

---

# The Middle Length Lamrim

༄༅། །ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་། །བྱང་སེམས་སྣོད་བའི་རིམ་པ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 September 2023

---

## Breathing meditation

We will do a short breathing meditation together. Engaging in breathing meditation is very beneficial at any time and is effective for immediately calming our mind, especially when it is very disturbed. The breathing meditation is particularly recommended for beginners because it is very easy to learn and practise. Since our breath has no colour or shape, when we focus on it there is less cause for our mind to become distracted. Therefore, if we direct our mental attention to our breathing in and out, we can easily settle down or put aside all the outgoing thoughts and rest the mind within us.

## Meditation posture

If possible, we should try to adopt the sitting posture of the seven features of the Vairocana Buddha. We should try to sit in the full lotus or **cross-legged posture** or in the half lotus posture (like the leg posture of Tara). Keep the **back of the body straight** and the **two hands** just below the navel in the gesture of meditative equipoise, with the tips of the two fingers joined together towards the navel – the tips of the fingers represent the vital point of bodhicitta, so joining them together will enhance love and compassion. Both **eyes** should not be widely open nor completely shut. Being completely shut can give the impression of a sort of dullness that is cascading or descending down.

The **head** should be slightly bent down but not too much. Both **shoulders** should rest evenly, neither one higher nor lower than the other. Both **arms** should be positioned slightly away from the sides of the body, leaving a little gap or space from each side allowing the wind to pass through, which prevents sweating from the arms. Then the **lips and teeth** should be kept in their natural position. The tip of the **tongue** should be resting against the palate which helps to prevent dribbling, thirst or a dry mouth, especially if you are doing meditation for a prolonged period. These features are useful for overcoming the two main obstacles or faults of meditation which are mental sinking or laxity and distraction or excitement.

## Breathing techniques

When engaging in the breathing meditation you should avoid the type of breathing that makes a noise which in Tibetan is called *lung dra dagpa-chen*. Rather, you should try to breathe in and out quietly so that you can't feel any sensation of inhaling and exhaling through your nostrils. You should try to breathe in and out evenly and not forcefully so that you are not panting, which in Tibetan is called *lung-ngampa*. So, you must try to breathe in and out gently or naturally and not wildly, which in Tibetan is called *lung gopa*.

Regarding your mental focus, you should just simply be aware or mindful of the breath coming in and going out through your nostrils, then just try to hold on to this awareness of inhaling and exhaling. To help maintain this awareness of breathing in and out, you can mentally count each cycle of inhaling and exhaling; one cycle being '1' and the next cycle being '2' and so on.

## Mind, body and 'I'

Meditation practice involves disciplining both the mind and body. So, choosing the correct sitting posture is a part of the preliminary practice that relates to the physical discipline necessary for the meditation practice. The fact that mental and physical wellbeing affect each other indicates an indispensable relationship between the mind and body. This is to say that a healthy mind will contribute to a healthy body and an unhealthy body will cause unhappiness in the mind.

It is important to know and think about the relationship between the mind and the body together with our self or the 'I', which is also a part of that relationship. Whether or not the 'I' is happy has a lot to do with our mood or our state of mind. It is important to ask ourselves, 'What is this 'I' that we all have within us? Where is it?' We can say that the 'I' is something that is imputed upon the psychophysical aggregates. The 'I' always wishes for happiness and does not want any suffering. If we think about it, the most important factor that predetermines whether the 'I' is happy or not is the type of mind that accompanies it.

As to the mind, it is not just one single type of mind, but the prevalence of many different types of minds. We can have a good or positive type of mind as well as a mind that is bad or negative. So, it is very important to utilise our own wisdom, our own sense of discrimination about these various states of mind that we generate and understand their impact on our lives.

## Correct thoughts to correct actions

If we observe closely, sometimes our actions are detrimental and harmful to other beings as well as to our own self, resulting in us later feeling guilt and regret. To correct our actions, we need to correct our mind. Generating harmful thoughts and emotions will only bring pain and suffering to ourselves and to others. These unwelcome thoughts and emotions arise due to certain objects. So, by disengaging our mind from those objects we can eliminate negative thoughts and emotions, at least temporarily, whereas the long-term remedy is to practise meditation. We can become more aware of the effects of anger for example, and the extent of the harm it directly causes us in terms of our mental and physical health, in addition to the effect it has on others.

## Overcoming anger

If we become aware and mindful of the shortcomings of anger we can prevent it from arising, or if it arises, we can make a conscious effort to not react. For example, if we are about to utter any harmful words out of anger, we could remind ourselves that 'this is not good, it will harm others and me also.' So, if we become more aware and cautious about anger, we can reduce its overall harm and damage. Likewise, the shortcomings of jealousy are suffering and pain and we need to be aware of it to apply a remedy.

---

---

As part of counteracting or deconstructing mental afflictions such as anger, we need to understand how they arise. Anger is based on perceiving an object as being undesirable; the object appears to be unpleasant prompting us to dislike and hate it.

Examining the main cause of why the object seems undesirable to our mind, neuroscientists have found that 95 percent is due to our own faulty mental perspective or our exaggeration of those perceived faults of the object, and only 5 percent is due to other factors. So, in view of this, we can understand the efficacy of meditation practice which is primarily about counteracting all afflictive emotions which are said to be the main source of suffering in our life.

We may know afflictive emotions such as anger, jealousy, pride and so forth are negative and destructive, but we tend not to make much of an effort to counteract them. So, we must engage in meditation to become more aware of the afflictive emotions and their harmful effects, and through this awareness we can make a more conscious effort to eliminate or at least manage them.

### **Overcoming attachment**

Attachment or desire is an afflictive emotion, but unlike anger and jealousy, its shortcomings are much harder to recognise because when we experience it, the objects appear as being desirable and attractive to our mind.

Once someone said to me that without attachment and desire in the mind, they can't see any pleasure and meaning in life. This is an honest statement reflecting the experience of most of us, such that our life mostly revolves around fulfilling our desires. Indeed, recognising the faults of desire and completely abandoning desire/attachment is very difficult. However, we can draw from our own experience of having strong or too much desire, the result of which can cause immense suffering and pain. Therefore, we must apply meditation to at least counter a strong or overwhelming desire/attachment. This would be very beneficial.

### **Benefits and purposes of meditation**

The Tibetan word for 'meditate' is *gom* which literally means to familiarise or habituate. When we engage in meditation practice, we must direct all our focus onto the meditation object and try to familiarise and habituate our mind with it. We must also keep our mind away from the influence of distracting thoughts and the afflictive emotions. This is how meditation trains our mind and counteracts mental afflictions such as anger, jealousy, desire or attachment and so forth. As a result, we will begin to experience a level of peace, happiness, joy and satisfaction which comes from within ourselves, without being associated with any of the mental afflictions. We will begin to appreciate and understand the true benefit of meditation practice and thought transformation. Following that, we will be more motivated to meditate, and the more meditation we do the more happiness and peace we will achieve.

We all seek physical and mental happiness, but we must know how to achieve it. If our happiness primarily depends on outer objects and factors, then we have very few choices.

It all depends on us, on our way of thinking and on our actions. So, whether we achieve happiness or not is in our own hands.

The experience of both happiness and suffering is derived from our mind which dictates to us what to do. Hence it is imperative that we recognise and control the mind that leads us. This is the purpose of engaging in the meditation practice.

We suffer as a consequence of being led by a mind lacking focus, being disturbed, agitated and misled by various conceptual thoughts and afflictive emotions relating to the objects and events of the past, present and future. Moreover, when our mind is embroiled in afflictive emotions or negative mental attitudes, there cannot be any calmness or stillness within us. So, meditation practice is about controlling and subduing the mind and enhancing within us more virtuous and wholesome states of mind.

Before we engage in the breathing meditation practice, it is important to first empty our mind of all extraneous and distracting thoughts, to the point where there are no objects, or nothing at all. If we let our mind completely rest and sit and do nothing, which is really not that hard if you think about it, we will experience ease in our mind.

As it is difficult to remain in such stillness for a long time, before our mind flips to outside objects, we need to start the breathing meditation at this point. Rather than chasing after any other objects, we must direct our mind to the meditation object, which is our incoming and outgoing breath.

In a sense, once we are accustomed to meditation practice it can serve as our true friend who can always comfort and support us. For example, even if we are alone at home, if our meditation practice is our companion, we won't feel lonely or restless. With the habituation of meditation, we can easily rest our mind on a virtuous object feeling relaxed, joyful and peaceful. On the other hand, if we lack practice in meditation or an ability to calm the mind, even if we are at home with nothing to do, we can become mentally agitated, anxious and busy.

Someone said to me that when he is at home with nothing to do, he becomes very anxious and restless. So, he finds going out is important. He said he becomes depressed and then when he goes out, outside things and people seem very unpleasant and depressing. So, meditation is important and beneficial to us, and we must apply it as much as possible to habituate ourselves with and abide in the virtuous states of mind.

*[Meditation]*

Thank you.

*[Tara Praises]*

*Transcript prepared by Judy Mayne  
Edit 1 by Bernii Wright  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**