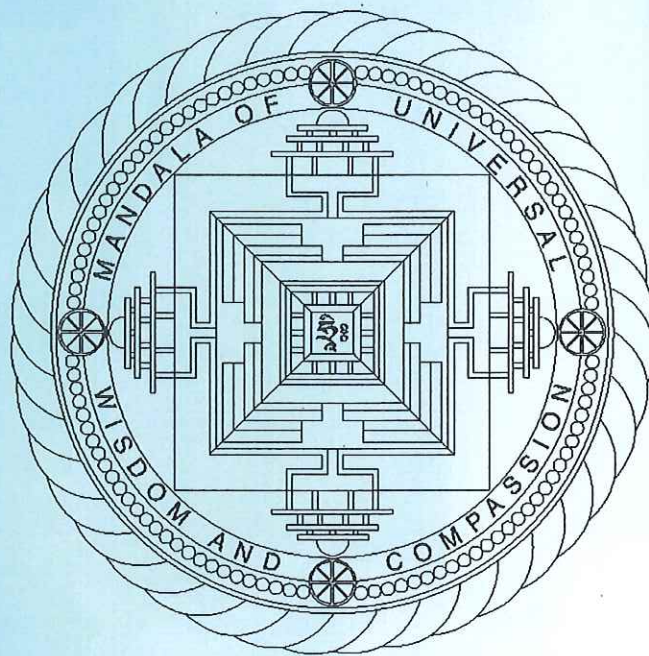
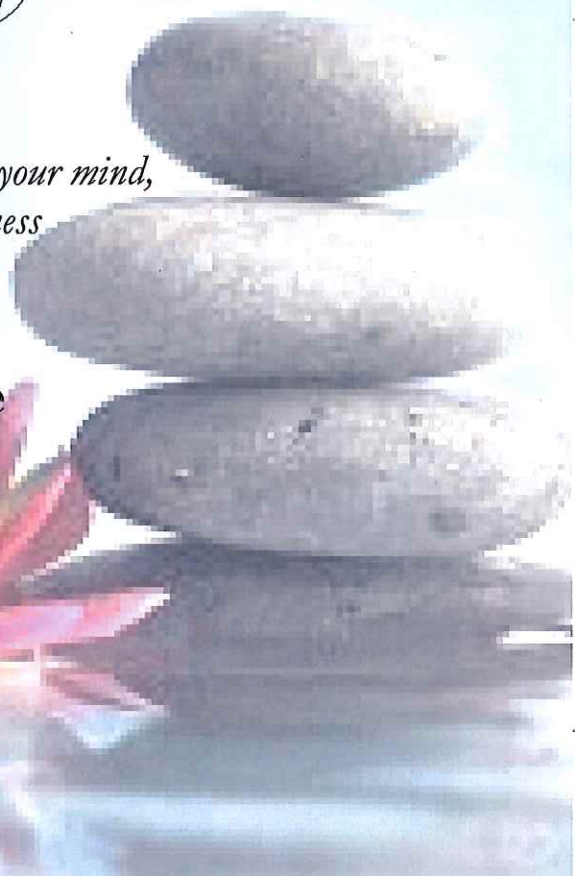
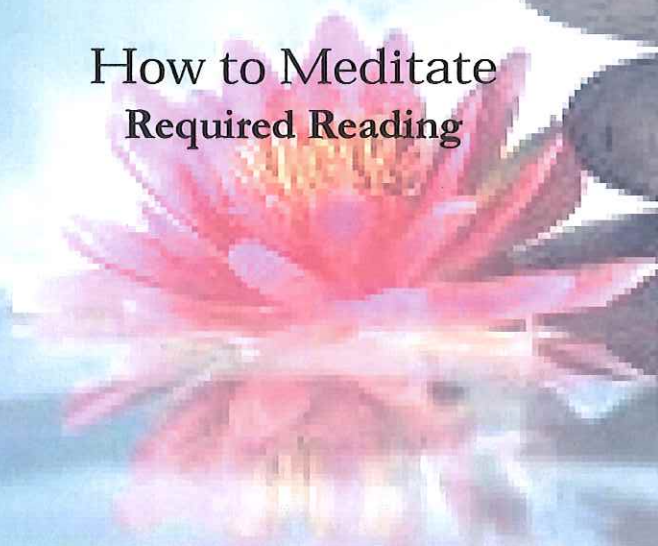


# DISCOVERING BUDDHISM



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

**How to Meditate  
Required Reading**



## **Creating a Conducive Environment**

First, you should seek a proper environment and arrange a comfortable seat, slightly upraised at the rear so that when you do long meditation sessions you will not feel tired. Then, the position of your body should be maintained in the Vairocana posture: your legs crossed, if possible; your spine straight; your head slightly bent and the eyes downcast, looking in front of you; and the tip of the tongue touching the palate of the mouth. You should judge for yourself the best position for your eyes: some people find that doing the meditations with open eyes is much more powerful, whereas others find it very distracting. For them, slightly closing the eyes might prove more beneficial. Generally speaking, I think that visualizations of the deities and so forth, if conducted with the eyes open, will have a greater clarity. Sometimes it may also be beneficial to just sit down facing a wall directly, so that you don't have any distraction. The point is that you should figure out a way that you find least distracting and that permits you greatest clarity.

You may find the position uncomfortable. If so, at the beginning of your meditation - just as a symbol, a sign of auspiciousness - try to sit cross-legged at least for a while and then later you can adopt leg postures more comfortable for you.

Place the hands in the position of meditative equipoise, four finger-widths below your navel, the right palm on top of the left, the two thumbs touching each other, forming a triangle there. You should keep your elbows away from your body, slightly outstretched so that air can pass through. Keeping the upper tip of the tongue touching the palate of the mouth may prevent thirst; otherwise, if you just open your mouth, then - as a result of breathing meditations and so forth - you might feel thirsty.

The most important thing is to have an object appropriate to your meditation. To help you have a better visualization, it is good to have a representation of the deity on whom you are meditating, such as the Buddha Shakyamuni, the master of the doctrine, and to look at it frequently. If you don't have any representations, that is all right, but if you do have them, they should be arranged properly - statues, scriptures, and so forth.

I always make the remark that inside Tibet, since the Chinese have meted out great destruction of religious monuments, making statues is quite important, because they can be used to point out to the younger generation that such is the Buddha, and such is Avalokiteshvara, the patron deity of Tibet and the embodiment of compassion, and such is Manjushri, the deity of wisdom, and so on. But here, representations - for a serious practitioner - are not indispensable. Many masters of the past, such as the great meditator Milarepa, achieved high realizations without depending on these external factors. It is important to be able to judge what are the most essential elements.

Furthermore, I often mention that although there have been very great masters in Tibet who have had high realizations, at the same time there have been many shortcomings in Tibet as well. Even in religious practices worldly considerations have crept in, so it is very important for all practitioners to realize that the practice of dharma means bringing about a discipline within one's mind - in other words, training the mind.

Therefore, one should not view one's dharma practice as being something decorative, regarding statues and images as material possessions or as furnishings for one's house, or thinking that because there is an empty space on a wall one might as well put up a thangka for decoration. That kind of attitude should not be cultivated. When you arrange the statues or

thangkas, you should do so out of a deep respect from the mind, moved by your faith and conviction. If you can arrange these physical representations - statues and so forth - out of deep respect and faith, that's all right. On the other hand, the attitude that they are merely material possessions is dangerous and destructive. I think that some people who have a cupboard or the like in which they keep all their precious possessions may arrange an altar on it just for the sake of decoration. This is very wrong.

It is also dangerous to arrange statues of very wrathful dharmapalas, or protectors, without also having a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. One's attitude in arranging such statues, if it is influenced by worldly considerations, such as thinking that if one propitiates such and such a protector one's wealth will be increased and so forth, is unsafe. Sometimes I feel it is almost like entrusting these deities on the altar on top of the cupboard to protect the things that are inside the cupboard and perhaps increase them if possible! Such an outlook is contradictory to the practice of dharma. If the great Kadampa masters such as Dromtonpa were to come in person and see such an arrangement made with such motivation, they would never admire or be pleased by it, but would denounce it. I can guarantee such a response.

Having such motivations is not the proper way to become a Buddhist; the proper way to become a Buddhist is to bring about some positive change within the mind. Any practice that can give you more courage when you are undergoing a very difficult time and that can provide you with some kind of solace and calmness of mind is a true practice of the dharma.

I thought that it would be more beneficial if I explained the disadvantages of arranging the altar in such a manner and with the wrong motivation, than if I explained the advantages of properly arranging an altar. If we were to spend all our energy and time simply on the arrangement of beautiful altars and so forth, totally neglecting the development of the mind, then that would be very bad.

The environment where you are doing the meditation should be properly cleaned. While cleaning, you should cultivate the motivation that since you are engaged in the task of accumulating great stores of merit by inviting the hosts of buddhas and bodhisattvas to this environment, it is important to have a clean place. You should see that all the external dirt and dust around you is basically a manifestation of the faults and stains within your own mind. You should see that the most important aim is to purge these stains and faults from within your mind. Therefore, as you cleanse the environment, think that you are also purifying your mind. Develop the very strong thought that by cleaning this place you are inviting the host of buddhas and bodhisattvas who are the most supreme merit field, and that you will subsequently engage in a path that will enable you to purge your mind of the stains of delusions.

Then, if you have a representation of the Buddha's speech, such as a text on Lamrim, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses*, or any other texts, it would be good to arrange them properly. Offerings can also be arranged, if you have some - but if you do not have them, they can be done without. When you make offerings, it is important to see that the materials of the offerings have not been wrongly procured. There is nothing to be admired about elaborate offerings if the materials for the offerings are obtained in a wrong way, because the negativities accumulated in the process of procuring such materials will not be offset by the merits gained through offering them. So, such offerings are pointless and foolish. However, a great store of merit can be gained on the basis of making offerings properly.

## **Preparing the Mind**

One's motivation at the beginning is very important, because whether or not one's practice becomes successful and effective depends upon the initial motive and attitude. For the development of the right attitude, the practice of refuge and the generation of bodhicitta are vital. Through the practice of the two one should be able to bring about some discipline and transformation within one's mind.

So, on a comfortable meditation seat you should adopt the right physical posture and then generate the appropriate motivation. After you are seated facing eastwards (or imagining that you are facing eastwards), reflect that you are very fortunate to have this opportunity to engage in the practice of dharma, and that you will make this session most worthwhile. Rejoice that you have this opportunity, and think that, at this juncture, when you have obtained most of the important conditions for making progress on the path, there is hope that you can embark on the right path and make some spiritual progress.

It is almost like being at a critical crossroad and taking a new turn in your journey, embarking on a path leading to the achievement of the omniscient state - not for your own sake alone, but rather for the benefit of all living beings.

Also reflect that you possess within yourself, as do all living beings, the potential or the seed of buddhahood, and also have access to the means by which this potential can be successfully activated. Think: I shall explore this potentiality to its fullest extent, and I shall make the most of the present opportunity. Furthermore, you should reflect upon the fact that you have been extremely fortunate to have received many teachings from the masters and that you are equipped with the knowledge to undertake the practice properly.

You should understand that the whole purpose of listening to teachings, taking teachings and studying them is to put them into practice, just as after having learned how to prepare a certain dish, you utilize that knowledge to make the dish and derive full nutritional benefit from it. What you know should be put into practice immediately; you can thus derive the benefit of having some transformation within your mind. Even though it might be a very minor effort, a very small practice just leaving imprints within your mind, still you must think that it is worthwhile to do. Otherwise, your knowledge of dharma will be quite fruitless, and like merely playing something on a tape.

At the initial stage it is important to have short sessions, as many of them as possible in a day. Generally speaking, the texts speak of four sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, but you could make it into six. The length and the number of the sessions should be judged according to your own personal disposition. Your practice should be enduring, and you should undertake it with sustained effort. But because at the initial stage much depends upon your physical condition - the body's influence on the mind is very powerful - you have to take the body's condition into account. So it is very important to be careful. Some practitioners who put the body to a severe test in their practice of dharma may end up losing it, as such an act is very destructive.

Once you have made good progress on the spiritual path, you will gradually gain control over your body and mind through meditative stabilisation. Particularly when you have gained control over the subtle energies, you will be able to employ your body for any length of time without there being any danger of imbalances being caused by your spiritual practices. This stage is quite difficult to attain; therefore at the initial stage it is very important to be cautious and very skilful.

I make this remark for the people who are undertaking the practice of dharma very seriously as solitary meditators in the mountains. For you, it is crucial right from the beginning to be skilful and cautious so that you can maintain a sustained effort. If you can undertake such a practice when you are young, you will be able to make great progress, whereas if you start when you are already too old, you may not be able to make much progress.

You can do the sessions at the initial stage for about half an hour or maybe an hour, depending upon your own conditions, and after that you can end the session and do other practices or take a rest.

For those of you who are not able to devote all your time to meditation, there is nevertheless the possibility of engaging in practice in a serious way. For example, the students at the monastic universities in South India can, with some effort, do meditations during the prayers. When you recite the prayers, you can mentally do the contemplation. The lifestyle and daily routine at these monasteries have been structured by the great masters of the past in a way that is most conducive to individual practice as well as to the flourishing of the dharma.

If you find that your mind is in a very fluctuating emotional state - displaying anger, hatred, attachment and so forth - then you should first try to calm down that state of strong emotion. This should be done by first transforming it into a neutral state of mind, because there is no way that one can switch directly from a negative state of mind to a positive one. Therefore, you should first reduce the force of these emotions and fluctuations and try to bring about some sort of calmness, using any means - such as taking a stroll or concentrating on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath - that will enable you to forget what you are immediately feeling. This will help you to reduce the force of strong emotion, thereby giving you the calmness necessary for the practice of dharma. Like a white piece of cloth which could be dyed any colour that you desire, such a neutral state of mind could then be transformed into a virtuous state of mind.

You could also engage in the preliminary practices of performing 100,000 prostrations, recitations of the Vajrasattva mantra, and so forth. When you undertake these practices, you should do them properly, not being only concerned about the number. Many great masters of the past of all traditions have emphasized the importance of these preliminary practices - they will enable you to have a very firm start. If through them you can acquire a fertile mind, then when the seed of meditation is planted, it will readily bear the fruits of realizations.

Having successfully neutralized the emotional fluctuations within your mind and having restored a reasonable degree of calmness, you should then engage in the practice of taking refuge and generating the altruistic aspiration to attain full enlightenment. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the factor that distinguishes one's practice from that of an erroneous path, and the generation of the altruistic mind makes it superior to the paths aiming at individual liberation.

(From H.H. Dalai Lama, *Path to Bliss: A Practical Guide to Stages of Meditation*, Snow Lion, New York, 1991, pages 31-38)

## **Activities of the Between-Session Periods**

At the end of the session, take a little rest. Sometimes when you are resting, you may have inspiration all of a sudden, which helps you see things that you have never seen before.

Although in the after-session periods you are not engaged in formal meditation, you should keep your mind deep down still focused on the practice so that the warmth of the session is not lost. Then, when you resume your second session you will be able to conduct it successfully, thus enabling you to build on the progress you have made in the first session. Otherwise, if you let yourself stray and be idle during the between-session periods, whatever progress you may have made in the first session will be totally lost, and then in the second session you will have to start right from the beginning. The state is analogous to a hearth in which you do not extinguish the fire totally, so that when you rekindle the fire you will be able to do so quite easily and quickly. It is also helpful to read texts related to your practice.

When you wake up in the morning, you should bless your speech with certain mantras and develop a strong determination that you will use the twenty-four hours of the day for a worthy purpose and shall not waste even a single moment of the day. With such determination and motivation at the beginning, do any practices that you undertake, such as guru yoga, and then engage in the practice of Lamrim.

If you live your life in such a manner you will be able to make progress, whereas if you give up right from the beginning and feel discouraged, then there is not much you can hope for. Therefore, it is very important to have courage and determination. The same is true for lay people: Although you have to be concerned about your profession, livelihood, and so forth, nevertheless, at the beginning of the day when you first wake up, it is important to develop the firm determination that you shall live the day properly, in a righteous manner, and not deceive others, tell lies, and so forth. Tibetans, for example, should make the determination that during the day, if they are not able to make any contribution to the Tibetan cause, at least they will not degrade the Tibetan name or be a disgrace to it. Those Tibetans who hold me dear should determine that at least they will think about the Dalai Lama, and not be deceptive to him.

Therefore, monks, lay people, and all of you, it is possible to live a life properly within the dharma, right from the beginning of the day adopting the right attitude and determination, putting all that you know about dharma into practice, with a plan that the things you are not able to practice right now, you will practice next year or in the future. In such a manner you will be able to make progress.

At the end of the day when you go to bed, before going to sleep you should check on the nature of the activities in which you engaged during the day. If you find that any negative actions have been performed, you should generate regret and resolve that you will never indulge in them in the future. If you find that you have engaged in some positive actions, you should rejoice.

Also, when going to bed, it is important that you do so with a virtuous thought, because sometimes it is possible for a practitioner to have certain practices in dreams, too; this will be particularly important for the morning, when you are waking up, because in the morning you have a very clear, fresh mind and therefore, when you engage in a practice at that time, it will be more powerful and clear.

Those meditators who are up in caves should be careful not to meet just anybody, because such a meeting may hinder their progress. Even the mere indication of a stranger coming may hinder your practices; therefore, be cautious.

This is how you should meditate and undertake the practice of dharma. If you are able to undertake the practice in such a manner, irrespective of whether you recite many texts or not, you will be able to make real progress. Then there is a hope that you will be able to achieve enlightenment in this lifetime, or, if not, in the intermediate state, or in a future lifetime.

(From H.H. Dalai Lama, *Path to Bliss: A Practical Guide to Stages of Meditation*, Snow Lion, New York, 1991, pages 76-78)



## Recognizing the Human Potential

The first of the practices based on a proper reliance on a spiritual master is the persuading of oneself to take the essence of having obtained a human life of leisure and opportunity.

First it is important to recognize the human form as rare and precious. It is not enough just to obtain this precious human form which has great potential; rather, you should use that potential to its fullest extent by taking its essence. For example, if a person's ascent to high office is not followed by good work for the community and people, it is not very beneficial and worthwhile. If, on the basis of full use of the potential, one is able to accomplish great feats, that would truly be a great success. Therefore, it is important initially to recognize all the significance and great potential of this human existence.

What is the meaning of human existence endowed with leisure and fortune? *Leisure* refers to having time, just as the word is ordinarily used when one asks whether or not people have the time to do such and such. Therefore, this term refers to a human existence that has the time to undertake the practice.

Other forms of existence, such as animals, do not have the chance to think about dharma because they are under the strong influence of ignorance. Compared to them, we human beings are amply endowed with the leisure and capacity to practice dharma.

So, just as the masters said, if you were to take rebirth right now in the lower realms, then the doctrine of the buddhas and the teachings of tantra, although they might exist in this world, would not be of much benefit to you. Although you might take favourable forms of existence in *deva* realms and so forth, since the practice of dharma has to be undertaken on the basis of enhancing one's mind, and since in such realms one's mind is under strong influences, you would not have the opportunity that you have right now. But this is not the case with you.

Furthermore, you have not taken rebirth at a time when the Buddha's doctrine has totally lived out its duration of benefit. Rather, it is still active and very much relevant. But even though you have taken rebirth at such a time, if you were born in a country where dharma was totally inaccessible, then you would not benefit from your human existence. This is not the case with you either.

Even though you have taken rebirth in a country or community where dharma is available, if you were to lack physical and mental capabilities, you would not be able to benefit from its availability. This is not the case, nor is it the case that you are under the influence of wrong views, such as the total negation of the possibility of rebirth or the authenticity of dharma. Whether or not you have cultivated a deep conviction derived from valid cognition, you do have a certain understanding of dharma that is powerful enough to persuade you to take an interest in it.

Therefore, at this juncture, if you probe you will find that you are free of most of the obvious adverse conditions for the practice of dharma and that you are equipped with favourable conditions. You are free from lack of leisure, and on top of that you possess what are called the ten endowments, personal and circumstantial. You have been born at a time when, although the Buddha is not still alive, his doctrine is still alive and you can meet a living spiritual master. Also, you can emulate certain exemplary personalities who have gained high realizations by engaging in such a practice. So, if you think in such terms, you will be really able to admire and rejoice in the present opportunity.



After you reflect along these lines, it is very important that you finally make a conclusion and decide on the basis of this human existence to explore its potential to its fullest extent by engaging in a serious practice of dharma. So, request the spiritual master at your crown to grant you the inspiration to overcome the obstacles to your realizations. On the basis of this precious human form, you will be able to accomplish great feats - not only the assurance of well-being in future lifetimes, but also the fulfilment of the final aspiration.

Chandrakirti, in his *Guide to the Middle Way*, chapter two, said:

*If one doesn't restrain oneself (from one's downfalls)  
When one is free and lives agreeably,  
How can one raise oneself in the future,  
When one fails into an abyss and is at others' mercy?*

## **Rarity of Human Existence**

Having reflected upon the great significance and potential of human existence, you should reflect upon its rarity. Although something might be rare, if it does not have any potential to bring about great benefit, it is not very precious. Present human existence is not like that. Not only is it rare to find, it also has great potential; on its basis one will not only be able to attain a higher rebirth, but can also obtain the omniscient state.

Since the beginning of life on this planet, for more than five billion years, many forms of life have existed and have gone through a process of evolution. Of all these forms, one finds that the human form is the most sophisticated, in terms of having not only a positive capacity but also a destructive one.

Humans possess a very sophisticated brain, which has great power and capability, and are endowed with a faculty that enables them to plan things and judge between right and wrong. So, among all the forms of life, one finds no history that can compare with that of human beings.

Besides the category of phenomena that are obvious to one, phenomena that are hidden to one at present, such as the momentary nature of things, the emptiness of inherent existence, and so forth, can also eventually be understood on the basis of a human body employing the human faculties. Furthermore, on this basis one will be able to cultivate the very strong force of the altruistic attitude as well as receive very profound vows – tantric, bodhicitta, or monastic – with which one will be able to accumulate great stores of merit. Therefore, from all these points of view - those of ultimate and temporary aims - the human body is equipped with a great capacity.

You should rejoice that you have obtained such a body and should decide never to waste its potential. If the effort is made on your part, you will be able to attain great achievements. Many masters of the past, Indian and Tibetan masters of all the great traditions, achieved their high realizations on the basis of the human form. Regarded as a basis, the human body that you possess, and the bodies of the great beings, have no difference between them. Think that, like the great masters who achieved high realizations on the basis of this precious human body and achieved the completely enlightened state, you also will work for the achievement of the omniscient state on the basis of this present human existence. You have obtained this great opportunity; if you do not take the initiative right now, when will you? It is now or never. That is how you should reflect.

By emulating the examples of great personalities of the past, by pondering upon scriptural quotations and anecdotes taught by teachers, by employing all sorts of means, you should be able to develop a deep conviction that this present human body has great potential and that you shall never waste even a single minute of its use. On the other hand, not taking any essence of this precious human existence, but just wasting it, is almost like taking poison while being fully aware of the consequences of doing so. It is very wrong for people to feel deeply sad when they lose some money, while when they waste the precious moments of their lives they do not have the slightest feeling of regret. Such an indifference comes as a result of not realizing the value and rarity of the precious human existence. Therefore, you should determine that on the basis of this precious human existence you have the capability and capacity to undertake the practice of dharma.

## **Difficulty of Attaining Human Existence**

In the next phase, you should reflect upon the difficulty of obtaining a human existence in the future. You should reflect upon the rarity of obtaining a human form from the point of view of its causes: how only through the aggregation of many factors can one achieve it. Compared to other forms of existence and life, human existence and life are very rare and difficult to find.

When you reflect upon the rarity of the precious human form, you might have the feeling that although this human existence has great potential, since you are already quite old it might be better to hope to obtain a better human existence in a future life and embark then upon the path when you are much younger. But it is very difficult to say whether or not you will succeed in obtaining a precious human existence in the future. Such an attitude is almost like that of a person who, when having money with him, spends it without any consideration and purpose, just hoping that he will get more in the future and be able to do business with it. Such a person is stupid. By comparison, a person who, even though he might have a very small amount of money, preserves it and builds on it and does whatever business he wants to with it is a more intelligent person. Similarly, you should use the present potential of the human body already at hand, rather than hope for the future.

Unlike other forms of life, such as elephants, however old we might be we are able to recite at least a mantra and are able to ponder upon questions of karma and its results and our future lives and so forth. There is still potential within us to make progress.

Now, how do we reflect on the rarity of attaining a human existence? First of all, I think it is very important to have some understanding of the Buddhist view of dependent origination. How do we determine whether or not something exists? This done on the basis of whether or not a phenomenon is established by a certifying consciousness, a valid cognizer. Within the category of existent phenomena, there are some that exist occasionally. The occasional nature of their existence is a sign that they depend upon other factors, causes, and condition for their arising; therefore, they are other-powered. The other type is that of permanent phenomena which do not depend on causes and conditions for their existence.

The first category of phenomena consists of dependent phenomena, and within this category there are external phenomena like matter, and others that are only in the nature of clarity and knowing, which are known as consciousnesses. Then there are others such as time, which are abstract phenomena - although they exist, they are not tangible like material phenomena. So, we find that there are three categories of dependent phenomena.

Since we are concerned with the phenomena that directly relate to our experience of pain and pleasure, we are here concerned with the phenomena that are related to consciousness. One can never talk about pain and pleasure as isolated from consciousness. Here it is important to reflect on the causality of phenomena that are related to our inner faculty, mind and consciousness. It is very obvious to us that the body, which is the basis for our experience of pain and pleasure, is in the nature of suffering and is dependent upon causes and conditions. Then, we possess the faculty called consciousness; it exists, it is the agent through which we experience pain and pleasure, but it does not possess any form, colour, or anything. Yet this mysterious force is there.

Just as the external body has causes and conditions, the inner faculty, consciousness, also has causes and conditions. When we reflect in such terms, we will be able to see that within the causes there are two types: substantial causes that eventually turn into their fruits, and cooperative causes that contribute to the production of particular fruits. Phenomena possess certain essential qualities - for example, the wetness of water and the heat of fire - which are their natural defining characteristics. These characteristics cannot be said to be produced by a specific cause. I do not know if the karmic forces of sentient beings can affect these natural characteristics.

We find that within phenomena there are certain laws: natural laws, the laws of dependence, functional laws, and the laws of logical evidence. The first one, the law of nature, is very important as a basis; first of all, it is very important to recognize the basic nature of a phenomenon. For example, the basic nature of a consciousness is clarity and knowing. After having perceived the basic nature of a consciousness on the basis of such knowledge, one will be able to understand it better. Understanding that the basic element of matter is atoms will be likewise helpful.

I think that there are some parallels between the disciplines of modern science - physics, chemistry, etc.- and some of the Buddhist concepts. Matter possesses certain natural characteristics, and consciousness possesses certain characteristics as well. The *Kalachakra Tantra* speaks of space particles as the source of all matter, from which later evolves this entire universe; eventually, all matter will be dissolved back into the space particles. I do not know whether or not one can posit a beginning or an end to these subtle particles. But in *Chatu-shataka Shastra* (The Four Hundred Verses), Aryadeva does say that although lacking a beginning, matter does possess an end. So, if we trace the matter that we see on this earth to its source, we will find that it is originally in the form of potential in these space particles. When we reflect in such terms, we will be able to see a basic law of inter-dependence within all these phenomena. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to speak fully about all the subtle aspects of these laws. Buddhist philosophy speaks of the extremely subtle aspect of karmic law, the law of causality, as an object of knowledge only for the omniscient mind, and perceptible only by the wisdom of a fully enlightened being.

All the phenomena that are directly related to our experience of pain and pleasure - of the body, environment, and so forth - due to their causal conditions increase and decrease and go through the process of change. Among these phenomena there are certain ones that go through the process of change naturally, and others, such as the experiences of happiness and suffering, that go through certain changes when the being interacts with external conditions.

In order to achieve a human existence in the future with a precious body, the causes and conditions that bring about such a result should also be precious, because there should be a concordance between causes and their effects. Just as the result is very rare, similarly the

causes themselves are very rare. So the appropriate cause for obtaining a human existence in the future, as the text here discusses, is to have a very proper foundation of a practice of morality - at minimum an abstaining from the ten negative actions. In addition to this basis, the practice of generosity, patience, and so on are also required, which will contribute to the positive qualities of human existence such as having a better intelligence, and so forth. These complementing factors should themselves be complemented by aspirational prayers dedicated to the obtaining of such a human form conducive to the practice of dharma. So, you need these three factors: the foundation, the complementing practices, and a strong force of aspiration to obtain such a body.

If we were to examine whether or not we possess within us these causes that have the potential and power to bring about a human existence in the future, we would find that achieving such an existence is very difficult, very rare, for us. Most of us are so habituated to negative actions and emotions that virtuous thoughts come about only accidentally or through great effort. We are not as accustomed to them as we are to negative actions, which flow like a stream of water running downhill. Because of the habit of our minds, the arising of negative emotions is effortless for us, whereas the arising of virtuous thoughts is very difficult - we really have to work to generate them, as though we were driving a donkey up hill. If we consider matters in such terms, we can find that our own minds are always tormented by negative thoughts and that these impulses lead us to negative actions. If this is what happens when we are born as human beings and are equipped with the knowledge to discriminate between right and wrong, what would it be like if we were born in the lower realms, as animals for example, and were not equipped with such knowledge or intelligence?

If we think in such terms, we will be able to infer that we must have accumulated great stores of non-virtues and negativities in past lives. If we were to recollect our own past actions even in this lifetime, we would find that we have indulged in more negative actions than positive. If such is the case with this present life, there is no need to say what kind of actions we must have committed in past lives.

Furthermore, the negative actions in which we have indulged are really very complete from all points of view. For example, when we kill a mosquito or a bug, we have the intention to kill it, we use the most severe means to kill it, and then at the end we rejoice that we have killed it. So, even one negative action has a very strong motivation, an action, and also a sense of satisfaction at the end. This is not the case with positive actions. Besides, negative actions have the potential to increase, whereas positive actions can be destroyed by many adverse circumstances. For example, although we may have accumulated great stores of merit by making prostrations and so forth, if we generate strong anger, this anger - even though it might be momentary - will just blow away a large part of the merit that we might have accumulated yesterday. We will then have to start all over again.

We find that it is very rare that we engage in positive actions. Even those that are accumulated are very weak and also very vulnerable to the effects of negative actions. In view of this, it is important to study the texts that speak of the great advantage of reflecting upon emptiness; even a slight understanding of emptiness, be it just a wavering thought, can destroy great stores of negative karma. This is very true, and reflection on it will give us encouragement to accumulate merit.

Judge whether or not you possess these causes within you for obtaining a precious human life in the future. If you develop a certainty that you possess these factors within you, then there is no need to request or seek others' help, because you possess all the necessary conditions

within you. But if you lack these basic factors, then, even though you might invoke the power and inspiration of other forces, it is very doubtful that you will be helped.

When you do the meditation, reflect upon the rarity of the precious human existence first by using all kinds of analogies (though it is very difficult to find an analogy that can totally illustrate the great potential of human existence), and then by considering it in terms of its own nature, and finally by thinking about the rarity of its causes. This order of reflection on the rarity of the precious human existence of leisure and fortune is said to have great significance and has been recommended by many great masters of the past.

If you think in such terms, you will be able to convince yourself that you should make the effort and take the initiative right now when you have obtained a human life. So, make whatever effort you can, now that you have a human body. Make the decision to undertake dharma practice right now in this very life. With that, the reflection on the great significance and rarity of human life is over, and you should affirm this by again visualizing nectar descending and so forth.

These reflections help persuade us from within to engage in the practice of dharma, and thus are preliminary factors. Next follows the actual path. This is divided into three: training the mind in the stages of the path common to the practitioners of initial capacity, training the mind in the stages of the path common to the middling capacity, and training the mind in the stages of the path of the great capacity.

(From H.H. Dalai Lama, *Path to Bliss: A Practical Guide to Stages of Meditation*, Snow Lion, New York, 1991, pages 93-103)

## **Preliminaries**

The actual meditation requires a good degree of concentration and subtlety of mind, so I find it useful to begin with meditation on the breath as an aid in bringing the mind to such a state. Sit comfortably with the back erect and focus on the breath as though you were asked to listen to it - that is, without trying to control it or judge it: “Oh, that was a good one!”

Watch the breath as it comes in, pauses, goes out, pauses, comes in, and so on. Focus particularly at the end points, where the mind has the tendency to be lazy and occupy itself with fantasies or other thoughts. Put all your mental energy into concentration and simply ignore other thoughts that might tempt you: just let the thoughts go by.

If you are beginning such practice, you might find that mentally counting the cycles of respiration (i.e., this is the first inhalation, now it is changing direction, this is the first exhalation ... ) will help you notice and let go of distracting thoughts. It is like having both your hands full and being offered a cup of tea - there is no way to take it unless you give up one of the objects in your hands.

## **The Meditation**

When the mind has become somewhat focused, follow one inhalation up the nostrils, down to the area of the heart chakra, and away from the head, the area more associated with conceptual thought. Place your attention on the mind itself instead of on the respiration. Remind yourself that you are not paying attention to the other five senses, but to the sixth sense, the mental consciousness.

Spend some time at first observing the thoughts and images that are constantly flowing through the mind. Just observe the thoughts without getting involved with them. It is like when you are sitting at a street side cafe watching the people passing by; one just notes them but does not get up and follow them down the street. Try to get familiar with the laboratory of the mind.

Try to notice the quiet moments between thoughts and focus on those as you previously focused on the breath. Then, whenever a thought arises and distracts you from focusing on the clear quiet nature of the mind, let go of your attention to that objective thought and refocus your attention on the subjective mind within which the thought is appearing, the clear quiet nature of the mind itself.

The Buddha and the great practitioners after him have said that the nature of the mind is clear light: non-material, unobstructed by thoughts, and posing no obstruction to them. Try to focus your attention on this clear-light nature of the mind within which all mental events occur. The mind can be likened to an ocean, and the thoughts and other mental events to fish swimming through that clear medium.

We are ordinarily unaware of the nature of the mind and instead observe only the fish-like thoughts. It is as though we were observing an aquarium through a large glass wall and at first only noticed the fish. If someone were to tell us to observe the clear water within which the fish were swimming, we might at first have difficulty noticing it because of its transparency. But by simply realizing that the fish could not be moving unless there was some substance to move in, we can take our attention away from observing the fish and focus instead on the clear water.

In a similar fashion, try again and again to let go of attention to the fish-like thoughts and try to recognize the clear-light nature of the mind within which all mental events occur. In the case of the aquarium, the fish will remain before us when we focus on the water. However, when we focus our attention on the clear-light nature of the mind, the thoughts begin to diminish in intensity and frequency, thereby quieting the mind and enhancing our ability to concentrate.

(From Thubten Dondrub (ed.), *Spiritual Friends: Meditations by Monks and Nuns of the International Mahayana Institute*, Wisdom, Boston, 2001, pages 72-73)



## **An Antidote to Discouragement**

It is easy to feel that your practice session has been a waste of time when much of it is taken up with distraction or agitation. A simple remedy to this, and a way to help develop our concentration is to break up your hour or half-hour or less into many smaller sessions with very short breaks in between. (Also, you could apply this method any time you have a few moments to spare.)

1. Sit comfortably with the spine straight.
2. Gently and completely exhale.
3. As you exhale, softly vocalize the sound Ahhh. Allow the sound to open and flow outwards. Allow your mind to open and flow with the sound as one continuous wave of awareness, until it reaches the moment when distraction or agitation arises.
4. At the first sign of distraction or agitation, immediately stop the session.
5. Relax, take a break for 15-20 seconds. Look around, stretch your legs if you like, then repeat steps 2-5.

Repeat these steps as many times as you like within the time you have allowed for your session. Gradually you will become accustomed to these short spans of continuous attention and applied concentration. Initially your concentration will last for only a few seconds, but with practice you will develop stability, and the depth and duration of your concentration will grow.

As your concentration develops, consciously feel that your mind and the sound of Ahhh are continuously opening outward, even when you stop the Ahhh to take another breath.

(From Joel and Michelle Levy, *The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration and Meditation*, Wisdom, Boston, 1987, page 67)

## **Meditating on Leisure and Fortune**

Contemplate each of the eight freedoms and the ten endowments and see what having each of them means compared to the situation of not having them. This will generate the mind of seeing the preciousness of the birth that we have taken this life. Meditate single-pointedly on that strong sense of value.

Then reflect on the rarity of the birth of leisure and fortune by analysing the causes for its production and the numbers of those attaining it, and by reflecting on the analogy of the turtle. This will strengthen a sense of the preciousness of our present situation from the point of view of its rarity and you can then hold this realisation single-pointedly.

Now analyse the opportunities presented by the birth of leisure and fortune. See how a knowledge of the Dharma teachings on karma enables one to accomplish anything that is wished for, especially the various favourable conditions of high status. Understand that the opportunities to attain liberation from samsara and to gain enlightenment are available to those with a birth of leisure and fortune. Hold this panoramic sense of opportunity and rare good fortune single-pointedly.

Finally, recognise that to ‘extract the essence’ of the birth of leisure and fortune is to take the most essential thing from this life and that is to engage in the practices of the three scopes. Hold with single-pointed concentration the determination to make this life meaningful by engaging in these practices.

Another meditation that will help to gain the realisation of the precious human rebirth is as follows.

Visualise yourself as having taken rebirth in an unfortunate state, say as a snake. Use visualisation and strong imagination to really feel yourself in that form. How does it feel to be a snake, driven by instinct and fear, with limited intellect and opportunities severely limited by one’s cold and difficult form? Feel the lifestyle of the hunter and the hunted vividly - and then suddenly snap back to one’s present form and in that instant feel the difference. Then think to yourself, ‘I am fortunate to have been born free of the limitations of such a lower form and have the rare and precious opportunity to practise Dharma with a birth of leisure and fortune.’ Develop a strong sense of rejoicing in this and hold it single-pointedly. Then think, ‘Although I have this wonderful opportunity now, this life is impermanent. At some point I will die and due to my limitless previously created karma, especially that of ignorance and anger, I hold within me the karmic cause to take rebirth as a snake. Therefore I will strongly determine to take the essence of the birth of leisure and fortune by practising the paths of small, medium and great scope so that I completely purify the karma to be reborn as a snake and so on and ensure that I gain high status, liberation or enlightenment.’

This meditation is a very powerful way to understand the situation of other life forms in comparison to our own and to emphasise the rare and precious opportunity of the birth of leisure and fortune. It also helps to generate a strong sense of renunciation and compassion for less fortunate beings by developing an intimate understanding of their situation and view. The same meditation can be applied to any form of life: other animals, fish, insects and so on. Also you should apply it to beings of other realms, the various hell realms, hungry spirit realms, long life god realms and so on. Further, it is very useful to apply the method to other human forms who do not have the birth of leisure and fortune: to the blind, deaf, handicapped and mentally impaired. Also see yourself in the situation of those millions in totalitarian

countries with no opportunity to control their destiny by practising Dharma. Get to know the situation and view of the alcoholic, the drug addict, those in situations of extreme poverty and starvation, those obsessed with and driven by wealth, power and reputation. See the limitation and lack of freedom and opportunity of such rebirths by using creative visualisation and imagination and you will naturally develop a deep appreciation and sense of joy about your own situation of leisure and fortune.

Upon a foundation of the preliminary practices, guru yoga and leisure and fortune, the stages for training the disciple's mind proceed through the paths of small, and great scope.

(From Geshe Acharya Thubten Loden, *Meditations on the Path to Enlightenment*,  
Tushita, Melbourne, 1996, pages 108-110)

## **Short Sessions**

In the beginning it is best to meditate for short periods - ten to thirty minutes - and end your session while mind and body are still comfortable and fresh. If you push yourself to meditate too long and rise from your seat with an aching body and a frustrated mind, you won't have much interest in sitting down to meditate again. Meditation should be a satisfying and productive experience, not a burden.

You should decide beforehand on a period of time for the session and stick to it, even if the meditation is going well. As your skill develops you can increase the length of your sessions accordingly.

## **Be Relaxed But Alert**

Mind and body should be relaxed and comfortable throughout the session. You can relax mentally by firmly deciding to leave behind all problems, worries and involvements of the external world and immerse yourself in the silence of your inner world. It might help to recall a past experience of feeling at ease and contented - and then generate that same feeling on your meditation seat.

Breathing meditation can also bring the same result. Observing the gentle, natural rhythm of the breath and avoiding distracting thoughts, your mental state gradually becomes tranquil and clear. But don't fall asleep! Stay alert. Take note of whatever thoughts, images, feelings and sensations arise in your mind without becoming involved in them. Your main focus of attention should always be the breath (or whatever subject you have chosen to meditate on).

Physical relaxation can be facilitated by the practice of such disciplines as hatha yoga, tai chi, kum nye or other stress-reduction and relaxation methods. Literature and courses on these techniques are available in most cities. Any means you use to ease physical tension and improve your ability to sit in meditation is a valuable addition to your practice.

## **No Expectations**

Since we all want to enjoy happiness and peace of mind and avoid problems, it is natural to want good experiences during meditation. But such expectations are not necessarily realistic and are likely to hinder your progress. The mind is complex and ever changing. One day you might have a calm, joyful meditation and the next a meditation beset by distractions and turmoil. This is quite normal and should not cause worry or frustration. Be ready for anything and do not be disturbed by whatever happens. The most troublesome painful experiences can be the most valuable in terms of the growth of wisdom.

Feel satisfied that you are making the effort to meditate and transform your mind - that itself is meditation. As long as you are trying it is mistaken to think that you can't meditate. Results take time. Don't be discouraged if you have not achieved good concentration within a few weeks; it is better to think in terms of years. Habits built up over a lifetime are not eliminated instantly but by gradual cultivation of new habits. So, be easy on yourself. Recognize your capabilities and limitations and evaluate your progress accordingly.

## **The Need for a Teacher**

The most effective way to learn anything is to study with someone who has already mastered it - and meditation is no exception. The mind can be compared to a musical instrument: in order to create beautiful music with it we need to study with a master who knows the instrument inside and out, and in order to develop a clear, enthusiastic and loving mind we need the guidance of someone who thoroughly understands how the mind works and how it can be transformed.

However, it is not easy to find a qualified teacher. The qualities to look for include compassion, knowledge and insight, morality, sincerity and skill in explanation. You should have confidence in your teacher and communicate well with him or her. Therefore, it might be a matter of years before you meet the right teacher. But don't think you should set out on a frantic guru hunt! Take it easy. When the time is right you will meet the person who can guide you successfully.

In the meantime, you can practise meditations such as those explained here, and seek the advice of any practitioner whose qualities you admire - even if the person has been meditating for only a short time. Your own innate wisdom, your inner guru, will tell you whether or not you are heading in the right direction.

## **Don't Advertise!**

Whenever we discover something new and interesting we feel like telling everyone about it, but it is not a good idea to talk too much about your meditation. Unless someone is sincerely interested and asks you about it, it is better to keep quiet. Broadcasting your experiences will dissipate whatever good energy and insight you have gained. It is best to discuss your practice only with your teacher and a few close friends.

Having taken up meditation there is no need to make big changes in your lifestyle, behaviour or appearance. You can keep your job and your friends, continue to live in your nice house and just enjoy life as usual.

Meditation is an internal, not external, activity. Your practice will transform your mind on a subtle level, making you more sensitive and clear, and giving you fresh insight into ordinary day-to-day experiences. Superficial changes are not natural and are unlikely to impress anyone, but the deep, natural changes created by meditation are real and beneficial, both for yourself and others.

(From Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide*, Wisdom, Boston, 1984, pages 28-30)

## **Common Problems: Mental Excitement**

At times during a meditation session the mind is very restless and our attention is continually distracted by other things. This tends to happen when we're feeling excited and happy. Our thoughts turn to people we love, good experiences we've had, conversations, places and films we've enjoyed. Normally we just let the mind run like this without trying to control it, so mental wandering has become a deeply in-grained habit.

It is not easy to give up habits, but we should recognize that this one is the very opposite of meditation. As long as we are busy running in circles on the surface of the mind we will never penetrate to its depths and never develop the concentration we need for perceiving reality.

There are a number of methods for counteracting mental excitement. One is to focus firmly on the breath and let the mind become as calm and even as the natural rhythm of your breathing. Each time your attention wanders, bring it back to the breath. Observe whatever thoughts and feelings arise without getting involved in them; recap that they are just waves of your mind, rising and falling. Once you have regained control over your mind you can return to the main object of the session.

A method recommended by Tibetan yogis is to imagine that the mind is enclosed within a tiny round seed whose upper hemisphere is white and lower red, situated in the central channel at the level of your navel. Concentrate on this until the mind has quietened down, then return to the object of meditation.

If you are familiar with the analytical meditations on death, impermanence or suffering, think briefly over the essential points of any one of these; this often helps to make your mind more calm and balanced. It might also help to recall your motivation - why you sat down to meditate in the first place - and thus strengthen your determination.

If mental excitement is a recurring problem, check your posture. The spine should be very straight and the head tilted slightly forward with the chin tucked slightly in - the mind tends to be restless when the head is raised too high. Reducing the amount of light in the room could also help, as bright light can stir up thoughts and feelings.

Patience is essential in dealing with a busy mind. Don't be upset with yourself if you can't keep your attention on the object of meditation. It takes time and persistent practice to learn to slow down and gain some control over the mind, so be easy on yourself.

## **Sleepiness**

The very opposite of excitement is sleepiness. This can vary from a dull, listless state of mind to near-unconsciousness. It is related to another of our habits: usually, when we close our eyes and relax our mind and body, it's time to go to sleep!

First, make sure that your back is straight and your head is not bent forward too far. Open your eyes halfway and meditate with your gaze directed at the floor in front of you. Increasing the amount of light in the room should also help you to stay alert.

Another solution is to visualize your mind enclosed within a tiny seed in the central channel at the level of your navel, as before. This time, imagine that the seed shoots up the central channel and out through the crown of your head. The seed opens and your mind merges with vast, empty space. Concentrate on this experience for a while, then return to the meditation.

It is possible that sleepiness during meditation is symptomatic of underlying depression. If your mind is still dull and sleepy after having tried these remedies, it would be best to either take a break or stop the meditation altogether.

## **Physical Discomfort**

Your meditations will flow smoothly if your body is relaxed and comfortable, but often it is difficult to get it into that state. Much of our physical tension is mind-related, arising from unresolved problems, fears, worries or anger. The most effective solution is to recognize these problems and settle them in meditation. A short-term method for easing physical tension - to be used either at the beginning of a meditation session or during it - is to sweep the body with your attention. Start at the top of the head and travel down-wards through the body. Concentrate briefly on each part and consciously let it relax. Imagine that the tension simply dissolves.

Another method is to breathe deeply and slowly, and with much concentration imagine that the tension or pain leaves your body with each exhalation.

If neither of these methods works, you could try a more elaborate one: visualizing your body as hollow. Starting at the centre of your chest, imagine that all the internal, solid parts of your body dissolve into light, and then into empty space. Everything within your chest, head, arms and legs gradually dissolves and becomes empty. Your skin transforms into a very thin membrane of light to enclose this empty space. Concentrate for a while on this experience of your body being hollow, like a balloon.

If sitting causes discomfort or pain - in the knees or back, for example - it is all right to change to a more comfortable position. As meditation is an activity of the mind, not the body, it is more important to keep the mind clear and comfortable. However, at times it is useful just to *observe* the pain, which is a conscious experience, a mental perception, and try to overcome the usual fearful reaction to it. Instead of giving it the label “pain,” see it as just a sensation, another type of energy. Doing such analysis should give you more insight into the workings of your mind and help you develop more control over your physical reactions.

An extension of this method of dealing with physical pain is mentally to increase it as much as possible. Imagine it getting worse and worse. After a while, return to the original pain - which now appears much less painful than before!

Another method is to visualize the suffering of all the beings of the universe and then, with great compassion, bring it mentally into the pain you are experiencing now. Meditate that you have taken on the pain of all beings, who are thus freed of all their suffering. Hold this thought and rejoice in it for as long as you can.

It is good to experiment with these methods for dealing with pain - but be careful not to overdo them and cause yourself an injury!

## **Strange Images and Sensations**

Meditators sometimes experience unusual images appearing in the mind, or sensations such as the body expanding or shrinking, or the mind floating outside the body. These are normal reactions of the mind adjusting itself to a new activity and nothing to worry about.



On the other hand, do not be attached to such experiences or try to repeat them - this will only distract you from the real purpose of meditation. Simply observe whatever images or feelings arise without clinging to or rejecting them and let them disappear of their own accord.

However, if any disturbing experience occurs frequently and you are unable to free yourself from it, you should consult a meditation teacher or a more experienced practitioner. It might be best to discontinue your practice until you receive their advice.

## **Discouragement**

We often hear people complain, “I can’t meditate; I’ve tried but it doesn’t work,” or “I’ve been meditating for so many months but nothing is happening.” However, the problem is usually that they are expecting too much too quickly.

We need to be realistic. Most of us have never in our lives tried to understand our mind or control our thoughts and feelings. Old habits are not easy to break. Even if the results of daily meditation don’t appear for two or three years - although this is highly unlikely - it should not be a cause for worry or despair.

Positive changes do not appear suddenly out of the blue, but develop slowly, gradually, little by little each day, so be patient with yourself. Remember, just making an effort to understand and control the mind is meditation. Trying to do what is best for yourself and others, you can feel confident that your meditation is worthwhile.

Often, new meditators think that their negative minds are getting worse, not better! And they feel that it is meditation that has caused it. Consider, however, what happens when you wash clothes. When you first put them into water, a certain amount of dirt comes out. As you continue to scrub them the water gets dirtier and dirtier. You might even be surprised by the amount of dirt that they contained. It would be foolish to blame the soap, water and scrubbing for the dirt - the process of washing merely reveals what is there already and is the right method for completely removing the dirt.

Similarly, meditation is the way to purify the mind of what is already there: at first we discover the gross negativities, then the more subtle.

So, be patient and don't worry!

(From Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide*, Wisdom, Boston, 1984, pages 37-41)

## **Meditation on the Clarity on the Mind**

The reality of our existence is that we are a combination of body and mind. Each of these in turn is a combination of many parts, all constantly in a state of flux. Unfortunately, our ego is not satisfied with such a simple explanation. It complicates matters by fabricating a view of an I or self based on our conceptions, likes and dislikes. We think, “I’m attractive,” “I’m ugly,” “I’m a good dancer,” “I won’t succeed,” “I have a bad temper.” We believe these projections and assume they are permanent and unchanging.

We do the same with people and objects in the world around us. We believe “he is ugly,” “she is good.” We build up our own elaborate and very solid picture of reality and hold on to it unquestioningly.

Meditation on the clarity of the mind is an effective antidote to our concrete projections. We can gain a direct experience of the clear, non-material, transient nature of all thoughts, feelings and perceptions, thus weakening the tendency to identify with them. As the subject - the mind - softens, so too do its projected objects; they slowly lose their concreteness. The feeling of dislike towards the “bad person” may still arise through habit, but we have the space to recall, “This is a projection of my thought, which is clear and transitory. It rises like a wave in my mind and soon will pass. The object does not exist in the way I see it.”

This meditation is especially effective for softening our view of our own self. Normally our self-esteem is low, based on past mistakes, personality faults, bad habits and the like. But anger, jealousy, selfishness, depression and the other problems that haunt us are mental experiences and therefore clear and transitory. These states of mind depend for their existence on our belief in them! By recognizing this in meditation on the mind’s nature we learn to let go of and stop identifying with these experiences.

Our intrinsic nature is clear and pure and is with us twenty-four hours a day. The negativities that rise and fall like waves on the ocean of our consciousness are temporary and can be eliminated. Consistent practice of this meditation will eventually generate a certainty about this pure nature to the point where it becomes our reality, our actual experience. This is a natural step towards understanding the more subtle nature of self and all phenomena: their emptiness of inherent existence.

## **The Practice**

Begin by breathing in deeply through both nostrils, bringing the air down to the stomach, holding it for a moment and then exhaling slowly and gently through your pursed lips. Repeat this twice, then breathe normally; observe your breathing without thinking, without conceptualising. Once your awareness has become sharp, turn your attention to the clarity of your consciousness.

Your consciousness, or mind, is whatever you are experiencing at the moment: sensations in your body, thoughts, feelings, perceptions of sounds and so forth. The nature of each of these experiences is clarity, without form or colour, space-like, pure awareness. Focus your attention on this clear, pure nature of the mind.

Initially it might be difficult to find the actual object, that is, the clarity. If so, meditate on a mental image of clarity - one way to generate such an image is to visualize space. Imagine lying on a hilltop and staring up at a sky that is completely clear and free of clouds.

Concentrate on this vast, unobstructed emptiness. Imagine that it flows down and embraces you and your surroundings; everything becomes empty like space. Hold this experience; feel that the nature of your mind is like this clear, empty space.

Thoughts and distractions will arise, but do not react to them; neither follow them nor reject them. Remember that they are clear by nature, without substance. Simply watch them come and go, then return to the awareness of the mind's clarity.

Do not think about anything during this meditation. There is no need to wonder what the mind is; simply observe it, its clear nature, which is like infinite, empty space. That is sufficient. Be natural. Meditation is simple and natural; it is nothing special.

Concentration means holding the mind on an object continuously, without forgetting it. The automatic result of concentration is awareness, which is free of concepts. A light does not need to think, "I am dispelling darkness" - it simply illuminates. Awareness is an inner light that enables us to see things more clearly. It dispels the heaviness of how things appear to us, thus weakening our clinging or aversion to them.

Meditate for short periods - ten to thirty minutes - until your concentration has improved. Then you can sit for an hour or more, or as long as you can maintain strong awareness. If the meditation is going well, you will feel light and relaxed.

Conclude the meditation session by dedicating the positive energy created during it to the happiness and welfare of everyone.

(From Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide*, Wisdom, Boston, 1984, pages 47-49)

## Instructions on Clearing Out Stale Breath

While sitting in the seven-fold bodily posture, the essentials of breathing [may be corrected in] either of two ways: (1) Clearing out stale breath in nine rounds or (2) Balancing the breathing by ensuring that the movement of breath is gentle.

### *1. Clearing out stale breath in nine rounds*

Inhale through your right nostril and exhale through the left. Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right. Inhale through both nostrils and exhale through both. Do each of these three times. When exhaling, imagine that all the faults and flaws in your continuum are exhaled along with the breath and when inhaling you imagine that the blessings of the Buddha's and bodhisattvas are gathered inward along with the breath.

### *2. The way to balance the breathing by ensuring that the movement of breath is gentle*

Having corrected your posture so that the seven essential points of bodily posture are present, then check your mind to see whether your mind has fallen under the sway of fantasies about this life or if one is only motivated by [fear of] bad omens [signifying difficulties] in future lives. When checking to see whether your mind is directed towards the Dharma, if you find that as a result of clinging to this life, you are subject to attachment and aversion, recognize that and think, "These negative attitudes have ruined so many different lives from time without beginning. And if I let them persist they will again put to waste this life of leisure's and endowments that I have obtained. I will cast away these negative states of mind!" While exhaling, imagine that you have cleansed your continuum of the afflictive emotions and their seeds. While inhaling, imagine that you are gathering in all of the blessings of the Buddha's and bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

Without dishevelled breathing, that is without breathing loudly, forceful laboured breathing, or a disparity in the length of one's inhalation and exhalations, check to see that the rise and fall are gentle and allow your breathing to remain natural.

Then count the cycles of breath, one exhalation and inhalation counting as a full cycle. Work at it so that the mind can be held without distraction for at least seven full cycles. Then try and hold it for another seven cycles. Then again for another seven cycles. Once the pure essence has been refined out from the coarse dregs, allow the mind to abide naturally in its clear and knowing essence. Once the breath has been thus cleansed, check your continuum and correct your motivation. It is necessary to develop a special virtuous state of mind.

Also, from the root verses on Mahamudra:

*Within absorption, the support for bliss,  
Assume the seven-point bodily posture  
And clear out stale breath in nine rounds;  
Thus you will refine the purity of awareness from its dregs.*

This saying is an important vehicle [for development]. Checking one's mind and correcting your motivation is as essential to the start of all meditations as the Sanskrit title is to Tibetan translations of the sutras.

(From Kachen Yeshe Gyaltsan's *Commentary on Mahamudra*, translated by Ven. Lozang Zopa, Chenrezig Institute, 2002)