

---

# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

༄༅། རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མ་བཟུགས་སྟོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 March 2018

---

Based on the motivation that we generated while reciting the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our regular meditation.

The way to incorporate refuge and the bodhicitta motivation when we recite the prayer is to visualise the Buddha Shakyamuni in the space before us, and then develop a heartfelt conviction that the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha have the complete capability to protect us from the fears of the lower realms and cyclic existence in general. Having generated a sense of fear and disgust with the sufferings of cyclic existence and developed an urgent wish to be free from samsara, we rely entirely on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha who have the unique ability to free us from our suffering.

With that conviction in mind, and having taken refuge in the Three Jewels one engages in the trainings of the paths and grounds to achieve enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings from the misery and sufferings of cyclic existence, and place them in the state of ultimate joy and happiness.

We can now engage in our meditation practice with the intention that ultimately it is for the purpose to liberate all sentient beings.

## *Tong-len meditation*

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings with the same intention: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Indeed, just the mere act of generating this motivation is a really worthwhile practice. As we familiarise ourselves with setting the right motivation before engaging in practise, we develop the good habit of ensuring that we have a positive mind before we engage in any activity. As explained in the teachings, the mind is the forerunner of all activity, so if our state of mind or thought prior to engaging in any activity is virtuous and positive then there is no question that whatever activity we engage in will also be positive, and of benefit to others. That will be incredibly meaningful.

In fact, this is a great instruction. Our mind precedes every activity we engage in, so if we generate the mind wishing to benefit others, then that will ensure that whatever activity we engage in will not be non-virtuous and negative.

The giving and taking practice is a pivotal practice to enhance love and compassion within our hearts. More specifically, the giving practice enhances our love for sentient beings by giving happiness to those who are deprived of happiness. The practice of taking enhances our compassion by taking upon ourselves all the unwanted sufferings of sentient beings.

As we become more and more familiar with this practice, we reach a heightened or perfected level of love and compassion for others. At that stage, as soon as we see any

living being who is deprived of happiness, we will spontaneously and uncontrollably develop a strong wish for them to be endowed with happiness, and as soon as we see any beings suffering, we will not be able to bear that and develop a compelling, spontaneous wish for them to be free from their suffering. When that sentiment is developed further, we will inevitably come to a point where it is not enough to merely wish them to be endowed with happiness and free from suffering. Rather we must take the personal responsibility to actively engage in placing other sentient beings in happiness and free them from all suffering. When we reach the point of taking on this personal responsibility, then the *tong-len* practice becomes particularly relevant and fruitful.

When we really contemplate the necessity and value of love and compassion it is quite unfathomable – the benefits of love and compassion are incredible. One of the simplest methods of generating love and compassion is relating our own situation to that of all other sentient beings. Just as we wish to be happy and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering, so too all other living beings also wish to be happy and free from all suffering. As we contemplate this further we realise that out of our wish to avoid any unhappiness, we will not intentionally cause ourselves any suffering. Of course, in a state of extreme anger or frustration, if we are not in our right senses we might harm ourselves or place ourselves in situations where others may harm us. However, naturally and instinctively we have no intention to harm ourselves, because we hold ourselves most dear and precious. So we instinctively do everything possible to make ourselves happy and to release ourselves from any suffering.

When we contemplate the fact that all other beings are in exactly the same situation, then that will instil the understanding that it is right and befitting to wish other sentient beings happiness and to be free from suffering. That natural pursuit is something that we all share. Having contemplated in this way and genuinely wished for others to be happy we then contribute in every possible way to their happiness; having wished others to be free from suffering we then contribute in every possible way to freeing others from suffering.

On a practical level, we can see how these sentiments will definitely contribute to bringing about world peace – a world in which people are free from harming each other and free from conflict and distress. The same sentiments also contribute to harmony and goodness at a national level. Even in the relationship between two people, a good mutual relationship is really based on a mutual sense of real care and concern, wanting the other to be happy and be free from suffering. So, we can see the importance of these sentiments at all levels.

This is quite manageable, as we already possess the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. It is not as if we have to search for it elsewhere, because we already have the basis of love and compassion within us. We may have to cultivate and practise developing some other qualities to gain realisations, however we all already have the basis of love and compassion within ourselves right now.

So it is a matter of really cherishing and protecting that. As I regularly share with you, it is much more practical to develop what we already have, rather than trying to acquire something which appears to be much grander yet not within our reach right now. Why try to go after something grander

while neglecting the fundamental basis of the good qualities of love and compassion that we already have?

For example, it may not be within our reach right now to develop miraculous powers or clairvoyance. If we think that we have to develop those powers right away, we will only tire ourselves out. The main point is that neglecting to cultivate the essential qualities of love and compassion that we already have and aiming for something higher and grander is a fault. Many teachings emphasise this point as being where we fall short in our practice.

We definitely do not lack objects to focus on to generate compassion in our hearts. Just in the past few days there has been a lot of devastation as a result of bushfires, and the people who are affected are definitely in need of a lot of compassion. Around twenty years ago I stayed in that area for about two weeks. It was very different in those days compared to what it is like now. The main point is that we are not deprived of objects of compassion. When we look around, there are so many who are deprived of happiness and experiencing great suffering. By focusing on those who are in these pitiful states we can, on a very basic level, understand their plight, and then on the basis of that further develop compassion and love for them.

Even though we are not deprived of objects of compassion, we might not readily develop love and compassion for those who we feel some hostility towards; i.e. a difficult person or someone who we consider an enemy. Because of our unruly mind, we might even feel the opposite, wishing them calamity and mishap, and being glad when they are suffering and deprived of happiness. This is, of course, due to our unruly mind. Leaving that aside, even if we can't immediately practise love and compassion for such people, there are still so many others we can focus on as objects of our love and compassion.

The stronger our sense of not being able to bear the sufferings that others are undergoing and not being able to bear seeing their lack of happiness, the stronger our wish to benefit and help others will be. This is how our actual practice of helping and benefiting others develops from the sentiment of not being able to bear witnessing their suffering and seeing them deprived of happiness.

### How to train in calm abiding

#### ***Relying on favourable conditions for calm abiding*** CULTIVATING THE PREREQUISITES FOR MENTAL QUIESCENCE (CONT.)

In our last session we left off at the point of the favourable conditions needed for calm abiding. This is based on the following verse in the root text:

39. *While the conditions for calm abiding  
Are incomplete, meditative stabilization  
Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates  
Strenuously for thousands of years.*

This verse stresses the importance of finding the required conditions to attain calm abiding.

The commentary on *The Lamp for the Path* says:

There are four main branches which are indispensable to acquire. They are, [sound] morality, [less] desires, contentment and [relying on a secluded] place.

Last week, you might have discussed the favourable conditions according to the Lam Rim teachings. There are six: the four listed above along with abandoning the

demands of society and abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desire.

It would be good for you to read up on this topic in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* as well as the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. My intention in suggesting the discussion was for you to actually do the research yourself - to read the text and make yourselves familiar with it.

#### 1. *Dwelling in a conducive place*

While there are extensive explanations on this, the main point is that the place should be in accordance with the temperament of the practitioner; it should be a place that they like.

*Liberation in your Palm* quotes five particular features from Maitreya's *Ornaments to the Sutras*:

Any place where the wise practice  
Has excellent provisions, is a wholesome place,  
Is a healthy location, has noble friends at hand  
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

#### Excellent provisions

The place where you seek to engage in your practice should be a place where you can easily sustain yourself. This is an important point, because if you go into a really remote area it will be difficult for you to get necessary provisions, which would be an obstacle as a lot of time and energy would be needed to secure your basic needs.

Your supply of provisions should be free from being obtained through wrong livelihood or through negativity. They must be from an ethical source.

The significance of emphasising this point is that the food you consume definitely has an effect on the mind and therefore meditation practice. Food which is obtained through wrong livelihood, or which involves a lot of negativities, like stolen goods and so forth, seems to actually have a negative effect on the mind. It actually disturbs the mind of a meditator who consumes it. If the food is polluted it pollutes the mind.

Even on our level we will have had some experience of feeling lethargic and heavier after we consume certain food, and lighter and fresher after we have consumed other types of food. So even on our grosser level we can see that food does have an effect on the mind. On a more subtle level, where the food comes from and how it was obtained will definitely have an effect on the mind as well.

#### A wholesome place

A wholesome place is a place that is conducive for practice. As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* explains, a wholesome place is one that has been consecrated by great masters and practitioners, i.e. they have actually been in that place in the past. It is explained that when a place is blessed it helps to bless one's own mind so that it is conducive for practice. We can have a similar experience when we go to the holy sites such as Bodhgaya. Just by visiting this holy place we naturally feel calmer and more tranquil; we feel the positive effects on us right away.

It is significant to recall that while we can go to places that bless our mind, as ordinary beings we have not yet reached a level where we can bless places. This reminds me of the time several years ago, when a lama who is a close acquaintance, Thubten Rinpoche, was going to do a three-year retreat in a remote area outside Dunedin in New Zealand. I happened to be there just before he went into retreat, and his attendant asked me, 'Oh, Geshe-la, can you

bless this place'. I replied, 'Oh, I am in no position to bless any place. In fact, I am someone who needs to be blessed by holy places! So I am not suitable to give a blessing'.

I think that was a good response and in fact a good practice to abide by. People may ask for blessings and assume that one could bless a place. Of course, if one has the ability then there is no question that it is good to do so, but if one hasn't reached appropriate levels then it is not proper to pretend that one has the ability. I have never attempted to follow that path.

Further, *Liberation* explains that if you cannot find a place blessed by holy beings, then at the very least you should not stay in the dwelling of someone who has broken pledges made to a Vajra master. It is explained very clearly in teachings that the place of someone who has broken pledges made to their own spiritual mentor or guide is an unsuitable place. One would not be able to develop realisations in such a place. Another unsuitable place would be where someone has created a schism within the sangha.

### **A healthy place**

On a practical level, it should be a place where there are no beasts of prey, such as tigers, thieves or wrathful spirits. Such a place could hinder one's practice. Even here in the west, there are those who feel that some non-human entity (translated in *Liberation* as spirits) has harmed them.

A healthy place implies a place with drinkable water and unpolluted fertile soil, so there is no sickness due to the environment. Otherwise, through illness, one could easily be disheartened and give up the practice of pursuing calm abiding. It could even reach the point where one may think, 'Oh, what's the point of staying in this place, I might as well go to a more comfortable and pleasant place. But I'll need to earn some money first', which may then involve getting a job and so forth, and delaying engaging in practice.

### **Friends at hand**

It is also important to have good companions – people who are ready to help you. You should not attempt to stay completely alone because if anything were to happen there would be no-one to help, and that would again be an obstacle. The friends to rely upon should be friends who are like-minded, who don't have contradicting ideas and advice or who have a negative influence. Do not befriend the disrespectful or unscrupulous. As Pabongka Rinpoche says:

It is very damaging for beginners to live alone without friends. You should have at least three friends at hand; and if they are Dharmic friends it is better to have even more. However, no matter how many friends you have, they must be people who command your respect.

When you have friends you respect, then they will be Dharma friends. Being worthy of respect they will be a reminder to be like them. When you have very good Dharma friends they can serve a similar purpose to a spiritual friend, like an actual teacher. Seeing them naturally reminds you of your practice. Together you remind each other of Dharma practice and so forth, and so you become very good and conducive friends for practice. They are definitely friends who can really help to enhance your practice rather than becoming a negative influence.

Of course, you can get a comprehensive understanding if you read the more detailed and thorough explanations in the text.

## **No distractions**

Pabongka Rinpoche says:

'because sounds are irritants to concentration', in other words the place must not have the sound of people by day or the sound of dogs or running water at night.

A conducive place means a place that does not have too many distractions in the form of noise, because that can hinder your concentration. This reminds me of the time when I was staying somewhere near the beach; you could hear the water crashing against the rocks and at night it was even louder. You should not be in a place like that where there are constant sounds that can distract you.

I have an acquaintance called Geshe Palden, who was once asked to go to a centre in Tahiti. The house he stayed in was near the ocean and there was constant sound from the ocean making it hard to sleep in the night. It was also very humid and hot. So he couldn't stay there for very long.

### **Facilities to suit the yogi**

The next point relates to the last line in the verse from the *Ornament to the Sutras*:

And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

You should be someone who can stand on their own two feet through study and contemplation. You have eliminated inaccuracies about the meaning of the things that you are to meditate on.

These are really significant points.

As mentioned in the teachings, you first listen to the instructions well and then contemplate and think about them further. Then you will come to the point of actually being able to meditate on the instructions. *Liberation* further explains:

Such a person is equipped to gain satisfaction. However, this could also mean you have made all the necessary preparations – such as having the initiations, teachings, books and so forth.

For some practices you will need an initiation first, and to have also received instructions or the teachings on the things that you will meditate on. Furthermore, at times you will need reliable sources such as textbooks to rely upon. As mentioned here, the main thing is to be skilled at doing your practice. As mentioned further in the text, there are some who fail to prepare themselves well.

The point being made here is that the main preparation of some seems to be working hard at making a living. So, when it comes time to actually practice:

they have no idea what to do and are compelled to request dice divinations and so on.

This is the point I have mentioned in the past. After hearing teachings and relying on certain deities some later ask, 'Oh, what mantra should I be reciting?' It is the same here. If you have prior preparation and knowledge of what practices to do, then you will not have to find out from others at the last minute. As Pabongka Rinpoche emphasises in conclusion:

Do not act like this. You must make proper preparations for your Dharma practice.

That is the main point being emphasised here.

### **2. Having few wants**

This is sometimes translated as 'having less desire'. As Pabongka Rinpoche says,

---

Having few wants means having no attachment to large quantities of fine clothes, good food and so forth.

This is not suggesting that you shouldn't have fine clothes and good food and so forth. Rather it is referring to wanting more than is necessary. There are those who have many desires, wanting large quantities of fine clothes and food and so forth. That is what we need to avoid.

Indeed, practising having few wants and less desire is really useful. If you don't try to develop this practice, then you will always be longing for something more than you have. Then it will always be very difficult when you go out, because every time you see a nice thing, your mind will start to think, 'Oh, I wish I could have that'. Going out and about will cause so much wanting and desiring that it can become quite uncomfortable and unbearable.

### 3. Being content

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

Contentment is making do with the bare necessities of food and clothing. You will be attached to sensual things if you are not content and do not have few wants.

Practising contentment and having few wants and less desire is, as mentioned earlier, a practice that can help your mind to be more satisfied and content. Wanting lots of things and being discontented about not having them can cause a lot of mental turmoil. There is always something you are not satisfied with, always something more that you want. That unsatisfied mind can really cause a lot of mental turmoil. As Nagarjuna mentions, the true meaning of wealth is to have contentment; the measure of wealth is being contented and satisfied.

Pabongka Rinpoche further explains, that as a consequence of being attached to sensual things:

You will not develop single-pointed concentration because you will be distracted by the need to protect your possessions and so forth.

As explained here, if you have too many wishes arising from sensual attachment or desire, you will make strenuous efforts to try to acquire these objects of sensual pleasure. Then, having obtained them, you will spend a lot of energy in trying to protect them, and there will always be the fear that they will be lost, or stolen by others. This will become such a distraction that you could not possibly develop single-pointed concentration.

Thus, developing a sense of contentment with one's wealth in any situation really helps the mind to settle down and not be overly anxious. Just think, 'OK, this is sufficient for me; that much is good for me. My situation is good'. The main point here is that you need to protect yourself against following sensual distractions.

### 4. Having pure ethics

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

In general, ethics are the basis of all good qualities.

Observing ethics is said to be the basis of all the good qualities that are to be acquired. The definition of morality or ethics is 'the mind of restraint', which relates to the ten non-virtuous deeds, one of first teachings on morality. In his teachings of morality, the Buddha first laid down the ten misdeeds that we should refrain from if we are to follow a righteous, moral life. These include refraining from killing, refraining from stealing and so forth. The practice of morality is developing the mind of restraining from killing

and so forth and making the decision to avoid killing and so forth.

The text further explains:

Pacification of the subtle internal distractions depends on the abandonment of gross external distractions.

If one does not follow ethics, then one is not refraining from even the gross levels of external distractions. Without overcoming these gross external distractions there is no way of overcoming the subtle internal distractions.

In this context, internal distractions refers to the internal distractions to developing calm abiding. In meditative concentration these are the faults of dullness or laxity, and excitement, which are gross inner distractions. There is also the subtle inner distraction of grasping at the self. The gross inner distractions of laxity and dullness and excitement are overcome by meditative concentration, whereas the subtle inner distraction, which is grasping at the self is overcome by the wisdom realising selflessness.

Overcoming this subtle internal distraction depends on abandoning the gross external distraction, because if the gross external distractions are not overcome then you cannot possibly overcome the internal subtle distraction. Observing ethics or morality will prevent you from engaging in pursuing sensual desires and following sensual distractions. When you lessen engagement with sensual distractions then the external distractions are naturally pacified, and thus your mental state becomes more conducive to engaging in meditation to overcome the subtle inner distraction.

In relation to the three higher trainings, by observing morality one's external distractions are pacified, and when the external distractions are pacified one is better equipped and able to work on overcoming the inner distractions. There are two types of inner distractions. The gross inner distractions are, as mentioned earlier, laxity and dullness and excitement, and these are overcome by the second higher training of meditative concentration. When the grosser inner distractions of dullness and excitement are pacified you are better equipped to overcome the subtle inner distraction, which is grasping at a self. That requires one to use the higher training of wisdom, specifically the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness. More specifically, one uses special insight to overcome the most subtle inner distraction, the grasping at a self. This is how it is related to the three higher trainings.

As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

Ethics restrain and pacify your misdeeds of both body and speech and do this by taking you out of the mental yoke of your greatest conceptual thoughts. So thus by overcoming, as mentioned earlier, when one follows ethics specifically when we relate to the ten misdeeds, by overcoming then ten misdeeds of one's body ...

The misdeeds of body and speech include the three wrong deeds of body, which are killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and the misdeeds of speech, which are lying, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip. So one refrains from these misdeeds of body and speech. Then, by virtue of refraining from them, your mind naturally becomes much more conducive to overcoming the gross mental conception, referred to here as *the grossest conceptual thought of the mind*.

---

## 5. Abandoning the demands of society

A more literal translation of the Tibetan word 'dutse' translated here as 'demands' is 'hustle and bustle'. As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

This means restricting the time you spend on meaningless actions, conversations and so forth.

In the hustle and bustle of society, you get involved with the many gatherings of people and you then start to talk and gossip about all sorts of things. That's when you start gossiping, 'Oh, so and so is doing this and doing that'. You get involved in so many distractions in that way. If you become overly involved in such conversations, that will become an obstacle for the development of meditative concentration because of the time you waste in this way. As presented in the teachings, of the ten unwholesome deeds, idle gossip is said to be the least grave in terms of negativity. However, in terms of practising the Dharma it is one of the worst, because we spend so much time engaging in idle gossip which otherwise could be used for Dharma practice.

Further, the text explains that:

You must have very little to do with such meaningless actions in order to be completely undistracted by them. Development of concentration is much more important and so you will automatically have little to do with these things, because you have few wants and have contentment.

Having few wants or less desire and being contented will also protect you from having to engage in the meaningless demands of society. It is said that this will be the means to develop concentration

While there are more elaborate explanations on the earlier points, I'll leave that to you to read more in detail. I have only presented the essential points as a way to encourage you to read the text further.

## 6. Completely abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desires

As the text states:

Turn your mind away from these thoughts by thinking about the drawbacks of desire and about impermanence.

Conceptual thoughts such as desire are the disturbing discursive thoughts based on following the sensual desires. As mentioned earlier, if you do not practise having a mind of being content and satisfied with few wants, then your mind will just follow those conceptual thoughts and become preoccupied with how to acquire more wealth. A very good way to overcome such discursive conceptual thoughts is to think about impermanence; really thinking about the fact that 'no matter how much wealth I have, eventually I will die'. Indeed, there are many examples of individuals who are wealthy in the morning and who lose all their wealth by the evening. This is something that we can all see. Thinking about the transient or impermanent nature of wealth and so forth can help to reduce excessive desire to acquire more wealth and so forth. That is what we need to contemplate.

As the teachings present, there are four inevitable conditions: in the end all acquisitions are exhausted; all birth ends in death; all meetings end in parting; and all who have higher status will end up with lower status. These are said to be the conditions of cyclic existence.

On a practical level these points can be very helpful for our mind. Contemplating them can help to eliminate much mental agony. If one is of a high status, one suddenly loses

that status and as a result of a change, it will not be such a big shock if one has already contemplated the nature of impermanence; then there won't be so much mental agony. Likewise, with the second point that all meetings end up in separation. It's the same with one's relationships with partners and so forth, if there is excessive obsession, desire and so forth then when separation takes place there can be a lot of mental agony, due to not being able to give up that attachment. However, if the mind is acquainted with impermanence, then things will be easier.

Contemplating that everything that is produced is in the nature of impermanence and then contemplating the various aspects of this truth can be really helpful. This is really the point to keep in mind.

Now we will recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, which we can dedicate for Kerrie who has been unwell, and for Marilyn's sister who has passed away. Marilyn used to work in the office. Both of them have a connection with us: one coming to the study group and the other has been here in the past. In any case we can dedicate for them, and others as well.

We visualise Buddha Amitabha on the crown and receiving nectar and light from Buddha Amitabha when reciting the verses, and pray to Amitabha for those who are unwell to be cured from their ailments soon, and recover well. For those who have passed away, pray for Amitabha to continuously guide them and help them on the righteous Dharma path leading to enlightenment. If we can dedicate this practice in this way then it will be a very meaningful practice, which will definitely benefit others.

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 Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute