

Meditation on Buddha Nature

An extract from Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche's teaching in a day of meditation at Blackheath, NSW, Australia, on 30 June 2013.

Tashi Delek everyone!

In Tibetan Buddhism we set our intention for all sentient beings, thinking of them as our mothers, because the mother is the one who gives the most love, and this is central to our experience of love and compassion. There is probably no being throughout the world who isn't fostered somehow by a mother. The love of a mother makes the world go round. So let's set our intention for this Dharma teaching, for the sake of all sentient beings who are like our mothers.

Sometimes people ask about my nuns at Gebchak Gonpa, which is in a very remote part of Tibet. The nuns do a lot of meditation and yogic practice and don't mix with many people. So how is it that they are benefiting others? What's the point? Isn't that selfish? But they do benefit others very much, because they are cultivating powerful compassion and selfless minds. Even within their environment you can see a ripple effect on the nomads and surrounding people, who are inspired and conduct themselves with noble behaviour.

There is a story by Patrul Rinpoche about the importance of the good intention. Somebody made a *tsa-tsa* (clay image) of a Buddha. He placed it on a hillside and walked away. A second person came along when it was raining. He saw the *tsa-tsa* in the rain and thought 'Oh that's going to get destroyed so I must protect the holy image'. He had nothing but a rubber boot to cover it with, so with the best of intentions he covered the *tsa-tsa* with his rubber boot. Then a third person came along and saw the rubber boot on the *tsa-tsa*. He was horrified to see such a lowly rubber boot on a holy object, and removed it from *tsa-tsa*. All three people had pure intentions and so the bottom line is that it didn't really matter what they did. This is a true story that shows how the Dharma we are practicing is Dharma of the heart and the mind. All of our practice comes down to a state of mind. The characteristic of a Buddhist is somebody who is the same on the inside as they are on the outside: very sincere, very natural. That is a good intention.

Today we are all here to learn and practice meditation. When we talk about meditation, the meaning is to transform the mind. Usually in our lives we don't rest in a spacious, clear mental state for even one minute. We are constantly caught up in thinking. There may be some mental clarity when we are in a deep sleep, without any dreams or mental activity; but besides that, there is almost no thought-free rest in our waking life at all. This excess of distorted thinking, this confusion, is what we need to transform with meditation. Meditation transforms and heals the deluded mind. It is like medicine for fear, anxiety and unhappiness in the mind. Sometimes unhappiness sits in a very deep place in the consciousness. Meditation is the essential antidote for that.

We just have to remember that in its original state, the mind is clear and spacious like the sky, while concepts and deluded thoughts are like clouds – they are not the original nature of mind. We need to see through the clouds to the pure nature of mind. The clear sky-like nature of mind is Buddha nature. And this can be realised, awakened. The mind is not the nature of negative emotions. It is not of the nature of anxiety and confusion. Do we all know this? We must know that if something is pure by nature, it can be purified. If we didn't understand that it could be purified, we wouldn't bother. We wouldn't try. But the mind by nature is pure, and it can be realised. Obscurations can be cleared. The confusion and the obscurations are merely temporary. We must always remember that Buddha nature is the essential reason for meditation. If somebody comes up to you and asks, 'What is meditation? Why do you meditate?' What would you answer? We have to know the answer to this. If we meditate merely to attain calmness, without understanding the essential intent, it is only a neutral practice and cannot accomplish the Buddha Dharma.

As it is, the mind is primordially pure and obscurations are merely temporary. They are not the actual nature of the mind and we are practicing to clear them. Again the very nature, the very essence of the mind – is pure. It is just distorted by projections. It is the deluded grasping at dualistic projections that is the problem. Meditation is about overcoming that deluded grasping. It's exactly the same meaning when we talk about enlightenment, or when we talk about going to a pure land. It comes down to exactly the same understanding. It is in the nature of the mind that these will happen. People might be meditating and doing prayers to go to Dewachen pure land, thinking that they can ascend there or go to some other place. But that is not the way it works.

Happiness and joy occur within the mind. The pure land exists within the mind. Likewise hell and misery exist within the mind. If we take one simple phenomenon like water, it is regarded completely differently by different perceptions. Humans see it as water, animals and fish see it as their habitat, while other sentient beings may perceive it as hot, dangerous fluid. There are many different ways that water is perceived. Another example is the differing perceptions of an owl and a human being. For humans and most creatures, daytime is when the sun shines and illuminates the world. For an owl, however, it is night time that is clear. It all comes down to perception. Or you may really love someone and feel attracted to them, while others feel nothing at all. It really comes down to one's own perception. It doesn't come from the object, it comes from the mind.

When we meditate, we shouldn't think that we are trying to experience something different in the mind, or trying to stop something in the mind. Meditation is not a mind-made activity. When meditating just leave the mind as it is, uncontrived. Let your body be relaxed. Don't manipulate your mind in meditation. When we meditate, particularly in the Nyingma tradition, we are taught to keep the eyes gently opened, even in basic *shamatha* meditation. Because with closed eyes the mind may become dull or darkened. This doesn't mean that the eyes should be wide open and staring, but relaxed and slightly open. When we meditate a lot of thoughts occur, but if we have noticed this it means we are aware, and that is good. There is no problem with thoughts. Please do not try to stop thoughts. When thoughts come and go in the mind, let them come and go. Simply be aware. So now we are going to meditate for twenty minutes. Then we will have questions.

-- **Meditation [20 mins]** --

Question †

Student: Rinpoche could you speak about the difference between the clear light mind and a blank mind?

Rinpoche: A blank mind, or a totally empty mind with nothing happening, is an extreme of nothingness. This is a misunderstanding of emptiness. In understanding the difference between a blank mind and clear light mind, we should understand that when we say clear light we do not mean as in a shining light. We are not talking about

a yellow light or a colour, but rather a lucid, aware clarity. When we talk about the aspect of clarity in Rigpa, it is not like light rays from the sun. Rather it is clear and pure awareness. If we are thinking of a colour, then we don't have the ultimate view. As soon as we've identified a conceptual colour, then there is an opposite to it. For example if we've identified a vivid colour, then there is an opposite of darkness or dullness. Therefore that is not it. That is not the ultimate view.

Westerners are generally very well educated and liberal. They have bright potential and sharp intellects. But perhaps westerners face a problem of taking the intellect too far. They are always making efforts to understand intellectually. They are trying to discover the subtlest points, the deepest and most profound understandings, through intellectual reason. But the ultimate truth cannot be known with the intellect. It can only be known within one's own experience, one's own nature of mind, with strong faith, pure vision and the compassionate heart of Bodhicitta. That is where it is. Devotion stated in other terms is faith and pure perception. The experience of pure perception is empty and appearing. It is both empty and clear – a union. There is nothing solidly existing there, but at the same time it is awareness and clarity. In order to realise the true view, the Buddhist view, we require a lot of conditions. It takes Bodhicitta, the warm heart, and it takes devotion and faith. There are many different conditions required to realize the ultimate view.

If somebody has genuine faith, pure perception and loving kindness (Bodhicitta) in their heart, they will be helped at times when they fall into extremes of nihilism or eternalism. In trying to understand the ultimate view we swing back and forth between mental extremes, and when this happens, faith, pure perception and Bodhicitta allow a restful balance between the two – like an experience of rainfall on dry earth. This is what we need. I think that many people nowadays tend to the extreme of nihilism, because science and scepticism is a very strong world view. They critically examine and deconstruct something in trying to find its ultimate nature. They then end up with a nihilistic view. So we have to be very cautious, because the middle way of Madhyamika is a very fine balance. We must always be careful that we are not falling into either extreme.

Most people here today have received many teachings from highly qualified Lamas and have nothing to worry about. In speaking about this, I am not concerned that you

are falling into the extreme of nihilism, because I know that you've been open to and received traditional teachings from Tibetan masters. So you have come to understand karma of cause and effect, and that existence or reality is an interdependence of causes and conditions. You understand that things don't inherently self-exist. I think some people who are interested in the Buddha Dharma read a lot of books in an attempt to gain the ultimate understanding. Then maybe they come to the conclusion that there is nothing, and that enlightenment is merely emptiness, a non-existence. I think that perhaps a lot of people have this misunderstanding. People are sceptical about the possibility of enlightenment and ask 'What is enlightenment?' Well of course they are not to be blamed for thinking this way. Without having experience, an experiential understanding, it is impossible to know. We cannot understand it by just hearing or reading about it. We can only understand it through practice and experience. When we talk with our friends about Buddhism and the nature of reality, we should emphasise the importance of experiential understanding.

The two extreme views are like a seesaw, always swinging back and forth. It is quite hard to balance in the middle. We have to be really careful. These extreme views are basically the materialistic and the nihilistic views. In medieval times in India, it was the Charvakas, or the Materialists, who believed that after the physical elements dissolve at death, there is nothing, like a lamp going out. That is a mistaken view.

So far science has been primarily interested in the physical elements in nature. But more recently it is slowly starting to turn its attention to the mind, to study consciousness, and in doing so it is becoming more interested in Buddhism. There is more dialogue between the two. Tibetan people and Lamas are predicting that as China is developing rapidly in science, in the future there will be more opportunities for Buddhist dialogue. This could become like the Mind & Life conferences His Holiness the Dalai Lama has with psychologists and scientists. The more an open-minded, scientific approach is taken to Buddhism, the more it establishes the truth of Buddhist philosophy and justifies the importance of practice. Of course in Buddhism we have the traditional belief that from lifetime to lifetime there is a stream of consciousness, and through lifetimes of deliberate cultivation, over thousands of years, an evolution of consciousness occurs. Scientists, generally speaking, have so far only been interested in examining physical objects.

Question †

Student: Rinpoche, yesterday when you were talking about your nuns in Gebchak Nunnery, you were very inspiring. But I was thinking that in the West it's very hard to find people with such dedication. I wonder if you feel that people will get realisation in the West without that kind of dedication to practice. I find it difficult to think that way. And the conditions are not always there. It has happened for some people, but it's quite rare. So what can you say about the future of the Dharma in the west?

Rinpoche: I feel that there is every reason to hope that westerners will get realisation, because the amount of time you spend practicing doesn't actually matter. What matters is that you have genuine confidence and certainty in Buddha nature and constantly hold that reality. If you always maintain that understanding and confidence, it doesn't matter about the room or environment you are in, or the amount of time spent doing formal practice. Those conditions are relative. The main thing is the nature of mind. The mind is where it's at. Even in your office, if you sit on your chair for a few minutes when you have some time and reflect on the nature of mind, your office becomes a retreat place. I really want to emphasise that you should not be concerned that you don't have the right conditions, or the right teachings, or everything needed to practice fully. Please don't think that way. It really does not matter where in the world you are. Even if you stayed in a monastery or long term retreat centre, if you didn't take good care of your mind with faith and confidence, it would pretty much be pointless.

There is a story of the Karmapa and the crazy yogin Drukpa Kunley. The two of them met and agreed that they were going to stay in meditation retreat for seven days. So they prepared everything and set up the retreat boundary. The Karmapa began meditating. But then he became distracted thinking about his favourite horse, worrying that an animal could be eating the cord tying up his horse and it would run away. Drukpa Kunley, who was a completely crazy but highly realised yogin, shouted, 'You broke your retreat! You came out of retreat!' Drukpa Kunley was a Mahasiddha, and though he seemed completely crazy to ordinary appearances, he had utter clairvoyance. If you ever go to the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, you can see a white pillar next to the statue of the Sakyamuni Buddha with two stones lodged at the bottom. Apparently Drukpa Kunley, and another crazy yogin called Heruka, had to exorcise an

evil spirit that had intruded into the Jokhang Temple. The yogins were inside the Jokhang and acting like madmen, hurling stones at each other, and the stones lodged into the bottom of the pillar. There was a drought in Lhasa at that time. It was very hot and the lack of rain was believed to be caused by the evil spirit. The crazy yogins got rid of the evil spirit and there was rain again. There are plenty of stories about the crazy behaviour of yogins.

When we say go into retreat, it means the mind is in retreat, not the body.

I feel quite confident about Dharma in the West because many great lamas are establishing their lineages there, and a lot of preservation of Tibetan Buddhist scriptural traditions is taking place there. I think that at this point the translation of the Buddha Dharma in the West – the translators and their manner of translation – is very important. And I feel quite confident that in the long run the practice will also be good. The Lamas are a bit concerned about the danger of the Buddha Dharma in the West becoming mixed with new age teachings, or being diluted by incomplete and non-traditional ideas. If this happens then the traditional integrity of the teachings will be lost, and Buddhism could become a kind of emotional religion, or atheism, or a non-religion. These days people with money can write about anything they like and have it published. Even in Tibet nowadays, too many people are publishing about all kinds of new ideas. They receive a brief education and then write about their thoughts and experiences. Until today the Buddhist tradition in Tibet has been preserved with pure integrity; in the past Dharma scriptures were only composed by masters who were highly realised. But once every person, and every Lama who feels like writing, has their own collected volumes, then there is unlimited written material available and it becomes very hard to discriminate between the pure and the mixed-up.

Question †

Student: Then how do we tell if it's a pure teaching, since a lot has been diluted in the West? How do we stay mindful of what is a pure teaching and what is not?

Rinpoche: I don't know how. This is a problem and that's why I'm expressing my concern. Anybody can write a book. Anybody with the money can publish a book and anybody can distribute it. Before in Tibet you would only find collected teachings by very highly qualified teachers like Mipham Rinpoche or Longchen Rabjam.

Student: Unfortunately it's already happening, particularly in the world of psychology. There are a lot of psychologists who study some aspects of Buddhism but are not very well practiced, and they go off and teach courses. They might teach a sevenfold or sixfold path instead of the eightfold path. They take bits out and mix it up. They include personal development as well.

Rinpoche: Yes. There was a good reason that the Buddha taught the eightfold path! I am a bit worried that the Tibetan Buddhist teachings are going to be diluted.

Student: There's a tendency in the West for some people to do some practice and go off and write about their experiences. I know many Lamas feel that this may be misguided, but often other westerners find it quite beneficial to read about the experiences of others and it doesn't necessarily seem negative. What are your feelings about that?

Rinpoche: If somebody has made genuine effort and gained some genuine experience of the Buddha Dharma and they write about it, then there's no real fault there. It is not too serious. Perhaps it is good to share that type of book. The danger lies particularly on the scholastic side where people are collecting, rewriting or commenting on traditional scriptures, when they might not have complete knowledge about them and parts get left out. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo is a good example of how to do it correctly. She spent many years in traditional practice and after all that time in retreat, she came out and wrote about Buddhism in a very sound way.

Student: Is this maybe some indication that we need a more direct relationship with our teacher? In the West we very much rely on written word. But in the direct communication and direct relationship with a teacher we sometimes let go a little bit because it takes so much trust.

Rinpoche: Yes it's good if you can have more communication with your Guru or teacher. But if that's not possible, or there are obstacles to communicating, then the main thing is to have your own sincere practice of Bodhicitta, and gain genuine experience from that.