is attachment – mentally you develop a coveting mind, vocally you say untruthful things. Then there are the physical misdeeds of stealing, sexual misconduct and so forth. All this attachment creates an unethical life. To live an ethical life, cause and effect are important. For whenever I create a cause, this cause is going to bring its own result. If I live an ethical life, that cause will bring a positive result. Having a positive mind means respecting yourself. The best way to respect yourself is to live an ethical life. We may say that if someone disrespects us, we won't tolerate it, and we get upset at that person. But when this happens, the person who most disrespects you is yourself. To prevent that you should respect yourself. To respect yourself, try to keep your mind in a positive state. Doing positive things, saying positive things and thinking positively – these are the mechanisms that cleanse your mind. The more you have this clarity of mind the more your meditation will be improved.

REDUCE ATTACHMENT

Attachment is perhaps the biggest waster of our time – attachment to loved ones, attachment to wealth, attachments to our thoughts and ideas. When we seek attachment to something or someone, we rush around to attain it and so we miss a great opportunity in this precious life. We waste so much time sitting around thinking about unnecessary things. Sometimes people say: 'I haven't got much time', meaning they don't have much time to do valuable things, yet they have lots of time to waste such as sitting in front of the TV. They may have lots of time – but they think they don't have much time for doing great things. They are deceiving themselves. When others deceive

us, the effect is limited, but when you deceive yourself there is no limit to it. Buddhism says you don't need to have be so concerned about others because they have a very limited effect on you. Rather you should be more concerned about yourself. The most harm and wasted opportunity comes from yourself, from the way you do things. So, if you really care for yourself, then nothing or no one out there can take advantage of you. Most of the time we take advantage of ourselves. Attachment to your loved ones is neither helpful to them nor to yourself. It causes more stress, more control, more ownership. So, if you really love your loved ones, attachment is not the way to make them happy.

You can benefit them in other ways, without attachment; you can benefit them unconditionally. It doesn't mean you don't take care of them, it means you don't own them. Without ownership, if you help them it is more genuine, it is much healthier. If you prepare yourself psychologically for meditation then your mind will be much more relaxed, much more conducive to meditation. It is this very mind we need to cultivate. For example, when you try to build a house you need to know the architecture, how to get material, how to manage the finances, and so on. Once you get all these things done, only then is it the right time to build your house. Similarly, sometimes when people meditate they think that as soon as they jump onto the cushion it's going to happen by itself. But it's not going to happen by itself. You have to create all the right conditions. Previous great masters trained. They are the experts. If you sincerely want to achieve quality meditation then you should create all these right conditions.

This sixth condition is about not being attached to two specific things: not being attached to samsaric phenomena, and not being attached to our own thought or our own mind. Samsaric phenomena, in turn, is explained by two things - animate objects and inanimate objects. It is common for people to be attached to animate objects such as ones' loved ones. This is built into our DNA. From an ordinary point of view there is nothing wrong with this whatsoever, but from a more subtle point of view this attachment to your loved ones causes much negative karma. In order to protect your loved ones, just think of how often you create negative karma. This is not the way to

make your loved ones happy. When birds hatch their eggs, they go out and hunt for worms, they feed insects to their young. From the mother's point of view, she is doing something worthwhile saving her chick. But, in reality, it is killing. Karmically, there's no other option for her chick to survive. But from a spiritual point of view, taking someone's flesh to save another's life is not right livelihood. Temporarily it may help that being's life, but ultimately it creates enormous negative karma. Similarly, if we think about what we do for our loved ones there are many things we do to make them happy and that at the same time create good karma for ourselves. However, that circumstance is very rare; more often it's associated with negative karma.

The great Indian master Shantideva stated in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that the reality is that the love we have for the beings that we love is not forever, it's very temporary. The reality is that this much loved one is close to me in this life, but we may have had a different relationship in a previous life. This very person is going to be in a different relationship in future lifetimes. There's no certainty; our human relationships with one another change constantly. Human relationships are almost the same as sand on the beach. When you walk on the beach one day, you are not going to see the same kind of landscape the next day, because the waves are constantly changing the landscape. Similarly, our karmic waves constantly change the relationships we have with everyone – life-after-life, even day-after-day, week-after-week, month-after-month. Just think about this life alone. How many people you come across in your life – with some of them you have a good relationship, with some you have a stubborn relationship, some are complete strangers. It never stays the same. So then, why are we so attached to the person we think is our loved one? If we are attached to this beloved person, perhaps to our child, then if something goes wrong with the relationship, then it's almost as if that person becomes the worst sort of enemy.

Human relationships are riddled with uncertainty; they are constantly changing. So from that point of view it's not worthwhile to engage in so much grasping and clinging. Many of us have gone through grief when we have lost a loved one. When that person has gone from our life we feel that their loss makes us feel grief and sadness. But the reality is that this grief and

sadness arises because we are grasping, clinging – we don't want to let go. The very mind that is clinging tightly is the ignorance mind.

Why do we talk about ignorance mind? Because that very mind lacks awareness of the nature of phenomena; because that mind thinks: 'This is my loved one, I want to be with that person forever'. However, the nature of phenomena is impermanence. It is impossible that phenomena will be with you forever. In this way, you are creating a kind of desire for something that you are never going to achieve. Therefore, at that moment you are already creating this potential for grief and sadness. We're not saying that as a Buddhist practitioner you should not feel sad when you lose a loved one, of course we are human and we have this emotion, we have this feeling towards loved ones. When this loved one gets sick or even dies, we get sad. The person who knows impermanence and the person who has no idea about impermanence – when they lose loved ones they both get sad, but there are vast differences between them. The one who knows impermanence gets sad from time to time but they know the reality of impermanence, about how things exist that I cannot control. Rather than thinking about that, they are grateful for the good times they had with that person. The other one has no remedy to overcome that sadness. The sadness is created by attachment mind. The remedy for that is also in your own mind. The problems you have in your life are created by mind. The solution is also found in that mind. Outside that mind, you're not going to find other solutions. This is very important. When we live in this ordinary world we look out there for a solution. The body and mind are different – when we break something in the physical world there is definitely help out there to fix the broken part, but when it comes to fixing our minds, there is nobody out there who can fix our minds. For this reason, it's so important to differentiate between the mind and the physical body.

Reflect that this person is my loved one, my close family member, my friend or my relative. Then instead of a sense of ownership, I offer them something that they can genuinely benefit from – something like wisdom or compassion. This is worthier than when we offer samsaric things. When we offer samsaric things, we give them something to increase their delusion mind. If you look at it from that point of view you're not actually helping,

you're hurting. Instead of that, offer them something to bring them more wisdom, offer them something to bring more compassion. These gifts are much healthier. If you genuinely love them as your family, relative or friend, then you should offer them something more valuable that's going to benefit them in this and future lives, rather than something that will temporarily make them feel good but will ultimately cause a more miserable state. When you love somebody, what are you going to offer them? How is it going to affect and benefit that person? The best way is to reduce your attachment. This is one of the main instructions when we meditate. It is attachment that takes your mind away and causes you to lose the object of your focus. That's the reason we need to work to reduce our attachment mind towards sentient beings.

We also need to reduce attachment to material possessions. At this point, whatever we have in this life, we may think: 'This is mine'. It is right to think: 'This is mine', but the object itself is impermanent, and our self is also impermanent. We never know if we're going to be here before this material thing disappears or if this material thing is going to disappear before I disappear! Nothing is reliable. If nothing is permanent then why are we so obsessed with material things? Think about what I'm saying from a worldly point of view – the more you have the more you feel secure. From a spiritual point of view, the more you have the less you feel secure, because the more you have then you have to worry about this and that. In reality we are actually creating more to worry about, we are not creating security, if you really think about it. People who have very little have less worry about how to protect it; people who have lots of nice things have to worry about securing them.

Arayedeva stated that you are the owner of the things that you have, but is it worth being attached to them? There's no guarantee. Today this table belongs to me but tomorrow it may belong to someone else. So why are you so attached to these things? What I'm saying is that if you understand impermanence, then instantly you're going to reduce this attachment and be free of it. We have to reflect on impermanence. Reflecting on impermanence will be really helpful bringing you into the present moment. At this moment I'm healthy, I'm happy I'm enjoying this table. As Buddhists, it's not that we

are saying you cannot enjoy things, each and every moment - you should enjoy them. However, there's a way to enjoy them. We are not saying do something harmful to someone, that will not bring you joy. That's the wrong joy. We should enjoy doing something positive for someone. Do something positive that makes you happy, because that's the sort of joy you want, because the whole idea of meditation practice is to bring joy. Ethical joy is important. Doing something ethical with joy, that's important. In this way, we can enjoy nice things, because there is nothing negative about that kind of joy. I got these nice things by working hard, ethically. At same time, don't think that this object is always going to be yours, this is a mistake. For instance, if someone destroys this table or it's stolen, then I get upset. The reason I get upset is because of my lack of experience of the nature of impermanence. We think it's always going to be with me, so if at some point it disappears, from that attachment mind we are not going to easily accept that it has disappeared. It's that mind that causes us trouble.

It's good to reflect on the reality of phenomena. The conventional reality of phenomena and beings are impermanence. The more you think about that, you can enjoy things; but this understanding will also help you to lessen your attachment to them. This reduced attachment allows you more space to meditate. In this way, we need to reduce material attachment to wealth and to loved ones. These are two types of attachment.

We also need to reduce attachment to our own thoughts, our own ideas. If you're caught up in your own thoughts and ideas, then one idea leads to another idea, leads to another idea, and, in the end, you just become lost in our own thoughts. Sometimes in the beginning there is some issue or difficulties that don't cause very much harm, but in the end this very tiny thing causes more harm to you because you just keep thinking and thinking about the same kind of problem. The more you think about it the bigger it becomes and then eventually it controls your mind. There is a saying that if you hold a tiny object, in the beginning it is light – but after holding it for a long period it becomes very heavy. The weight has not increased, it's the same weight, but it seems heavier. It's the same thing if, in the beginning, you may have a little bit of a worry, then you keep thinking of this thing again

and again and think it's getting worse. But it's not getting worse, you're just caught up in that state of mind. In that way, you're making a big story out of it. All this thought causes your mind to become a very messy mind. This very messy mind is one of the main obstacles to increasing one's clarity of mind, one's wisdom mind.

Therefore, we should not get caught up in our own thoughts. We should try to reduce attachment to our own thoughts and ideas, reduce attachment to material wealth, reduce attachment to our loved ones. If we can decrease attachment then that mind has more time for clarity to concentrate.

So these are the six prerequisites for successful meditation. Check that you have these six conditions before you meditate.

SUMMARY

You should not practise because you feel you should, or because you just have a feeling you want to meditate, because feeling is sometimes uncertain – sometimes you will do it, sometimes you won't want to do it, so it becomes an unreliable practice. You must practise with a reason, because if there is a reason then there is some sort of purpose and then there is more motivation to keep going when you feel like stopping. No one of us wants to experience any form of difficulties, every one of us sincerely wants to be happy – of that there is no doubt. To simply have the wish to end suffering is not going to make it happen. We all know that if it was only about having these wishes to end suffering then none of us would have suffering by now. How often do we have this kind of desire to end the suffering? That doesn't work.

The good news is that the suffering that we usually experience doesn't just manifest out of nowhere without causes or conditions. Everything that we experience is created by its own causes and conditions. You have some control over anything created by causes and conditions. To have some control we need to understand the actual causes and conditions of suffering.

From an ordinary world perspective, the cause of suffering could be the result of your poverty, your lack of education, your not being smart enough, not having a job or not having ambition. We think that not having much

wealth or education can lead to sickness and suffering – or so it appears. But if you closely examine if these are the true causes of suffering, those living in poverty, who are uneducated, or without a job must also be suffering – because they all have a cause of suffering. However, this is not true, because there are people living in poverty and who are uneducated and who don't have a job or don't have much intelligence, who are happy.

How many people haven't got a job and are happy? How many people haven't got possessions but are happy? If we follow worldly advice on how to be happy, we would try to have everything that the world tells us we need to be happy. Some of us do have everything that the world tells us to be happy – yet still we don't have happiness! So, if you look closely at that worldly advice, it is not correct. The Buddhist point of view is that poverty, lack of education, or lack of a good job may create the conditions that can make you suffer, but this is not the primary cause of suffering. The cause of suffering, discovered scientifically and logically, is negative karma. Negative karma is no other than negative mind. So when you are dwelling in a negative state of mind, no matter what else you have that should make you happy, so long as your mind is in a negative state, that negative mind will not allow you to be happy. That negative mind will make you miserable. So, if you look through the microscope, the real cause of this suffering is not poverty, not the lack of education or lack of a job – it's negative mind. This negative karma is the only creator of the entire suffering that we experience. This negative karma does not abide independently anywhere else, it's a manifestation of one's own mind.

When we talk about the mind, we may talk about the delusion aspect of the mind, and then we may talk about the absolute – the purity nature of the mind. The nature of the mind is like a clear blue sky. This clear blue sky cannot cause any form of lightning, thunderstorm, rain, storm or anything – all this happens because of the clouds. This cloud mixed with different temperatures and electrical static, positive and negative charges, creates all sorts of turbulence. So similarly, when we have this turbulent emotion then everything is happening – thunderstorm, rain, cloud and cyclone. This untrained mind is much controlled by these three poison minds – attachment,

anger and ignorance. These are the creators of non-virtuous or negative deeds. Whatever you do out of attachment, whether you think of it as positive or negative, it is all negative. It is the same with what you do out of anger.

These three poison minds are the creators of negative karma. Negative karma is the direct cause of all suffering that we experience. These three poison minds are created by the few different types of ignorance. One type of ignorance is lack of understanding of what is positive, what is negative. Another type of ignorance is lack of understanding of the nature of self. This nature of the mind is always pure – this pure nature of the mind that we grasp at as self. The moment you grasp at yourself, that concept of self *obscures* the power of interdependent nature. If there is no other, then how could you say there is a self? When you say you have a concept of self, then naturally you also have a concept of others. When you have this concept of self and others, attachment to self and aversion to others arises. In this way, the three poison mind arises out of grasping to yourself. This three poison minds multiplies many other negative emotions.

The Buddha said that the root cause even of physical sickness is the mind. I mentioned the three poison mind – attachment, anger, and ignorance. This subtle mind creates the three physical elements: the water element, the fire element and the air element. These three elements create three types of disease – bile, phlegm and air disease. These three are supposed to be the physical root cause of all diseases. As far as it can, modern medicine can help to balance these three, but it cannot uproot them. In this life, you can be completely recovered and then in next life be unhealthy. Modern medicine can only temporarily cure your disease. There is no physical tablet that frees you from the three poison mind. The kind of powerful medicine required to uproot this three-poison mind is wisdom. Once you manage to uproot this three-poison mind, then, life after life, there will be no need to go through these sufferings.

Whatever Buddhist practice you do – whether you sit and meditate, or recite a Buddhist prayer or make an offering of candles – the goal is to develop wisdom mind. If you're not aiming towards wisdom then no matter how it appears – even if you see someone sitting in a Buddhist temple practising, it

may appear that they are practising – appearance cannot show you if they are practising correctly or not. Real practice is to develop the wisdom mind. As long as you develop this wisdom mind then every form of practice that you do is Buddhist practice. There is no Buddhist practice that is absent of the wisdom mind.

This wisdom cannot arise by itself. This wisdom is also dependent on a cause. The cause of wisdom is calm abiding – shamatha meditation. If your mind is not calm, no matter what sort of practice you do, a disturbed mind is a chaotic mind, and this chaotic mind cannot understand what to adopt and what to abandon. The disturbed wandering mind's job is to make more mistakes, and to create more negative things.

We need to have wisdom to understand the reality of how things exist conventionally, in order to understand how things exist absolutely. The moment your mind is free from its chaotic state, you have the opportunity to realise, to cognise, the reality of how things exist. In this way, shamatha is not separate from the wisdom mind.

Buddhism is saying that although cause and result may appear in a different form, the reality is that cause and result are not separate. Neither are they one, because if they are one or separate then you fall into one of the two extremes – nihilism or anti-nihilism, that is, eternalism. If you think cause and result are the same, then when we have a result we still have a cause, and then that cause is going to be permanent which is eternalism. If you think cause and result are separate, then when a result arises, then the cause is no longer there, it disappears and becomes a kind of nihilism.

In Buddhism, we say cause and result are neither one nor separate. That's the reality. In that sense, shamatha meditation is the cause of developing wisdom, but when we achieve wisdom, shamatha is not gone. The qualities of shamatha itself are already there because when you realise the mind that stays, you won't get distracted. If there is no shamatha meditation then the moment you realise you are going to get distracted, and you remain in that state of understanding. It's a combination of realising conventional and absolute truth – that aspect we call wisdom mind. Then you stay in that state without wandering, without getting distracted – that aspect we call shamatha.

So that's shamatha and vipassana together. You cannot skip shamatha to get the vipassana. You can't avoid the body of the tree when you want to pick the apple, it is not going to happen. If we wish to have the fruit we should plant the seed to grow the main part of tree, that will germinate the fruit.

Just being aware of the importance of shamatha is not enough – we need to cultivate shamatha itself. The great Indian master Avalokiteshvara said that without causes and conditions, no matter how much effort you make you're not going to get any result. Some of us may lack knowledge of the soil, or how to plant things. You may put much effort into ploughing the soil and planting seed, but if you don't do in a proper way, all this effort will be wasted. So, if you sincerely want to have healthy crops you must have all the right conditions. Right conditions mean the right soil and the right seed. But just having these two is not enough, because it has to be the right season. If you are missing any one of these factors then the crop will not grow. It is like trying to grow a summer crop in the winter. If the crop only grows in the summer but you try to grow it in the winter, even with great effort, it is not going to happen. Once you know all these things about the seasons and the soil, there is no reason you will not be successful. Buddhists say there is nothing that exists independently by itself – everything is dependent and exists because of causes and conditions. For that reason, we can create dependent conditions that are going to have a result.

MAIN MEDITATION

Once these six preliminaries have been established, we come to the main practice of meditation. This is then followed by the concluding dedications.

To begin with, we think about the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we are unwell we generally don't have a clear idea about the nature of our illness and hence, we are unable to treat it. Left untreated our illness likely worsens. To avoid this, we seek the advice of a doctor who will diagnose our illness and based on this diagnosis, will treat it.

Initially the Buddha is like a doctor who knows our illness and is able to prescribe treatments.

All the Buddha's teachings can be likened to prescriptions. Some of us believe we can solve our problems by hearing teachings or reading books, but this alone will not cure our illness. It would be like seeing the doctor but failing to collect the medicine or take it. No matter how often we do this, without actually taking the medicine our illness will not be cured. In this way, we human beings believe that our unhappiness stems from not getting what we want –this is the simple view of things.

We have the expectation that if we have nice things we will be happy – we believe that things, rather than mind, will make us happy or unhappy. The reality, however, is that everything we experience as happiness or unhappiness is none other than our own mind. This is what the Buddha stated and it is up to us whether this is true for us or not. We need to contemplate, analyse and experiment. Through this process, we are going to realise that it is our mind that makes us happy or unhappy. From the point of view that this mind makes us unhappy, so this very mind is the cause of our illness. To overcome this sickness, we need to take the medicine.

The medicine we are referring to is the Seven Point Mind Training and includes loving kindness meditation, compassion meditation and bodhicitta meditation. The idea is that we constantly implement positive things in our mind and these positive things become our treatment. If we constantly treat our mind in this way, it will become healthier and free of suffering. This method is what we refer to as the Dharma and this is why we take refuge in the Dharma.

It is not always easy to do something positive as an individual, but if we work as a team, our efforts will be far more effective, a lot more will be achieved. This team we refer to as the sangha – a team who work together holding the right view, right intention and a desire to work together – this makes everyone's work easier.

In order to develop ourselves, we need to recognise these three important aspects – the guide, the path and the support. We reflect on these three first – this is the reason we recite the refuge prayer: 'We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha'. After this we establish correct motivation. We need to ask ourselves, are we doing this for ourselves or are we performing

these activities for the benefit of all beings? Either motivation is beneficial but a wish to help all sentient beings is far more powerful.

Once these preliminary aspects of the practice are completed we are ready for the main part of meditation.

This means that once we have all six conditions and have done the preparatory work of establishing correct motivation and taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the sangha, we prepare for the main meditation.

To start, we need to sit on a comfortable cushion or chair. Discomfort can distract the mind so it is important to be comfortable enough not to be distracted, but not so comfortable that we go to sleep. Buddhist meditation is training of the mind. If we sit on a cushion and fall asleep this does nothing for our mind, in the same way that attending the gym and falling asleep on the equipment would do nothing to improve our fitness.

SEVEN POINT YOGA POSTURE

Now we sit in the seven-point yoga posture. Try to sit in this posture, but if for some reason this is not possible use your mind to imagine yourself in this posture.

1. Cross legged full lotus posture

The diamond shape this posture creates symbolises the indestructible. The purpose of sitting is to defeat mental suffering. Never underestimate the extent to which this very mind is so experienced at harming us. In order to battle with this mind there are certain requirements. Firstly, we need the wisdom to be aware of how our minds work. Secondly, it is important to have commitment – without commitment we will never win. We need to understand that this enemy cannot harm us. We train to become indestructible, to have indestructible commitment so that no matter how difficult things get, we will never give up.

1. Placement of the hands

The hands are placed at the navel. This represents the need to be skilful through wisdom and not through force. The right hand is placed on top of the left with the thumbs held together just below the navel. The right hand symbolises method: that which makes things easier and becomes right method to avoid making mistakes. Mistakes arise when you act from your ignorance mind, rather than your wisdom mind. Whatever is done out of wisdom mind is correct, whatever is done out of ignorance mind is a mistake.

Accordingly, with wisdom mind, certain activities that are perceived as negative, such as lying, can become correct, where with ignorance mind, even telling the truth can be harmful to both yourself and others. These things are not black and white rules, they depend on the circumstances. This is similar to the way that with certain illnesses where a substance that is usually considered unhealthy may be given as a medicine. It depends on the type of illness; hence the circumstances determine what is healthy and what is not.

So, the right hand, representing method, is supported by the left, representing wisdom – method is supported by wisdom. The hands are placed just below the navel. The navel is not mentioned a great deal in the sutrayana but in the Vajrayana the body is talked about. When we are conceived in our mothers' wombs, the form starts at the navel. From this point the physical body is slowly constructed. When we place our hands at our navel, all our energy goes to our centre and acts to balance us.

1. Back posture

We sit in an upright posture. The reason for this is that in Buddhist science the mind does not exist independently – it is based on subtle air elements, which, in turn, depend on the vein channel. The channel is dependent on the physical body. So everything is linked, interconnected. An upright position helps these veins remain straight. With the veins straight, the circulation is helped to flow freely. In this way, the body supports the veins, the veins support the circulation, the circulation supports the air element, and the air element supports our mind, which gains more clarity. That is why it is important to maintain an upright position.

With the back in this upright position, the arms are held a little wide, resembling the wings of a bird. At first this position may not be easy or pleasant, it may be a little uncomfortable. This is because we are used to sitting in a lazier way, but eventually we will find this posture more comfortable than our usual lazy posture.

1. Shoulder position

The shoulders must be balanced, so we need to drop them and keep them relaxed.

1. Neck position

The neck is positioned slightly forward – it is said that if we are positioned too far backwards our eyes focus on bigger places and we become distracted, but likewise, if we focus too far forward, on small things, we may fall into dullness. In order to avoid this wandering or dull mind, the position is a little forward, with the mouth and chest more or less in line. We avoid being either too far backwards or too far forwards - this is the correct position.

1. The eyes

Here there are two objects, the outer object and the inner object. As beginners, we should train using the outer object – a flower, a statue or some other object. To use the outer object, the eyes need to be open. When you look at the object it is important that you look past the tip of the nose. So while you look at the object your eyes are neither widely open or completely closed. If our eyes are too widely open we may become distracted, if they are closed we may go to sleep, so neither is correct. They need to be half open, half closed – this avoids either the wandering or the sleepy mind.

If we meditate on the inner object, such as the breath, where we watch our inhaling and exhaling, this is not a visual object. It is a form, but not a visual form, so some suggest it can be done with closed eyes. But again, it is

important to avoid losing the object of meditation. If the eyes are closed, the mind must remain clear. So long as the meditation remains with the object, we are training and stabilising our minds. This is very important.

1. The mouth and breath

The mouth is held slightly open with the tip of the tongue resting on the roof of the mouth. In this position, the breath is normal. Breathing can affect the mind. At a gross level, breathing is the way we get oxygen into the body and so long as there is oxygen, we are alive. Without enough oxygen, we will fall unconscious and may even die. On the subtle level, the body has innumerable veins and these innumerable veins give rise to different states of mind. When breathing in an angry state of mind, the oxygen goes to certain channels of your body. When in a happy state of mind, the oxygen goes to different channels. In gross terms, we think that breathing is the same whether we are happy or angry, but Buddhist science states that different air elements go to different veins and create different thoughts.

For this reason, it is important that when we talk about Buddhist breathing meditation, we breathe more into the central channel, into that kind of vein. The mind and the air element are very closely linked while we are alive, so much so that the mind is sometimes referred to as the jockey and the air element the horse. We are always riding this horse, so if we breathe in the wrong way it is going to affect the mind. While meditating, it is important to constantly check whether we are breathing correctly or not.

Sometimes while meditating we become too focused on the object and this may stop our natural breathing pattern, which may cause some discomfort in the body. This discomfort will affect our minds. In order to relax our body, we need to breathe as normally as possible. The more relaxed we are, the longer we will be able to meditate – for this reason it is important to train in the seven yoga posture before we can train our mind.

Now we come to the main part of meditation.

It is important to think about the three types of mind – conceptual mind, non-conceptual mind and secondary mind.

Firstly, non-conceptual mind: This is the consciousness that can see things but is not able to explain these things, hence it is 'non-conceptual'.

Secondly, the conceptual mind: This mind sees the object and at the same time sees it as a flower or a cup or a house or a person. This mind recognises individual phenomena so is referred to as 'conceptual'.

Thirdly, the secondary mind: Based on the recognition of individual phenomena, another mind describes these phenomena as 'my cup' or 'he or she is my friend' and so on. This describing mind is neither the conceptual nor non-conceptual mind, it is the secondary mind.

Single pointed or shamatha meditation is one thing, analytical meditation is another.

When we are practising analytical meditation, we must use the secondary and conceptual minds, because these minds first identify the object and then research it. The conceptual mind cannot research, it can see, but it cannot go beyond that.

When we practise shamatha meditation we are not touching on our secondary mind at all. In shamatha meditation we use the non-conceptual mind which 'sees' the flower or statue and the conceptual mind which remembers it – we do not use the secondary mind.

So long as we remember the object and it remains clear in our mind, we are meditating. If we lose the object or picture, we are not meditating. As beginners, we should not expect to look at the object and maintain it clearly in our minds right from the beginning. The more we meditate, the more this clarity of mind naturally develops, the more clarity we have, the more clearly we see this object in our mind.

We need four conditions for meditation:

1. The object upon which we intend to meditate must be solid and not moving. A moving flame for example can cause distraction.
2. Our physical body must be solid and not moveable, as movement breaks the concentration. However, the instruction for the beginner is not to force this, it is recommended to focus on the correct posture but to move when we become uncomfortable. Once comfortable and relaxed again,

we return to the correct posture. As a beginner, we should take regular breaks within the session.

3. Not blinking is the third condition – but this is a hard one. For the beginner, there is not enough moisture in the eyes, so it is uncomfortable not to blink. The common point of view is that it is almost impossible to look at an object without blinking but from the uncommon point of view, there are many great beings who have managed to meditate for long periods without blinking.
4. The fourth condition is that we give 100% of our concentration to looking at the object, because if we are distracted we will not maintain the clarity of the object. If we concentrate half on the object and half on something else, we are not going to have clarity.

These points are all important in creating the right position for body and mind. When we create the right causes we will achieve the right results.

STAGES OF MEDITATION

1. This first stage is called ‘placement of the mind’.

This means to simply train our minds to reflect on that object in our mind - to let the mind and the object know each other.

1. The second stage is called ‘continual placement of mind’.

Just looking at the object is not enough. Now we take things a bit further and try to maintain our focus on the object. The mind we are training right now is used to being wild. This wild mind is not simply going to listen to us. In the beginning, it is important to apply gentle force, not harsh force, to bring our mind back to the object. When the mind is just watching the object in the beginning, it may feel some discomfort. After a while it relaxes, and the nature of this mind is that it now feels safe.

When training a wild animal, in the beginning the animal is going to get

frightened and agitated, thinking 'this person is going to hurt me'. So you send the message: 'I am not going to hurt you', and once the animal understands this, it relaxes. The same can be said for our wild minds. They think we cause them so much discomfort, when really it is the wild mind itself which causes the discomfort. What we are trying to do is to make the mind more comfortable. When our minds understand this, they relax. Once our minds are relaxed, without harsh force which will cause further agitation, the mind can be trained. When we are relaxed, we can achieve the natural state of mind. So there are three stages – first gentle force, then relaxation, then, we come into the natural state of the mind.

It is important to remember that establishing the clarity of the object is not so hard, but maintaining this clarity is more difficult. As soon as the mind wanders we lose clarity, so we need to apply a little force to stay with the object a bit longer – we call this continual placement of the mind.

1. The third stage is called 'repeated placement of the mind'.

While we are focused on the object, we need to be aware when our minds have wandered off somewhere else. The moment we are aware of this, we need not be disappointed or upset, as this is common to everyone. Think of the great masters and bodhisattvas who, at the beginning of their training, went through what we are going through now. Nothing is wrong with us, it is common that the mind will run away. At least now we are aware of this. Before, our minds constantly wandered without our awareness, but now we are aware how easy it is for the mind to wander. This realisation is enough, when we realise our mind is wandering we bring our minds back into focus, and we keep repeating this.

We cannot expect things to be perfect in the beginning. We need to repeat things hundreds of times before they are perfected. When we train in meditation we cannot expect to be good at it in a week or a month, unlike at the gross physical level where we may see results after a few weeks at the gym. The mind is far subtler and takes far longer to change. A week or a month is not long enough for us to say meditation is working or not working. If it were

easy it would not have taken the Buddha many eons to reach enlightenment. At the beginning, therefore, we must remember what we are dealing with. It is tremendously helpful to remember that to achieve enlightenment is a huge task, like climbing Mount Everest. Once we reach the summit we feel great success.

Before us, many great masters have achieved this, so why not us? We have the same opportunity, so step-by-step we progress, without force, without feeling discouragement when we fail. In the spiritual world, unlike in the ordinary world, failure teaches us what not to repeat. It is seen as a blessing. Every mistake is a teaching.

1. The fourth stage is called 'close placement of the mind'.

In this stage, 'close placement' means that when we get distracted, the moment we are aware of this, the mind comes back without being asked. Before this stage, we needed to put effort into bringing the mind back. It is like training a dog or a horse. Initially when they wander off, we need to put some effort into getting them back; but with training, just calling their name will get them to return. Likewise, in this stage, the moment we realise the mind has wandered, it comes back.

1. The fifth stage is called 'subduing placement of the mind'.

The subduing placement of mind inspires us to keep doing our best. While we do our best to progress our meditation, this untrained mind and this untrained body eventually become exhausted and refuse to listen – they want to stop. As ordinary beings, we take this as serious, as real, but in Buddhist terms we think of this as a state of mind. We become tired and exhausted due to lack of inspiration. Once re-inspired, our mind and body recover.

So, how do we inspire ourselves? Instead of focusing on our exhausted body and mind, we shift our focus to the advantages of meditation or to the great qualities attained through meditation by the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Knowing the value of meditation and the qualities it brings re-establishes

inspiration. This very inspiration subdues the mind that thinks it's tired or exhausted, so it is called the subduing placement of mind.

1. The sixth stage is called the 'taming placement of the mind'.

When we get physically tired or mentally exhausted and want to stop, we need to think: 'If I stop now, my mind is not going to rest, it is still going to be active and wandering all over the place and, consequently, it is going to become more negative'. We remember that the wandering mind is the door through which discursive thoughts can enter, causing us more disturbance. We think about the disadvantages of not meditating. Our mind has a powerful energy which, when left unchecked without meditation, can be like joining a criminal gang – a gang that causes harm to ourselves and others. The true criminals, however, are our individual minds – our anger, jealousy, ego and attachment minds. If we spy on our minds when we are not meditating, if we follow our minds, we see that the untrained mind will cause far more harm than the tiredness we feel right now. In this way, we rescue our minds and bring them back to the meditation. This is the taming placement of mind.

1. The seventh stage is 'perfectly calm placement of the mind'.

With training, eventually we reach the seventh stage of perfectly calm placement of the mind where we no longer have to consider the advantages of meditating or the disadvantages of not meditating. The moment the mind becomes distracted we just think: 'This is not healthy', and the mind instantly comes back.

We can follow this structure step by step. With this sequential instruction, we know what stage we are at. Without the correct sequential approach, we may think we are meditating but next year we don't know where we fit. This sequential approach allows us to know where we are and how far we need to progress.

Shamatha, or calm abiding, meditation is the foundation of all other meditations. If our minds are not stabilised we cannot progress on to other

things. The prime reason to train in calm abiding is to develop the wisdom mind. Wisdom cannot arise without a calm mind, so we first have to stabilise this mind. This clear mind, which comes from having the right focus, is not only the foundation, it is useful in everyday life, with whatever we do, whether science, business, academic work or medicine. These all require a clear mind. Every success comes from the calm state of mind. This is the main part of meditation.

Often, when we try to meditate, a lot of thoughts will still come into our minds and disturb us. Somehow, we can't retain the object of focus. If this occurs, rather than forcing the mind and creating more resistance and disturbance, we need to do something that brings more calm, such as breathing meditation. This breathing meditation – watching the inhalation and exhalation without expectation – relaxes the mind. When the mind is in this calm state, it is more able to return to more advanced meditation. So, one can alternate between formal object meditation and breathing to relax the mind.

When our mind is less influenced by disturbing emotions and afflictions, when our mind is free of these disturbances – we call this the calm mind. When this calm mind looks at phenomena it is going to see them differently because the mind is not agitated. This non-agitated mind is closer to the nature of phenomena, the nature of mind. This produces what we call the wisdom mind. Shamatha, or calm abiding, meditation is very important in creating this wisdom mind.

We don't need to follow all seven steps in each session. Firstly, we need to put effort into encouraging joy and inspiration in our meditation because this will make our meditation enjoyable. It is not a good idea to continue meditating until this joy runs out. If we do this, we risk forming a psychological barrier to our next meditation session. So we are instructed to stop meditating while we are still enjoying it. In this way, we form a positive psychological imprint on our mind and we will look forward to our next session. This is so important. Also, don't push our meditation sessions to the point where we have completely lost interest; this will form a negative mental imprint and we may lose interest in our next session.

So, we stop while we are still enjoying our meditation and then return to everyday activities. But we don't separate these activities from our meditation, we use these activities to train in concentration. This method integrates meditation with everyday life.

Shamatha influences us to really focus on what we are doing. This has great benefits. Firstly, we accomplish our tasks more quickly; secondly, we do a better job; and thirdly, we know clearly what steps we have taken so we don't have to endlessly repeat them. In everyday life, so often we do things and have to start all over again. If we have a distracted mind, we make little progress over time.

Don't separate shamatha from everyday life. When it is integrated with everyday life, we have a better chance of success and a greater quality outcome when we focus. This is the main part of meditation.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, we make a dedication.

We think three things:

- 'I am so fortunate to have this opportunity to meditate.
- 'Having this opportunity I should rejoice:
- 'Having this opportunity, I should not limit it. The more I do, the more I will benefit and the more I can contribute to helping others. In this way, may this meditation be beneficial for me and others and may I have more opportunity to practise in my life.'

This completes the meditation.

In summary, in the beginning, we establish the correct motivation, then we follow with the seven step yoga meditation. In the end, we rejoice in the action of meditation and wish that others will also have this opportunity. This completes the meditation and creates a positive personality.

When we get used to performing this activity to its completion, it becomes a habit. Once this habit is formed, fewer difficulties arise. Initially, we may

feel inspired to start but may not complete the activity. This is less to do with laziness than it is to do with messiness. The reason for the messiness is the constant stream of thoughts that we chase after: 'I will do this, I will do that'. We keep starting but never completing anything.

A person living an ordinary, messy life may have very little opportunity to tidy up his or her life. The idea here is to start with the preliminaries, progress to the main part and end with the completion. Once this habit is formed, we achieve a tidy personality. Once we have this tidy personality we can succeed in any field. Whatever we do has a much greater chance of success. So, whatever course we start, we should not stop until it is completed.

After setting these right conditions, we have to build the meditation. The first step is 'placement of the mind'. Try to train in the seven-point posture because this posture is symbolic. This correct seating affects our mind. All who have gained enlightenment in the past have done so in this posture. Once in the correct posture, in order to meditate, to train one's mind, the mind needs an object upon which to concentrate.

In Buddhism, the object of shamatha is all phenomena. There is not a single object that is unsuitable for meditation. This may seem contradictory. Previously it was stated that a moving object such as a flame is not the right object for meditation. The reason for this is that, as a beginner, our minds are so easily distracted that using a solid object initially is more useful. This can be likened to driving a car. When we are learning, it is better to avoid large powerful vehicles as there is a higher likelihood of having an accident. This is not to say that you will never drive a powerful vehicle. Once you are more expert and have more control, you can drive any vehicle. The same thing applies here. In the beginning, it is better to use a stable object of focus.

In the beginning when we look at the object, we find that we do not hold that object in our minds 100 per cent of the time. We may see it, but our mind is somewhere else, wandering, so we do not get the full picture. Partially we concentrate, partially we are distracted. So, the first thing we need to master is making sure the object is reflected in our minds – not for a long time initially, but clearly. Once we can see the object clearly and the mind is not wandering we have taken the first successful step and we can move on to

the next stage.

Just seeing the object clearly is not enough, we have to stabilise the object and stay with it longer, maybe progressing from a minute or two to ten or fifteen minutes. This is called 'continual placement'.

At this point we may be able to stay with the object for ten minutes but then the mind wanders again. Now we need to recognise that the mind is wandering and gently bring it back to the object again and again. We still have interest and the enthusiasm to meditate, but the mind reverts to old habits and wanders off so it must gently be brought back. This stage is called 'repeated placement'.

The next stage is 'close placement' where the more we try to bring the mind back from its wandering, the less it wanders. The moment we think of wandering, the mind comes back. This we call close placement.

With mind training we, as ordinary beings, can become exhausted and start thinking about stopping and avoiding meditation. At this point we must remind ourselves of the outcome of meditation. Think of the enlightened beings, of their wisdom, their knowledge and kindness – these, and all immeasurable qualities are a result of meditation. Without meditation, none of these qualities would exist so we need to think that, I, as an ordinary person, have the same great opportunity, the same potential to have all these immeasurable qualities. So why would I waste this opportunity? These thoughts inspire us and make it much easier to continue with meditation.

The next stage is that with inspiration we can meditate for longer, but then we get tired again. Now we remember that if we stop the meditation, our mind is still going to be active and more prone to wandering into negativity once out of meditation. Remember that this negativity brings me things I don't want, so instead of forcing or restricting the mind, we are protecting it. This is important to realise otherwise we may think: 'Oh, I am not good enough, I have to force myself'. This is the wrong attitude. The whole idea is to give love to ourselves, to protect ourselves from the harm done by the mind wandering into negative thoughts. Self-love means taking responsibility to protect ourselves. We are restricting ourselves simply to protect ourselves from negative thoughts. With this awareness, we bring our minds back in

much the same way as we would bring our child back if they were exposed to dangers such as water or fire. We do this not to restrict but to protect the child.

The nature of mind is always pure, but its temporary nature is deluded. This constant returning of the mind helps to reduce the temporary delusions. The more we free the delusion mind the more clarity we find. This clear mind is going to be aware, it will cognise how things exist, it will cognise its own nature. At this point we will understand the nature of phenomena.

But right now, we do not know the nature of phenomena. What I see and what you see is clouded by anger, jealousy and desire. We all see things differently among this confusion. Once we remove the delusions and the confusion, we all see the same thing. This is how it works.

VIPASSANA MEDITATION

Vipassana Meditation recognises the luminosity or clarity of mind. It abides in a state free from all extremes and develops unshakable understanding and conviction that the nature of the mind is inexpressible. From an illusory path to a transcendental path, with whatever motivation one might have, from mundane life to renunciation to liberation, you will still not get exactly what you are looking for. If you really want Buddhahood you really need bodhicitta mind. Before you jump into any practice, whether it is the four common foundations or refuge or anything, make sure your motivation is clear: 'I'm doing this to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings'. This will turn your practice into the right path and you will not be deceived, and you will have good and valid results.

'Valid' here means that it delivers what it promises. Our usual samsaric paths are invalid because they promise one thing but deliver us something else. For example, anger promises to defeat the other person who causes you trouble, but in the end anger defeats you. If we follow desire, it promises to give you whatever you want; in the end it takes away everything you want. Jealous mind promises to cause trouble to the person who challenges you, but it puts you in a miserable state. So really these deluded minds are traitors and you become the victim.

We need to create the right cause, and that is with the bodhicitta mind. Our everyday western culture encourages us to think: 'I want to do it my way'. In Dharma this doesn't work. In Dharma you need to practise according to the teaching you received from the teacher. That is why you need to find the right teacher. The authentic teacher needs to teach from the sutras and

shastras, then you can rely on that teacher to lead you in the right direction from samsara to nirvana.

A Dharma practitioner needs equally to value both mind and body, because they are both equally important. When we have physical problems with our bodies we follow the prescriptions of doctors, and when it comes to the mind we follow the instructions of the Dharma teacher. Instruction from the guru is the main guide to improve our minds' development.

Our motivation, then, is to 'attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings' and the commitment is 'to follow the exact instructions I received from the Dharma teacher'. Based on this motivation and commitment we talk about meditating on absolute bodhicitta.

The unborn luminosity nature of the mind is absolute bodhicitta. To develop this kind of awareness, we reflect on the following points. We all have an illusory mind that we think of as 'self' or 'I', 'me' or 'mine'. What kind of mechanism or substance causes us to have this sense that the illusory mind is reality? It arises because we perceive, we feel, through the five aggregates. The five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Let us take one of the five aggregates, the form aggregate. There are many types of forms. On the gross level there are five types of forms – that is, five physical objects of our experience.

1. Visual form that the eye conscious can see.

Then there is a form which eye consciousness cannot see, but ear consciousness can hear and that is:

1. Sound form.

Then there is a form that eye cannot see and ear and not hear, but nose can sense and that is:

1. Smell form.

Then there is another form where eye cannot see, ear cannot hear, nose cannot smell, but tongue can sense and that is:

1. Taste form.

Then there is a form that the others cannot sense, but the body can feel, and that is:

1. Touch form.

These forms arise due to karmic perception. When we do not analyse, we think they are real. When we think they are real, this leads to thinking this is 'me', this is 'I'. Based on this thinking, we develop the identity of a 'self' or 'I'. Really none of them is a 'self'; none of them is 'I'. So the object we grasp at as 'self' is baseless. It does not exist. If you investigate you will not find a self. So, why do we grasp at a self? Understanding that this arises from karmic perception helps us to know that grasping at a self creates a very deeply deluded mind. It takes time to unravel this karmic perception, because we have been holding on to this convoluted deluded mind since beginningless time.

The first thing we need to know is that grasping merely at a 'self' is the act of a deluded mind. We really need to confirm this in our understanding. We need to really confirm this as often as possible, all the time.

Come to know this grasping mind as a needy mind. If you know a needy person who is always demanding from you, you know that at some point that person should become more independent. You will need to be more firm with them, insisting that they not depend on you or rely on you or demand so much of you. If you hold that firmness, eventually that person can become more independent. So, too, our grasping mind is a needy mind. It is always demanding us to need to do this or need to do that. And that is the reason we are so tired. When we come to understand that this grasping at a self arises from a deeply deluded mind, we need to be firm in deciding not to follow the

demands of this deluded mind.

It is not through ignorant mind that we force this grasping of self out. It is through realising the nature of the self that we learn to distinguish what to abandon and what to follow.

It is possible to push out this grasping mind without knowing the true nature of the self. This is a religious way. We may think: 'Oh, self is no good,' and push that idea out. Another way of tackling the grasping mind is through philosophical reflection, investigating and identifying that we have a deeply deluded mind, and deciding to abandon it, all the while with awareness of the reasons why we need to do this.

If there is a self that exists, it can only exist by name, or as a physical body, or as a mind. There is no other way or possibility.

Name as self. Our names are given to us, or inherited, but not at time of birth. If we gave a name to ourselves when we were born it would be goo-goo gaga. If name is self, who are you when you are born? Because most people do not have a name before they were born, would you be a different person once you have been given a new name? Also, if some have multiple names, does it mean you are multiple selves? Names are quite easy to change, it may even seem a good idea to change names if you run into some trouble. But it does not work like that. Trouble will still catch up to you. Even if you call yourself Buddha it does not make you a buddha. A name is just a label to help others to identify who you are. It does not actually represent you or who we really are. Therefore, you don't have to grasp at a name as self.

Physical body as self. Our body is also a label or name. The body does not exist independently. Our body is a collection of flesh, blood, and bone which we label as our body. From the point of view of our past, present and future lives we have different bodies in the past and present and future. But what we did in the past will ripen in this life and what you do now will ripen in future. Our bodies are constantly changing, so our body is not the 'self'. In this way when you investigate from the crown to the toe, none of the parts are the 'self'.

Mind as self. Which mind is self? Past mind? Present mind? Future mind? The past mind no longer exists. The present mind changes or dies from

moment to moment, it never stays the same for a single moment. And the future mind is not here yet, so how can it be the 'self'?

In this way, we can conclude the concept of grasping at a permanent independent true 'self' is a mere illusion. A drunk person thinks that what he sees is reality, but what he sees is not the same as what the non-drunk person sees. Because of delusion and karma and defilements, we think there is a self. But if we remove the karma and defilements and investigate physically or mentally or by label, we will find there will be no such thing as a permanent independent true self. This is the correct way to investigate selflessness, without ending up grasping at nihilism. If you simply grasp at nihilism you may end up in lower realms of existence and even lose the motivation for liberation or enlightenment. It is important to not grasp at nihilism!

Thinking all this through, we end up with the conclusion that we want to be free of karma and defilements and free of grasping of a 'self'.

Logically we do not have valid evidence of a single being that created everything or a power that created everything. Neither is everything created merely by the four elements. All that you see – in inanimate and animate objects – is primarily the result of your karmic perception. If all that we see is truly existent then beings with totally different karma will see it as the same thing. What we humans see and how we perceive things, animals do not perceive in the same way, and how animals perceive things, we as humans do not perceive. For example, cows perceive grass as food, humans cannot perceive grass as food. If you look at it from the logical point of view, our perceptions are created by our defilements rather than something else. If you continue with all this logic you will not find any objective phenomena. All phenomena are mere perceptions of our delusion mind; we give labels to these perceptions. Besides that, there is nothing that independently exists.

We need to invest time to use this sort of logical mind to confirm these conclusions. We might not like these conclusions, but we need to accept the logical conclusion as it is a law of nature. It is like if you go to court for a crime and lose the court case. If the opposition has more valid evidence

and you don't have enough evidence, you have to accept the reality of the conclusion even if you don't like it. It is the same with the law of nature. Those things don't exist the way it appears. Due to our ignorance, we don't accept the law of nature; we think of things that do not exist as existent. I always say we should go along with nature. There is so much space in nature, so much logic there, so much freedom there. The moment we fight against valid correct logic, which is what we are doing when we are on the samsaric path, we will be defeated.

In this way, we have to establish objectlessness. The mind that is grasping at objects is like an illusion mind, it's like a dream mind. People think that if no things exist, why can we smell things; if nothing exists why then do we hear things; if no things exist why then are we feeling these things? These might be some of the reasons we bring to prove things exist objectively. If these are valid reasons then I would counter that with a question – in my dreams I can smell things and feel things and hear things; do those things that I dream exist too? If they do exist, can they be found after you wake up from the dream? There is nothing to show for it. It is entirely your mind, in the dualistic roles of subject and object. Then when you wake up, your mind is different; that mind is not going to see what you saw in the dream. This way our mind is like a dream, like an illusion.

Once you are aware of this and are able to purify this subject and object, what you have left is mere clarity, mere awareness. This mere awareness aspect we call alaya consciousness. Its nature, which is free from four extremes, is buddha nature.

At this point it may help if you study Seven Points of Mind Training. The text mentions how to meditate on absolute bodhicitta and the innate nature of the mind meaning the non-dualistic state of the mind, which is mere awareness.

Consider all things as dreamlike.

Examine the nature of unborn awareness.

Let even the antidote be freed in its place.

Rest in the alaya, the essence.

Between sessions be a conjurer of illusions.

The alaya, or mere awareness, is without grasping and without a wandering mind. Wandering here does not mean you are thinking where you are from; wandering means that the moment you grasp, there is an object, and then you have wandered away from mere awareness.

We need to look after what we have realised. This is the yogi's job. Most of us don't get any realisations, and many of us never look after the realisations we have, and that is why we never get success. We need to know what we as practitioners are looking for. Once we find what we are looking for then we need to look after it. That is the practice.

Once we experience mere awareness, the alaya consciousness aspect. This mere awareness also needs to realise it is free from all extremes.

Firstly, we free the dualistic mind and bring it into mere awareness state. But if you grasp at this mere awareness you will not realise absolute truth. Mere awareness is the mind and you need to investigate this mind. To investigate means you look for the cause that created this mere awareness. When you look for the cause you are not going to find any initial cause for this mere awareness. If something is unborn, it is not abiding anywhere or retained anywhere. If it is abiding somewhere it will have colour or shape in the body or outside the body or somewhere between. No matter where you look you are not going to find those causes or those qualities. So not finding it is finding the answer.

When you look for the absolute truth, the moment you find nothing, that is the moment you find absolute truth. And because there is no beginning, so too there is no middle and no cessation.

When we push too much it causes so much stress mentally and physically, and with all the pushing there is no joy and no comfort. When you find absolute truth, it brings relief. You realise there is nothing to grasp. Just let go of everything. We ordinarily hold so tightly onto everything we have and we have much stress. If we just let it go, we will have much less stress and things will happen naturally. This is not cultural or religious advice or advice from a particular point of view. After thorough investigation, we find that there is nothing absolute, that is why we can let go.

This is why we do not need to hope or fear. There is complete joy and

freedom. Once the yogis find a real place to meditate they can really enjoy their mind – so much that they just don't want to come out from the cave. There is a great sense of joy when you realise there is nothing to grasp. It completely relaxes the mind. The moment the mind relaxes, the body can feel the joy. It is almost like the body is a house and the mind is the tenant. If the tenant is tidy and calm, then the house can relax too.

We are not forcing it to relax, but through study we can begin to understand and accept the absolute truth. Based on this awareness, we can train the mind. Because we have the habit of grasping all the time, we need to take this medicine, in the form of this realisation, whenever we are grasping. The moment we bring this realisation to our mind it will relax the grasping mind. Whenever you are stressed, bring up this realisation. This is what we call practice. This is real practice. Keep doing this, then one day your mind will be more dominated by the realisation that you have gained, rather than by the ignorance controlling your mind. The ignorance did not disappear, but that very ignorance-dominated mind is transformed into a wisdom-dominated mind.

If you really look at what we want to achieve when we talk about bodhicitta mind and loving kindness, it is not different to what our anger or jealous mind also wants to achieve. But one method ultimately achieves it and the other method doesn't. For this reason we need to change or transform our minds, transform them from jealous mind to rejoicing mind, and transform them from anger mind into patient mind.

When you realise that mere awareness is absent of birth, absent of abiding, absent of death, when you realise that mere awareness is apart from these things, then meditate that there is nothing left to grasp. In a post-meditative state we may think: 'Oh, there is nothing there', and we may end up grasping at the idea that there is nothing there. This is not right. We also need to free our grasp on this nothingness, as it is created by the mind. There is no absolutely independently existent nothingness out there. You also need to be free from that.

In the end, all you experience is absolute truth, but there is nothing to explain it. That is the reason why there are no words to explain it. The real

absolute truth is not the object of the ordinary grasping mind. Many of us try to understand absolute truth with our ordinary mind, but it is not possible. It is like a child's mind trying to understand the experiences of an adult's mind. Similarly, a childlike samsaric mind is not going to fully understand the yogic experience of emptiness. The reason we study and contemplate is to understand that we need to be open to a different state of mind; we meditate to grow our minds.

Absolute truth is free from all extremes and all labels and supremely relaxed, because at that moment there is not going to be anything that can disturb your mind.

The object we meditate on, the method of meditation and the meditator is not going to be found to exist as we think or perceived. That is why we say it is beyond expression, or beyond conceptual thought.

In the post-meditative state, we don't block what we see; we think of what we see as the production of emptiness, because from emptiness everything appears. If things were absolutely existent, there would be no change. When we have space, it allows things to arise and move around. Space allows for a great degree of freedom. Similarly, because of emptiness, everything is possible. If there was no emptiness then nothing could change. If a bowl is only as we perceive it, it can't be used as anything else or for another purpose. So there is no innate identity within itself. With emptiness, you too can be transformed. It can relax you.

On one hand we don't like discipline, and on the other hand we are so inflexible and stubborn.

Without emptiness, a bowl can only be a bowl, but in reality it can be used and transformed into many other things. If someone takes this bowl and puts it into the garden, our conventional mind would make us upset and say: 'Who took Khenpo-la's bowl and put it into the garden?' Many things can make us upset, but it is really just our mental state which has the wrong perception. This mind training is not a cultural thing.

In the post-meditative state, everything is a manifestation of or display of emptiness. So let them arise. Let them arise. Let the drama play, there is no way we can stop it. Better to just let it be. If good things come, just enjoy

them, but don't cling to them. If bad things come don't be upset – just let them be. If we don't get involved we will not be disturbed. The moment you become involved is when you get disturbed. The trouble we face is created by this mind. We want a joyous mind, so we need to shape or design how our mind responds.

Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltzen (1147-1216) says the mind is not born in the beginning, does not abide in the middle and does not cease in the end. When you realise with your conceptual mind that the mind is not beginning and not abiding and not ceasing, then you are not in the emptiness state, because you are still grasping that concept. So ultimately you need to be free from even concepts. In the beginning we use concepts to free us from the concepts of being born, abiding, ceasing. Later we need to be free even from those concepts. That is Vipassana.

UNION OF SHAMATHA AND VIPASSANA

We have talked about shamatha meditation and vipassana. The third step is to meditate on the union of shamatha and vipassana. We have talked about shamatha individually and vipassana individually, but when we practise we cannot separate these two. How do we practise these two in union? How to realise that absolute truth is vipassana, and when you abide in that state is shamatha. If you don't have shamatha then your awareness is not going to last. However, if you have shamatha and no vipassana, then you have stability but no realisation.

In the union you need to have awareness and then you need to abide in the awareness state.

This is a very brief description of the union of shamatha and vipassana. What is important in that state is that you don't put any expectation or hope or anything. Whatever you experience just leave as it is. This will really relax your mind and body. This is very important. That is the union of the two. That is the common vision of experience.

GUIDED MEDITATION

First, it is always good to relax our body and mind.

Second, it is so important that we clearly think what the Buddha said or taught is absolutely true. The teachings of the Lord Buddha have all the guidance to achieve everything that we want. It is unmistakable guidance. What you see in the guidance is what you are going to get. This is the perfect object of refuge.

Third, the Dharma is a universal truth. It is not the same as other practices. With other practices, what you get will not be what is promised. With the Dharma, what you practice you will get. It is the result that is stated in the Dharma.

And the Sangha is very much based on the experience of the Buddha and the Dharma accordingly helps us grow spiritually.

This path turns an ordinary path into an extraordinary path; it turns an incorrect path into a correct path.

For an ordinary path to become transformed into an extraordinary path we need to cultivate bodhicitta mind. I must attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This bodhicitta mind is going to lead us to the greatest result, which is Buddhahood.

Based on this motivation, we need to start with loving kindness. Bring to your mind one person or many people, depending on your mental strength. From your heart, sincerely wish them a virtuous life (a virtuous life is the most comfortable life) and wish them to have the conditions to constantly engage in virtuous activities. From the depths of our hearts, sincerely wish them to have a virtuous life and to engage in virtuous activities. As this loving kindness

increases, when someone hurts you, see them as your beloved sick child. Instead of harmful thoughts, think of what you can do to help to comfort this sick child of yours. Instead of being discouraged, this increases your kindness towards others. When you are in that state you will have the strength to protect that person from all sorts of difficulties. This is compassion.

Then in the compassion state, you observe the self and others. We are just in a bad dream, but we don't realise it; we think it is real. The moment we become aware of this, all the suffering will disappear, it will not exist. Lacking awareness of this, we all suffer. This is the highest view of compassion. Now we must practise to attain Buddhahood. The main reason is, to attain enlightenment to wake other beings from the dream state. The faster you awaken from the dream the quicker you can resolve problems. This is wishing bodhicitta.

But mere wishing this is not enough. We have to implement it with every action that we perform. Every action that you perform must have the law of bodhicitta. In this way we are always giving (make sure we are with a Mahayana giving). We need to live an ethical life, we need to avoid getting a disturbed mind, and we need always to joyfully commit virtuous activities. We need to keep a virtuous state of mind and develop a creative mind, knowing what to adopt and what to abandon. Once we are mature enough, it is our responsibility to look after the younger ones, through giving and pleasant speech, through skilfully encouraging them, and through being a role model. We should bring them to full maturity as much as we do ourselves. Eventually when we are free of the concept of self and others and of the concept of right and wrong, we will have the opportunity to recognise the primordial luminosity of nature of mind. In that state everything is possible; nothing stands against another; that is the way it is. Everything we experience arises from this primordial nature state.

Through the practice of Dharma we will have this wonderful experience. But in order to reach this state, first we need to tame this monkey mind. In order to tame this mind we need to sit in a correct meditative posture. We should let our focus be on breathing to ease our thoughts. When we are relaxed enough mentally and physically we can introduce our mind to the

object of meditation. Then gradually we try to stabilise it and try to stay in this meditative state a bit longer. Then we try to stay longer in this state, and as our mind wanders, we recognise this; we bring our mind back to the present. Following that, noticing your mind wandering helps you come back to the present. The more we repeat these four stages, the more we establish stability of the mind.

Then, if at some point, you may become exhausted or lose interest, think about the greatness of all the buddhas and the masters, all of them born in this very mind. Think that: 'I am not going to waste this opportunity. I will use this precious mind to create the cause, create the great qualities, and through this try to inspire and to refocus on to the object to continuously meditate'.

Again, at some point, you will feel exhausted; you will grow tired and lose interest. At that point, you may think that if you stop you will be being kind to yourself. But actually it is not kind. As soon as we stop meditating our mind is back to being filled with samsaric thoughts. It suffers, and creates more negativity. We need again to try to pacify discouraging thoughts. We need to realise that it is better to stay in meditation than to stop. Through this effort, the next time you feel discouraged, with even the mere awareness of a distractive thought, you will be able to bring back your mind to perfectly close placement of the mind.

Through this procedure we can realise: 'how fortunate I am that this mind belongs to me'. You may want to keep it this way, until you realise you don't belong to this mind, that you are controlled by defilements. Then you can enjoy meditation for as long as you wish in single pointed state.

Next, continue to get used to the experience. You may be busy verbally or physically. But no matter how busy you are with activities, your mind is calm and focused and there is no longer a requirement to sit on a cushion or to sit in a meditative posture to meditate. You can meditate while you are standing, while you are eating, while you are talking. Just think about how much potential you have to train this mind.

Once we have detoxed this mind, dissolved this dualistic mind – the moment we dissolve the dualistic mind we will have realisation. That moment will help us confirm Nagarjuna's quotation 'Without this mind there is no

GUIDED MEDITATION

Enlightenment, there is no Buddha'. This authentic experience proves to ourselves that this quotation is an authentic shastra, and this shastra proves the authenticity of the sutras. This also proves the authenticity of the teachers. Experiencing these four authenticities cuts off all doubts.

This is why it is so important to be aware of the possibility that arises if we train the mind. It will bring us immense joy.

