
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། བྱུང་ལྡན་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུང་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

27 February 2018

As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice.

If our practice is accompanied by strong refuge and a strong bodhicitta motivation then, whatever study and practice that we do will definitely become a means to develop meditative concentration. That will then serve to further develop our wisdom, and thus enter onto the paths that ultimately lead to achieving enlightenment. This is how we can see the significance of the very basis of our practice. With that understanding we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[Tong-len meditation]

Based on the earlier motivation, we can now generate the specific motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

Generating such a motivation ensures that our practice is not tainted with a self-interest that stems from a self-cherishing mind.

Just as Buddhism emphasises the importance of overcoming a self-cherishing mind, so too do other traditions such as Christianity. They also seem to recognise self-cherishing as a fault. In the Christian faith, for example, an antidote to overcome the self-cherishing mind can be the mind that generates single-pointed devotion and faith in God. When an individual places their complete faith in God and generates the thought, 'Whatever I experience is in God's hands', then the mind of self-cherishing or self-importance is definitely nullified. I see this as being a very significant point.

Furthermore, just like Buddhism, a core practice for Christian monks and nuns seems to be the practice of having fewer desires and feeling contentment. That is a practice that they actually engage in. This practice also comes from having strong faith and reliance on God. When they truly generate the mind, 'Whatever I experience is by the grace of God, and I entrust everything unto God', this frame of mind definitely reduces personal desires, and enables them to practise contentment.

The equivalent attitude in our tradition is to have strong faith and conviction in the law of karma and its effects. If we develop a strong conviction in the incontrovertibility of karma, we will be able to generate a state of mind that completely relies on karma. Without being too concerned with our immediate needs and immediate gratifications, we will be able to rely upon the consolation that, 'Whatever karma that I've created in the past is what shapes my present, and whatever karma I create now

will shape my future'. With that understanding we will not be swayed too much by desires, and we will be able to practise contentment as well. Furthermore, developing a strong faith and conviction in karma will also definitely serve as a means to overcome the self-interest which is based on the self-cherishing mind. So all virtues - i.e. purifying negative karmas and accumulating merit - are dependent on having a strong faith and conviction in karma. This is really a very significant impetus for personal practice.

To further contemplate how practising morality is dependent on having a good understanding of, and a strong conviction in karma and its effects, consider the example of the non-virtue of killing. The non-virtue of killing is a negativity and the result of any negative action is definitely going to be suffering. Karma is incontrovertible and unmistakable - the effect of negativity is definitely suffering. Likewise, shunning negative deeds such as killing and so forth is a virtue, so the results will definitely be good, positive results.

At the very beginning of his teachings on morality the Buddha said, 'avoid killing'. This is based on the natural consequence that killing is a negative act that brings about a suffering result. Practising the opposite of that will bring a positive result. With the conviction that karma is definite and incontrovertible, one will naturally and willingly avoid creating negativities such as killing and so forth, and adopt virtue. Without that strong faith and conviction in karma, one will not hesitate to engage in negativities. So just as faith plays a most important role for practitioners of other faiths such as Christianity, so too faith in karma is an essential element of Buddhist practice.

Other faiths such as Christianity also practise ethics or morality, such as the avoidance of killing and so forth, as the basis of their practice. However, while the basic practice is the same, the approach is slightly different. While both may be based on faith, in the Christian tradition for example, the practice of morality is based on the words of God. So, following the practice of morality is mainly based on faith in the words of God.

In our tradition, there is a distinction between those of sharp faculty and those of dull faculty. The practice of those of dull faculty is mainly based on faith. Those of sharp faculty however, don't base their practice merely on the words they hear. Rather, they investigate the meaning of those words, and use reasoning to verify whether what has been taught is valid or not. This is a unique presentation of the Buddhist tradition.

A practitioner who is of a sharp faculty will use reasoning and logic based on the words presented by the Buddha, for example, to further investigate and test whether they withstand reason and logic. They follow the process of first hearing the words or the explanation, then thinking about it, and finally meditating on the meaning of those words. Through this thorough investigation they develop complete conviction in the teachings of the Buddha. Then they are said to have developed an indestructible faith that is based on reasoning. The wisdom that is based on this kind of investigation is very sound.

This process of only accepting things through reasoning and logic is very useful in everyday life situations as well. We should not immediately believe or accept what someone says, but rather use our own intelligence and wisdom based on reasoning to investigate whether what they are presenting is true or not. If it withstands analysis and is based on sound reasoning then we can accept it. That is not to say that we don't seek advice or listen to what others have to say. The main point is to not blindly follow what others say without using our own intelligence and wisdom to ascertain whether it is valid or not. Without that intelligence and wisdom, we could easily be misled.

Therefore, as I regularly emphasise, particularly to the younger generation, really pay heed to the importance of investigating and reasoning. Whatever you engage in, check what the results will be. If there are positive results then engage in that activity; if there will be negative consequences, then avoid engaging in that. That is the best way to proceed, even with worldly activities.

We need to ensure that we are using our wisdom to further enhance and enrich that wisdom. If we adopt faulty reasoning, then our intelligence and wisdom will only become duller and duller, and then we will not be able to make proper distinctions between what is right and what is wrong. If, however, we adopt the practice of sharpening our intelligence and wisdom, then they can only become better and better. That is how to train in wisdom.

Otherwise we may fall victim to being permanently consumed by doubts and not able to achieve anything of significance in life. We often find people hesitating between, 'Should I do this?', or 'Should I do that?', and always lingering in doubt. Then they always have to resort to finding out by asking someone else. If the other person is a reliable source then the advice may provide some consolation. If, however, that person is not a reliable source, then they will fall victim to bad advice.

However, if we use our faculties of wisdom and intelligence then that will ensure that whatever we do will be based on sound reasoning from our own side. Then, without hesitation we will be able to decide what to do. Decision making is easier for those who are habituated to making decisions based on sound reasoning and logic and proper investigation. Whenever something comes up, they will be able to decide what to do. The analogy for those who are always in constant doubt, having qualms in two directions, is that just as you would not be able to sew with a two-headed needle, you will not be able to achieve anything when you have doubts in your mind.

TRAINING IN THE PRECEPT OF THE MIND

Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance (cont.)

The commentary reads:

An amount of merits that a Bodhisattva with clairvoyant power can accumulate within a day and night, for a Bodhisattva without clairvoyant power won't be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. This also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.

The significant point here is that *this also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.*

On the basis of this reason, one should exert effort in cultivating clairvoyant power to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood because clairvoyant power enables one to quickly gather the two accumulations.

As presented last week, the means to achieve Buddhahood quickly is dependent on having developed higher perception or clairvoyance. That being the case, it is emphasised here that *one should exert oneself in cultivating the clairvoyant power as a way to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood.* The reasoning is that having clairvoyant power will enable one to accumulate the two accumulations of merit and wisdom *quickly.*

As the commentary further explains:

Moreover, one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power, ...

Of course, *effort* here refers to the particular type of effort which is usually translated as 'joyous effort'. Through seeing the benefits of clairvoyance, we need to develop a joyful effort to achieve those benefits. Thus, *one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power.* The emphasis here is that it is not any kind of effort that is required to achieve the six types of clairvoyant power; a really persistent and strong effort is required.

Then the commentary further concludes:

... it is not something achievable by a lazy person, thus one needs to be enthusiastic and generate effort.

Again, the specific effort described here is joyous effort. The definition of joyous effort is having joy in engaging in virtue. That joyous effort, or what is translated here as enthusiasm, is deemed to be essential for engaging in virtue. It means having joy in engaging in virtue. Anyone who does not find joy in engaging in virtue can thus be defined as *a lazy person.* In fact, following the afflicted minds of desire and so forth is said to be a form of laziness! This is my personal definition. If the definition of enthusiasm is to joyfully engage in virtue, then the opposite would also be true; engaging in non-virtue joyfully is a form of laziness.

Going further into the commentary:

Now, it is said in the verse 37, 'Will accomplish higher perception, Through effort ...' With reference to that if you ask, 'Applying effort into what will bring about clairvoyant power?'

This hypothetical question is raised to introduce the next verse, which reads:

38. *Without the attainment of calm abiding,
Higher perception will not occur.
Therefore make repeated effort
To accomplish calm abiding.*

Then the commentary further clarifies the nature of the clairvoyance that is being presented here:

This is not necessary in the case of a little bit of clairvoyance arising naturally by birth or through some power of substance and mantras or just an ability to remember the life (the immediate past or future lives), ...

This type of limited clairvoyance is not the clairvoyance that is being referred to in verse 38.

There are instances of minimal clairvoyance that arise through some power of substance or mantra. One can use some substances to achieve some level of clairvoyance; also the recitation of mantras and so forth can bring about a certain level of clairvoyance. However, that is not the clairvoyance which is being referred to here.

As the commentary further explains:

... but in the case of a special clairvoyant power arising through the force of meditation, ...

The *special type of clairvoyant power* referred to here arises *through the force of meditation*. This relates back to the lines of the verse *Without the attainment of calm abiding, Higher perception will not occur*.

The commentary continues:

... without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance.

This kind of vast clairvoyance is quite different to the limited clairvoyance that was presented earlier. The point is that *without calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance*. It is this specific type of clairvoyance that is attained in the higher states.

The commentary then cites another text:

In another words, it is said that it is not a clairvoyance if the actual state (samadhi or meditative concentration) is not attained.

Then further, from another text:

It is also said that having attained the thoroughly pure level of the fourth meditative concentration, one will be able to hold a non-conceptual exalted wisdom, and abide in the object, and as a result will attain the supreme power of miracles.

What is being explained here is that if one does not attain *the meditative concentration of the fourth level*, then one cannot actually attain the vast power of clairvoyance. In order to attain that *fourth meditative concentration*, one has to firstly achieve calm abiding (also translated as mental serenity). So these two quotations are reiterating the point that without attaining the higher *meditative concentrations of the fourth level concentration*, one cannot achieve the vast power of clairvoyance.

The commentary further explains:

Due to this reason one needs to make repeated effort in the nine means of mental abiding in order to accomplish calm abiding.

Then here is a quotation from *Aryasura*:

Aryasura said,

With an unceasing yoga,
Make effort to achieve meditative concentration.
If one takes a break again and again,
Just like using a fire stick, one cannot be successful.

Here *yoga* relates to meditative stabilisation. The real meaning of 'yogi' refers to someone who endeavours to abide in perfect virtue. As I explained earlier, when someone earnestly takes to heart the practice of, for example, avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues then to that extent they are a yogi. Of course, depending on the level of practice, there are different

types of yogis. In any case, here *unceasing yoga* relates to meditative stabilisation.

The *meditative concentration* in the second line can be related to actual calm abiding itself.

What is being explained here is that in order to achieve the meditative concentration of calm abiding, there needs to be *unceasing* or consistent meditation. *Unceasing* means a consistent practice of meditation. In order to achieve calm abiding, the concentration on the chosen object should also be unwavering.

The third line, *if one takes a break again and again*, explains that if one takes long breaks while attempting to engage in meditation to achieve calm abiding or meditative concentration, then one would not be able to achieve that meditative concentration.

The analogy is *just like with a fire stick*. In order to create fire from fire sticks you need to rub them together until the friction generates enough heat to create a fire. Of course, you won't be able to start a fire if you constantly take a break from rubbing the sticks. It has to be sustained, continuous friction.

The aborigines used this technique to generate fire. I've also heard that bushfires can sometimes start when strong winds cause branches of trees to rub against each other and the friction then causes sparks. The main point is that you can't successfully start a fire using fire sticks if you keep taking breaks.

In a similar fashion, the way of yoga too should not be given up until achieving its goal.

Of course, this doesn't mean one doesn't take any breaks, such as eating or sleeping. It mainly refers to consistently practising meditation.

Calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy

Here we return to the following point:

... but in the case of a special clairvoyant power arising through the force of meditation, without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance.

It is said that contemplating the benefits of achieving pliancy will be a catalyst to really want to develop calm abiding. This is one way to understand it.

In order to achieve calm abiding, one needs to go through the nine different stages of the development of meditative concentration. The Tibetan word *ting-nge-dzin* is translated here as meditative concentration. So, firstly we need to understand what meditative concentration is. What is the nature of the meditative concentration that we are attempting to develop? How do we define that?

As I've explained many, many times, meditative concentration is to be understood as having two main attributes.

The first is a single-pointed focus on the meditative object with an unwavering mind, i.e. a mind not distracted by any disturbing conceptions.

The second attribute of meditative concentration is that it is a clear and lucid mind that is able to focus on the object with intensity. These attributes apply to the mind of

meditative concentration itself, as explained in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.

Thus, meditative concentration is defined as the combination of an unwavering single-pointed focus on the object, accompanied with a clear and lucid state of mind.

The conditions of mindfulness and introspection that are necessary to maintain that concentration will be explained in detail later. However, for the purpose of explaining meditative concentration it is necessary to understand that one needs to have mindfulness in order to maintain a clear, lucid and intense focus on the object. As explained in the teachings, the mind should not be dull, and the focus should not be unclear or hazy. Rather, there needs to be intensity to the focus and the object needs to appear to a clear and lucid mind. These are the main attributes for developing meditative concentration.

When one attains that single-pointed focus of unwavering concentration on the object for as long as one wishes, then one attains what is called mental pliancy. As one develops steady and single-pointed concentration on the object, one starts to experience a mental bliss. At that time, the mental defects that cause hesitation in pursuing the focus on a virtuous object are overcome, and are replaced with a feeling of bliss as one focuses on the object. The mind becomes very serviceable and one is able to focus on the object and remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes. When one attains that ability to focus on the object for as long as one wishes without any mental defects being present, then that is when one has attained mental pliancy.

Attaining mental pliancy then induces what is known as physical pliancy. This is a state where one has overcome the physical defects of unwillingness and weariness that one experiences when focusing on an object to develop meditative concentration. When all physical defects are removed and replaced with a physical serviceability that enables one to maintain the physical posture to focus on the object for as long as one wishes, then one experiences a physical bliss, and that is where one attains physical pliancy. More specifically, when one attains physical serviceability by overcoming physical defects, then one attains physical pliancy. At that stage, one has attained both mental and physical pliancy, which enables one to remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes.

Having attained mental and physical pliancy through developing mental and physical serviceability, one is able to remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes.

Within meditative equipoise, one further enhances one's meditative concentration, and at a certain point the winds within one's body become serviceable, flowing very easily throughout one's body. When the physical body is pervaded with the wind energy, it induces an extraordinary physical bliss which then in turn induces an extraordinary mental bliss. So based on mental and physical pliancy one now attains physical and mental bliss.

One attains calm abiding when one's concentration is combined with that physical and mental bliss that becomes very firm and stable, without any disturbance whatsoever.

Therefore, calm abiding is attained by developing meditative concentration to the point where extraordinary mental and physical pliancy is developed, which in turn induces physical and mental bliss. When that is fully attained, then one attains calm abiding. Obviously, calm abiding is not easily attained.

This explains the passage *without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy*.

How to train in calm abiding

We can leave this for our next session.

In order to cover this topic, it would be good to refer to the lam-rim teachings, particularly *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hands*, which has a very clear explanation. If you have that text, it would be good to refer to it, and other sources mentioned in the past. Relating these teachings to the great treatises will enhance your understanding. We can't expect to gain a comprehensive understanding of a subject from just two lines of explanation.

The Tibetan term for calm abiding *zhi gnas* has two syllables *zhi* and *gnas*.

The word *zhi* literally means 'calm' or 'peaceful', which is a reference to a calm or peaceful state of mind that is not affected by internal and external distractions. When the mind is withdrawn from all of the external distractions along with the internal distractions of the disturbing conceptual thoughts, then it becomes calm. The word *gnas* literally means 'abide' which refers to abiding in that calm or peaceful state.

To abide calmly just by focusing inward is, in itself, not a great achievement. It needs to be combined with profound meditative concentration to make it most beneficial.

In contrast to the bliss that can be found in meditative concentration, we seek happiness in the worldly context by letting our minds become completely focused on, and immersed in external distractions. That is how we normally seek happiness. In that instance, the mind is focused one hundred percent on disturbing conceptions and external distractions. Just imagine the sense of rest and relief from that very distracted, busy, agitated state of mind, when that outward focus is reversed and the mind is one hundred percent focused inwardly, free from those disturbing conceptions and external distractions.

By reasoning in this way, we can see the relief it brings when our mind is inwardly focused one hundred percent of the time. The longer the duration of that inner focus, the greater the calmness and serenity we will experience. Even though we are attempting to achieve the ultimate states of meditative concentration and serenity, making an attempt to focus inwardly even for a few moments will be really beneficial. Even though it might be quite short-lived and temporary, it nevertheless brings a real sense of relief.

As mentioned earlier, when the mind is one hundred percent focused on disturbing conceptions and external distractions, then there is really no opportunity for the mind to be peaceful and happy. A true sense of happiness cannot be experienced in that way, because the mind is completely consumed by internal and external distractions. But, if we were to focus inwardly by five

percent, there will be five percent relief! If we focus inwardly ten percent, twenty or fifty percent, then to that extent there will be a greater sense of happiness. Of course, a one hundred percent inner focus would mean being relieved from all of the agonies which are associated with the completely distracted and agitated state of mind.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives us practical advice about this. He says that if we make a genuine attempt to turn fifty percent of our focus inward, then there will be benefit to that degree. At the same time, we can also focus on external matters albeit external distractions. Indeed, this is something that we can see from our own experience. I'm not exaggerating here. Reason and logic show us that if our mind is completely distracted outwardly and swayed by the disturbing conceptions, then no matter how much external wealth and money we may have, it will not be a source of genuine happiness. These are points to carefully consider.

Those who are really interested, and who take up the mental training of meditation practice will see its value as a way of developing this inner focus in order to achieve real peace and happiness, and as a way of alleviating mental agonies and sufferings.

Those who have no interest in or understanding of this mental training won't be able to make the connection between the source of their problems, i.e. external distractions, and their mental agony. I hear this from people who come up to me. I don't know them but they come and confide in me saying that their business is going well and everything is going well, but still they are not really content or happy within. They ask me 'What could it be? What could be going wrong?' Of course, without some preliminary understanding of the meditation practice, it wouldn't be appropriate or the right place to tell them that it is because their mind is completely distracted outwardly. They may not be able to relate to that right away. However, it seems that they have an experience of feeling that something is not right, that the wealth and so forth that they believed would bring happiness has not done so. So they begin to question that.

I have many such stories of encounters with people who I meet in my trips outside. I used to go to Southland occasionally and have a coffee. Nearby there was a fruit shop, and when I sat down for a coffee the owner would come up and greet me saying, 'Hello, how are you?'. On one occasion, he came up as usual, and when I asked him as usual, 'Oh, are you well?', he didn't have an immediate response. He waved his hands about and said, 'Things are not going so well'. When I asked him, 'How's your business going?' he said, 'Oh, business is going quite fine'. Then he said, 'But, I would rather be like you!' He must have seen me always smiling in a joyful and happy state, and he seemed to relate to that when he said, 'I want to be like you'.

Here was a situation where someone had external wealth and so forth, looked at someone who doesn't have such wealth and saw that they were happier. This goes to show how our state of mind and our attitudes are really dependent on our state of mind and what we define as being happy and joyful.

The main point I'm emphasising here is that if you pay attention to developing a more stable, more focused and more concentrated mind, then that in turn will induce a happier state of mind. It also has a positive effect on your surroundings, and your immediate relations such as your partner or your children, or your relatives and even your colleagues. So, your state of mind can definitely have a positive effect on others as well.

This is a way to encourage ourselves to pay attention to the benefits of practising meditating.

This also reminds me of the story of the person who came to meditation sessions, despite their partner not being all that keen or encouraging. They did some meditation for a while, but then lapsed and stopped attending the meditation sessions. Then their partner started to say, 'Oh you had better go back to meditation! You definitely should go again!' After seeing the transformation, they started encouraging their partner to go back to the meditation sessions.

There are those who have gone to Dharamsala to listen to teachings and practise, and whose parents had reacted with horror thinking, 'Oh, our child has become crazy and is following a strange cult!'. Initially they were not at all pleased, but when the children came back and they saw the transformation, and how calm and peaceful their children have become, the parents were really happy and said, 'Oh, it's been good for you. You should go back to your teachers and learn more!'.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version

© Tara Institute