

Purifying the Mind

A reconstructed teaching by Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Potowa Centre, 21 August 2026 — morning and afternoon sessions

Editorial note

This is a coherent reconstruction of the teaching from two automatic Voice Memos translations. Repetitions, verbal fillers, room conversation, telephone interruptions and transcription artefacts have been removed. The order and substance of the teaching have been preserved, and sentences have been lightly reorganised for clarity. Familiar Buddhist terms have been restored where the context is clear. A small number of doubtful readings are marked in the text & collected in the final editorial notes.

Motivation: what makes an action Dharma

Good morning. I am very happy to be back in Wagga Wagga.

Before beginning a teaching, it is beneficial to shape our motivation. Motivation largely determines the meaning of the deeds of our body, speech and mind: whether an action becomes spiritual practice, whether it becomes Dharma, and whether it becomes a cause of limited benefit or limitless benefit for ourselves and the numberless sentient beings. In Buddhist practice, motivation is therefore one of the key factors that brings meaning to every action.

We can first spend a few moments bringing ourselves into the present. Our body and our environment exist in dependence upon the elements and upon many causes and conditions. Body, mind, person and outer environment are interdependent. When the mind is carried back into memories of the past (whether pleasant or unpleasant) or projected forward into worry and expectation, it cannot rest fully in the activity of the present moment. This distraction makes it difficult both to accumulate virtue and to purify negativities effectively.

Settling the mind through the breath

The nine-round breathing practice is commonly used in Buddhist practice to settle the mind and balance the energies. Several cycles may be done; three cycles can be especially effective. The first settles the body and mind. The second can be used for purification. The third establishes a basis for concentration, wisdom and other higher practices.

The breath is like a horse and the mind like its rider. When the horse comes to rest, the rider also comes to rest. The winds or energies carried by the breath serve as the mount of the mind and its mental factors. By bringing one-pointed attention to breathing in and breathing out, we begin to bring the other energies of the body and mind into balance.

There are several ways to do this.

First, simply follow the natural breath. When breathing out, know that you are breathing out; when breathing in, know that you are breathing in. Let mindfulness remain with that rhythm. If counting nine rounds creates more distraction, begin with only one or two minutes of uncomplicated awareness.

Second, lightly attend to the **sound** of the breath. Place mindfulness on the subtle sound of breathing in and out.

Third, use visualisation so that awareness appears to guide the breath. Imagine the breath descending to the region of the navel chakra. Although the physical air does not literally travel there, visualise the whole nervous system being filled with life and strength. Any blockage is cleared; damaged or depleted areas are restored; the whole body, from crown to feet, becomes refreshed.

As you breathe out through the mouth, imagine a cleansing movement beginning in the navel region, like sweeping or vacuuming. It gathers physical toxins, disturbed energies, sickness, emotional pain, negative karma and harmful imprints into the central channel and expels them beyond return. If you understand emptiness, recognise at the same time that these negativities do not exist inherently or independently. Relatively they function and cause suffering, but ultimately they are empty of existence from their own side. Let them dissolve into the expanse of emptiness. This recognition makes the cleansing especially effective.

In a first round, simply settle. In a second, use the visualisation to purify a particular emotion or obstruction. In a third, choose a virtuous object (a Buddha image, the eye of the Buddha, the sound of a mantra, compassion or love) and place the mind upon it. Good concentration has three qualities: vivid clarity of the object, one-pointed placement of the mind, and a relaxed, peaceful serviceability of body and mind. Keep the spine upright and the chest open. If the body or mind becomes strained or restless, pause and resume gently.

Feeling the presence and qualities of the awakened ones

On the basis of a settled body and mind, feel the presence of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times. Do not regard statues and paintings as merely material objects. See them as manifestations or reminders of Dharmakāya, the awakened dimension from which limitless benefit for sentient beings arises. Every detail of a holy image can remind us of enlightened qualities and inspire those qualities in our own heart.

The Buddhas have perfected moral discipline. Moral integrity is naturally admirable; it makes the awakened ones worthy objects of veneration, sources of refuge, true friends and reliable guides.

They have perfected generosity: not only material generosity, but generosity of life, love, compassion, inspiration and Dharma. They dedicate their entire existence, without bias, to the welfare of limitless sentient beings. Whether or not we notice them, appreciate them or listen to them, they remain ready to help. Their wisdom is not mere opinion. It is tested and perfected wisdom, embodied in their own awakening and taught according to the different dispositions of beings. The traditional expression of this limitless skilful teaching is the 84,000 Dharma teachings, antidotes to the 84,000 forms of affliction.

They have perfected patience. The Jātaka tales recount the Buddha's former lives as a bodhisattva and the hardships willingly endured to draw near to beings and benefit them. Śākyamuni Buddha's appearance in our world about 2,600 years ago made the Sūtra, Tantra and Vinaya teachings available to us. His life revealed that love and compassion need not remain partial. They can become immeasurable and mature into bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment.

They have perfected joyous effort. A heart devoted to others is joyful because, as the bodhisattva teachings explain, suffering comes from cherishing only oneself, while happiness comes from cherishing others. The Buddha's state is one of sustainable, everlasting happiness because every moment is devoted to the welfare of beings.

They have perfected concentration. Concentration is not merely keeping the mind fixed on one point. Its deeper meaning is serviceability: body and mind become workable in the service of virtue. In a Buddha, every moment of body, speech and mind is effortlessly serviceable for the welfare of sentient beings.

They have perfected wisdom. The wisdom that knows selflessness directly counters ignorance, because ignorance falsely apprehends persons and phenomena as independently existing. When every trace of that false apprehension and its obscurations has been removed, wisdom reaches its consummation in the dharmakāya.¹

The remaining perfections (skilful means, aspiration, power and exalted wisdom) enable an awakened being to guide each person according to that person's karma and disposition. Because beings cannot be forced along the path, however beneficial the destination, skilful means are indispensable. Through aspirations made and fulfilled over countless lives, and through the power of awakened body, speech and mind, even seeing a holy

¹ "Selflessness" here does not mean that nothing exists. It means that persons and phenomena do not exist independently or inherently; they exist dependently.

image, hearing or reciting a Buddha's name, remembering an awakened being or dreaming of one can plant virtue and purify obscurations.

Rejoicing in this human life

Reflect also on how fortunate our present situation is. At this very moment some people face natural disasters, warfare, grave illness, memory loss or death. Some wish to visit a Dharma centre but lack the physical ability, freedom or resources. Others use intelligence, speech and technology to manipulate, injure and destroy. Here, by contrast, we are using body, speech and mind to discuss bodhicitta, peace and liberation.

Do not measure the value of this by numbers. One peaceful person is profoundly valuable in a world where many contribute to harm. When you bring peace to your own body, speech and mind, the world becomes more peaceful because you are in it. If you become violent, the world becomes less safe; if you become peaceful, the world becomes safer. Cultivating a peaceful being has enormous meaning.

Sometimes negative conditions consume us and we feel depressed, lost or meaningless. But one who has found and continues to practise the path is not lost. To use human intelligence for virtue, to subdue one's mind and to try to benefit others is to use this human life meaningfully. Whatever our past has been, the present moment may be the best part of our life: right now we can cultivate the heart, use body and speech beneficially, and interact with our environment in a wholesome way.

Buddhism as the inner path

The Tibetan word for a Buddhist is *nangpa*, an “inner person” or practitioner of the inner path. This accords with the teaching that “subduing one's own mind is the teaching of the Buddha.” Buddhism is directed towards transforming the mind and freeing it from negativities and obscurations.

The first question is whether these negativities really can be purified. The answer is definitely yes. The Vinaya presentation says that there is no negativity that cannot be purified through the application of the four opponent powers.

Negativity may be discussed in relation to the person (body, speech and mind) and in relation to the environment. The ten non-virtues comprise three physical actions, four verbal actions and three mental actions. Negativities can also be classified by the result they obstruct or produce.

At a first level are non-virtuous karmas that obstruct a fortunate rebirth and cause suffering in the lower realms. At a second level are the afflictive and karmic obscurations that bind us anywhere within the six realms (gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings) and obstruct liberation or nirvāṇa. At the subtlest level are the cognitive obscurations, which obstruct omniscience and full Buddhahood. All of these can be purified by their antidotes.

Every genuine Dharma teaching or practice acts as a general antidote because Dharma is whatever subdues the mind. Specific antidotes, however, work more directly. A general supplement may support the whole body, while a targeted medicine treats a particular disease. In the same way, Dharma is medicine, the afflictions and karmic obscurations are diseases, and the experiences of saṃsāra are their symptoms.

Where karma is carried

Although actions are performed through body, speech and mind, their karmic potentials are not stored as physical or verbal objects. They are carried in the mental continuum as imprints or energies. An action of body, an act of speech or a thought leaves a potential in consciousness.

Different Buddhist philosophical systems explain the basis that carries these imprints differently. The transcript at this point speaks of the sixth mental consciousness and then of another more stable consciousness, apparently “a seventh consciousness” called **[“uni” ? / afflicted mentality (kliṣṭamanas) ? / foundational or store consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) ?]**. The standard Yogācāra presentation normally distinguishes the seventh afflicted mentality from the eighth store consciousness, the latter being the usual carrier of karmic

seeds. The intended technical term here is therefore uncertain. The essential point of the teaching is clear: karmic imprints continue within the stream of consciousness rather than being lodged in the physical body.

These negative potentials are impermanent, conditioned and dependently arisen. Because they arise through causes and conditions, they can change when different causes and conditions are applied. Ultimately, they also lack inherent existence. These facts are themselves proof that purification is possible.

If negativity were permanent, it could never be transformed. But it is not permanent. It can be weakened, neutralised, removed or even transformed into a condition for wisdom and compassion, just as a poisonous substance can become medicine when combined and used correctly. Understanding anger can open the way to compassion; understanding ignorance can open the way to wisdom. At the subtlest level of dependent arising, negativity is not something fixed “out there” from its own side. What appears is inseparable from the projections and habits of mind. When wisdom replaces ignorance, the energy of ignorance gives way to the energy of wisdom.

The mind is clear and luminous

Can the mind itself be purified? To answer, look at its definition: the mind is clear and knowing, or clear and luminous. This reveals something surprising. In its fundamental nature, mind is already pure; what must be purified are its adventitious stains.

The physical body is like a guesthouse and the mind like its guest. The guesthouse is temporary. The mental continuum is the principal basis by which we speak of the continuity of a being. The clear-light nature of mind, rather than any passing sensory, conceptual or deluded state, is the deepest basis of our potential.

Negative karma and delusions do not belong intrinsically to clear light. They are circumstantial. This pure and luminous nature is Buddha-nature: the potential for awakening. We often identify ourselves with a small, temporary and afflicted part of experience and then mistake it for the whole of who we are. If someone calls us deluded, we readily agree; if someone says that our nature is pure or Buddha-like, we resist. Yet there is a stronger basis for saying that we are close to Buddhahood than saying that impurity defines us permanently.

A small difficulty can appear to ruin a whole day, and a limited period of suffering can appear to define an entire life. The same exaggeration occurs when temporary stains are taken to define the mind. The traditional meaning is: **“The nature of mind is clear light; the stains are adventitious”**. Because the stains are temporary, purification and liberation are possible. We suffer because of confusion, ignorance and delusion. When ignorance and delusion cease, that cessation is liberation.

All Dharma practice can be gathered into two activities: purifying negativities and accumulating merit. These two support every stage of the path.

Karma and the scope of purification

From beginningless lives we have accumulated limitless imprints through flawed actions of body, speech and mind. Sometimes the physical or verbal act is not harmful by nature, but a negative intention makes it non-virtuous. Sometimes the action itself is harmful even without a fully formed intention. Sometimes both intention and action are negative. Harm may be directed towards oneself, other beings or the natural environment in which beings live.

Karma literally means action, but in ordinary discussion the term usually refers to contaminated action and its potential. There are virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral karmas. All three remain contaminated when they are performed under ignorance: the dualistic appearance and grasping that apprehend self and phenomena as inherently existent. Virtuous karma brings pleasant saṃsāric results, but unless it is joined to renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom, it does not by itself bring liberation.

Even attending a Dharma teaching may create only virtuous saṃsāric karma if the motivation is not shaped at the beginning and the merit not dedicated at the end. It may lead to happiness or another precious human rebirth, but it has not yet become a pure cause of liberation or enlightenment.

This is why purification cannot be limited to obviously negative actions. Ultimately, the whole contaminated cycle of saṃsāra must be purified. Pleasant human and divine experiences are impermanent and belong to the

suffering of change or to pervasive conditioned suffering. A healthy body is valuable, but it ages, becomes sick and dies because it was produced under karma and affliction.

A human rebirth arises principally in dependence upon ethical conduct, generosity and aspiration. Yet if these are directed only towards the concerns of this life or towards a favourable place within the six realms, their scope remains limited. Actions become causes of genuine liberation when motivated beyond worldly concern.

The three principal aspects of the Mahāyāna path are renunciation, bodhicitta and the correct view of emptiness. They transform ordinary virtue into a path to liberation and awakening. Generosity, for example, is excellent, but it is most pure when free from the wish for praise, status or merely one's own good feeling; it is offered selflessly for others and sealed by wisdom.

Purifying conceptual obscuration through concentration and emptiness

The clear-light nature of mind itself does not need cleansing. "Purifying the mind" refers to purifying the sensory, conceptual and deluded levels of mind. Conceptual hallucination is overcome by the union of a serviceable mind and the wisdom realising emptiness.

Bodhicitta alone does not remove conceptual obscuration. An ordinary bodhisattva may possess genuine bodhicitta and still have delusions and conceptual appearance. What distinguishes an ārya bodhisattva is direct, non-conceptual realisation of emptiness. Before the path of seeing, emptiness may be correctly realised through a conceptual image and reasoning. On the path of seeing, wisdom knows emptiness directly, without the intervening layer of an image, example or reasoning consciousness.

Correct intellectual understanding is necessary but not sufficient. Direct realisation requires a serviceable, stable mind: śamatha or serenity. Without śamatha, even an accurate definition of emptiness and many years of intermittent reflection will not mature into the required direct insight.

The emptiness of the person means that the person lacks inherent or independent existence. The person exists dependently: upon causes and conditions, parts, the aggregates, and mental designation. The traditional examples of a mirage, dream, reflection, star or magical illusion help us understand this. The person exists, but not in the solid, self-established way in which the person appears.

We should bring this understanding into ordinary life. When seeing ourselves in a mirror, walking, sitting or eating, we may think: "An illusion-like person is doing an illusion-like action." We do not say that the person is completely nonexistent. A reflection appears vividly and functions as a reflection, yet no solid person can be found inside the mirror. Likewise, the body and mind are like a mirror that supports the appearance and designation of a person; when searched for among the parts of the body or among the various states of consciousness, an independently existing person cannot be found.

This investigation is analytical meditation. Debate, reasoning and repeated examination are forms of meditation when they familiarise the mind with reality. At times, after analysis has led to a clear conclusion, rest the mind without further analysis in the absence of the inherently existing person.

Training in śamatha

The principal obstacles to serenity can be condensed into laziness and distraction, and their principal remedies into mindfulness and introspective awareness. In the more detailed presentation there are five faults and eight antidotes, six powers, four modes of attention and nine stages of mental placement. These are explained systematically in the śamatha section of Je Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*.

Choose a suitable meditation object and remain with it. Do not keep changing objects whenever practice becomes difficult. When the image is lost, introspective awareness notices; mindfulness returns the mind to the object. Do not force the mind. If practice is not working, take a short break and resume at a better time. A brief session at the right time is more valuable than a long, strained session. Early morning often works well, and it is better not to practise when extremely hungry, overly full or dull after eating.

Inspiration is also important. Reflect on the benefits of serenity and on its necessity for direct insight. If understanding and effort are present but progress remains blocked, combine meditation with purification and accumulation of merit. Make offerings, practise the seven limbs, and include a regular preliminary practice

such as Vajrasattva. Past obscurations may be hindering meditation even when the instructions are understood. Extensive teachings must eventually be translated into a concise personal instruction that can be practised without constantly consulting the book, while preserving the teaching's essence.

Śamatha joined with the wisdom of emptiness produces special insight, vipaśyanā. This union enables far deeper and more effective progress and supports the direct realisation of emptiness. From the path of seeing, the ārya bodhisattva progresses through the ten bhūmis towards enlightenment.

All of this rests upon the three higher trainings. Higher ethical discipline provides the foundation for higher concentration; higher concentration provides the foundation for higher wisdom. The more carefully we observe refuge commitments, lay or monastic vows, bodhisattva precepts and ordinary human ethics, the more readily concentration can develop. Spiritual seriousness is reflected not merely in thinking good thoughts, meditating occasionally or understanding philosophy, but in the discipline actually embodied in daily life.

Purifying the afflictions: know what is to be abandoned

To purify a delusion, we must know both the delusion and its antidote precisely. If we want to remove a thief, we first have to recognise the thief. Delusions steal inner peace and virtue, yet their subtle forms are easily missed.

The three root poisons are ignorance, attachment and anger. A six-root-affliction presentation adds pride, afflicted doubt and afflicted views. It is not enough to recognise only their dramatic, outward expressions. We need to observe their emotional texture, their causes, their behaviour and the harm they produce.

Anger as impatience

Anger is an impatient, disturbed state of mind. Shouting and harsh speech are only gross expressions. Impatience can be subtle and can appear even in the wish to practise Dharma, realise emptiness or become a Buddha. The goal may be virtuous, but the unsettled demand to arrive elsewhere immediately robs the mind of peace.

When walking, for example, we may believe we are taking a quiet walk while the mind is already pushing towards the next place. We do not feel the ground, the breeze or what is present beside the path. Even the movement from one step to the next may contain impatience. Concern about how we appear to others also makes us unable to rest naturally as ourselves.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche was a powerful example of presence and patience. Whether teaching, meditating, painting, gardening, drinking tea, circumambulating a holy object or helping an insect, he seemed completely settled in that activity, as though there were no other appointment. When food was offered, his prayers could continue for hours. His name, Zopa, means patience, and his way of living expressed that quality. Without rushing, he accomplished an extraordinary amount; we may rush constantly and accomplish very little.

To purify anger, begin by learning to live in the present and to settle fully in each activity. The breathing practice can help: breathe out impatience, stress and unsettled energy; breathe in with awareness and return to the present. The body becomes lighter, the mind clearer and the heart more uplifted.

The direct antidote to anger is patience. Compassion is also a powerful and sometimes more accessible doorway. Apply compassion not only when another person triggers anger, but also when you are impatient with yourself. Recognise that impatience is already causing suffering and wish to free yourself from it. Reflect repeatedly on the faults of anger and the benefits of patience, as taught in chapter six of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often explains how deeply this chapter shaped his practice. Despite immense responsibilities and the suffering surrounding Tibet, he exemplifies coolness, patience and peace.

A delusion is fully ceased when its antidote arises spontaneously. Until then, repeatedly familiarise the mind with the antidote. We become angry without intending to because we have meditated on anger—that is, habituated the mind to it. Now we must build an equally strong habit of patience and compassion. Repeatedly

recollect the faults of anger, the benefits of patience and the suffering of beings. In time, the antidote becomes the mind's natural response.

Attachment and grasping

Attachment is also easily misunderstood. Merely liking or valuing something is not necessarily an affliction. The Tibetan discussion here distinguishes a wholesome sense of connection or appreciation from attachment-grasping—likely a distinction involving *chags pa* **[Tibetan term uncertain in the recording ?]**. The affliction arises when liking becomes fixation: “I want it; I must have it,” driven by self-centred fulfilment, sensual desire, worldly concern or dualistic ignorance.

The scriptural antidote is detachment, but detachment does not mean indifference, rejection or lack of care. It means releasing self-centred expectation and the false view that object and self exist independently and can provide permanent satisfaction. We may appreciate family, health, holy objects, the guru, Dharma and even enlightenment without grasping at them.

When grasping is absent, change and separation do not wound the mind in the same way. We can love our families without the attachment that produces unbearable pain when separation occurs. We can care for the body, respect it and use it as the vehicle of a precious human life without treating it as permanent or perfect. One day separation from this body is inevitable.

Meditations on impermanence and on the body's components counter fixation. Visualising one's skeleton, or seeing the skeleton beneath the attractive surface of another body, is a traditional antidote to sensual attachment. Its purpose is not to despise the body. The balanced view is to value the body as a useful vehicle while knowing that it was never designed to remain intact forever. When this is understood day by day, death becomes easier to meet and letting go becomes possible.

Pride and humility

The antidote to pride is humility. Respect yourself, but do not use your qualities as a reason to disregard or belittle others. See that every being has a good nature and Buddha-potential. Every being has something worthy of respect.

Others are indispensable to our awakening. Without them we cannot develop great compassion, bodhicitta, generosity, patience or the other perfections. In that sense, sentient beings are supremely precious. Remembering our dependence upon them naturally softens pride.

Doubt and learning

Afflicted doubt is purified through study, investigation and open-mindedness. Learn about different philosophies, cultures and ways of understanding. Most importantly, study Dharma sufficiently to distinguish Dharma from non-Dharma and to see the different scopes of Dharma practice: teachings for temporary benefit, teachings for individual liberation, and the altruistic Mahāyāna teachings directed towards the welfare and enlightenment of all beings.

Learning should lead to clear discernment rather than closed-minded certainty. Once the meaning has been examined, take it into meditation and life.

A practical pattern for purification

The same method can be applied to any affliction or harmful habit:

1. **Identify accurately what is to be purified.** Learn its definition, notice its gross and subtle forms, and observe how it arises in your own experience.
2. **Understand its disadvantages.** See how it disturbs the body, clouds the mind, harms relationships, obstructs virtue and perpetuates suffering.

3. **Identify the appropriate antidote.** For anger use patience and compassion; for attachment use non-grasping, impermanence and wisdom; for pride use humility and respect; for doubt use study and reasoned investigation; for ignorance cultivate the wisdom of dependent arising and emptiness.
4. **Support the mind with ethical discipline and concentration.** A scattered and undisciplined mind cannot apply an antidote steadily.
5. **Purify obscurations and accumulate merit.** Use the four opponent powers, Vajrasattva practice, offerings and the seven-limb practice as appropriate.
6. **Meditate repeatedly.** Use both analytical meditation and calm placement. Habituation makes the antidote increasingly natural.
7. **Dedicate the merit.** Direct the virtue beyond the concerns of this life, towards liberation and the enlightenment of all beings.

Dedication

Let us dedicate our time together to the peace and happiness of the whole world. May those in places of war and natural disaster be freed from danger and suffering. May those experiencing emotional pain, illness, relationship difficulties or financial hardship overcome their challenges.

May we take good care of ourselves and those close to us, and may we become like wish-fulfilling jewels for the world. Beginning with peace, virtue and happiness in our own body, speech and mind, may we contribute to the peace, virtue and happiness of all beings.

Editorial notes on uncertain readings

- **The consciousness carrying karmic imprints:** The recording appears to say “a seventh consciousness” and a term resembling “uni.” The standard possibilities are the sixth mental consciousness, the seventh afflicted mentality (*kliṣṭa-manas*), or the eighth foundational/store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). The last is the usual Yogācāra account of the carrier of karmic seeds. The exact intended term cannot be recovered confidently from the transcript.
- **“The nature of mind is clear light; the stains are adventitious”:** The Tibetan has been tentatively reconstructed as *sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal; dri ma glo bur*. The English meaning is secure; the precise Tibetan wording should be checked against the audio.
- **Tibetan terminology for attachment:** The recording appears to contrast attachment/appreciation with attachment-grasping and contains syllables resembling *chags* or *chags pa*. The doctrinal distinction is clear, but the exact Tibetan words should be checked against the audio.
- **Canonical titles restored from context:** *Lamrim Chenmo* (Je Tsongkhapa), *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Śāntideva), the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*, the *Golden Light Sūtra*, Vajrasattva practice, and the seven-limb practice.