

Summary: Purifying the Mind

Geshe Tenzin Zopa explains that Buddhism is fundamentally an inner path: its purpose is to subdue, transform and purify the mind. The Tibetan term *nangpa*, “inner person,” expresses this orientation. Purification is possible because negative karma, delusions and obscurations are not permanent features of the mind. They are conditioned, dependently arisen and ultimately empty of inherent existence. The fundamental nature of mind is clear, knowing and luminous; its stains are temporary or adventitious.

Motivation and preparation

Motivation determines whether an action of body, speech or mind becomes Dharma. An action motivated only by worldly concerns may produce temporary happiness, but an action guided by renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom becomes a cause of liberation and enlightenment.

The teaching begins with breathing practice to bring the mind out of memories of the past and anxieties about the future and into the present moment. Three rounds can be used:

1. Settle the body and mind by following the natural breath.
2. Purify disturbing emotions, sickness, negative karma and harmful energies through breathing and visualisation.
3. Establish concentration by placing the mind on a virtuous object with clarity, one-pointedness and relaxed serviceability.

When breathing out, negativities may be imagined as leaving the body and dissolving into emptiness. Although they function conventionally, they do not exist independently or permanently.

The qualities of awakening

Holy images should be regarded as reminders and manifestations of the enlightened qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, rather than merely as material objects. These qualities include perfected:

- Moral discipline
- Generosity
- Patience
- Joyous effort
- Concentration
- Wisdom
- Skilful means
- Aspiration
- Power
- Exalted wisdom

The Buddhas work tirelessly and without bias for sentient beings. Contemplating their qualities inspires similar qualities within us.

Appreciating the precious human life

A person who cultivates peace makes the world more peaceful simply by being in it. In a world where intelligence, speech and technology are frequently used to harm, using body, speech and mind to cultivate Dharma is exceptionally meaningful.

Even when we feel depressed, lost or burdened by difficulties, continuing to subdue the mind and benefit others means that this human life is being used well. The present moment provides an opportunity to cultivate virtue, wisdom and compassion.

Why purification is possible

Negativities include:

- The ten non-virtues of body, speech and mind
- Karma leading to suffering and unfortunate rebirth
- Afflictive and karmic obscurations obstructing liberation
- Cognitive obscurations obstructing omniscience and Buddhahood

Every Dharma practice serves as a general antidote, while particular practices act as targeted medicines for particular afflictions.

Karmic potentials are carried as imprints in the mental continuum. Because these imprints are impermanent and depend upon causes and conditions, they can be weakened, neutralised, purified or transformed. Understanding anger, for example, can become a doorway to compassion; understanding ignorance can become a doorway to wisdom.

The mind itself is naturally clear and luminous. Delusions and negative karmic imprints do not belong to its essential nature. We mistakenly identify with a temporary, afflicted part of experience and assume that it defines our whole being. In reality, Buddha-nature—our capacity for awakening—is more fundamental than these passing stains.

All Dharma practice can therefore be gathered into two activities:

- Purifying negativities and obscurations
- Accumulating merit and wisdom

Purifying more than obvious wrongdoing

Karma may be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, but all three remain contaminated when accompanied by ignorance and grasping at inherent existence. Virtuous karma can produce favourable rebirth and temporary happiness, but it does not by itself produce liberation.

Even Dharma activity may remain merely virtuous samsāric karma if it lacks a pure motivation and dedication. To become a cause of liberation and enlightenment, virtue must be influenced by the three principal aspects of the path:

- Renunciation
- Bodhicitta
- The correct view of emptiness

Concentration and emptiness

Purifying conceptual obscuration requires the union of a serviceable mind and the wisdom realising emptiness. Bodhicitta is indispensable, but bodhicitta alone does not remove conceptual appearance. Direct, non-conceptual realisation of emptiness distinguishes an ārya bodhisattva.

The person exists dependently upon causes, conditions, parts, the aggregates and mental designation. The person cannot be found as an independent entity within either the body or the mind. Nevertheless, the person conventionally exists and functions—like a reflection, dream, mirage or magical illusion.

This understanding should be carried into everyday activities: “An illusion-like person is performing an illusion-like action.” Analytical meditation investigates how things exist; calm placement then rests in the conclusion reached through that investigation.

Direct insight requires *śamatha*, or serenity. Its main obstacles are laziness and distraction, countered by mindfulness and introspective awareness. Stable progress also depends upon ethical discipline, suitable conditions, consistent practice, purification and accumulation of merit.

The three higher trainings form a causal sequence:

Ethical discipline → concentration → wisdom

Śamatha united with the wisdom of emptiness produces special insight, *vipaśyanā*, supporting direct realisation and progress through the bodhisattva paths.

Recognising and purifying the afflictions

To remove an affliction, we must recognise both its obvious and subtle forms. Delusions are compared to thieves because they steal peace and virtue.

Anger

Anger is fundamentally an impatient and disturbed state of mind. It includes not only shouting or hostility, but the subtle inability to rest in the present. Impatience can even contaminate the wish to practise Dharma or attain enlightenment.

The antidotes are patience, compassion and present-moment awareness. Lama Zopa Rinpoche exemplified this quality by being wholly present in whatever he was doing. Without rushing, he accomplished far more than someone who remains constantly agitated.

Attachment

Liking, valuing or caring for something is not necessarily attachment. Attachment arises when appreciation becomes fixation: “I want this; I must have it.” Detachment does not mean indifference. It means appreciating people, possessions, health, Dharma and even enlightenment without self-centred grasping.

Impermanence and awareness of the body’s components counter attachment. The body should be respected as the vehicle of a precious human life, while recognising that it cannot last forever.

Pride

Pride is countered by humility and respect. Every sentient being possesses Buddha-potential and contributes to our spiritual development. Without other beings, we could not practise generosity, patience, compassion or bodhicitta.

Afflicted doubt

Doubt is purified through open-minded study, investigation and reflection. Study enables us to distinguish Dharma from non-Dharma and temporary benefit from the paths to liberation and enlightenment.

The practical method

For any affliction or harmful habit:

1. Identify precisely what needs purification.
2. Understand its disadvantages.
3. Apply its particular antidote.
4. Support the antidote with ethical discipline and concentration.
5. Purify obscurations and accumulate merit through practices such as the four opponent powers, Vajrasattva, offerings and the seven limbs.
6. Meditate repeatedly until the antidote becomes habitual and spontaneous.
7. Dedicate the merit to liberation and the enlightenment of all beings.

Purification is therefore not a single event. It is the gradual replacement of harmful habits with wisdom, compassion and virtue until the antidotes arise naturally.

The teaching concludes by dedicating the merit to world peace, to those affected by war, disaster, illness and other hardships, and to becoming like wish-fulfilling jewels who bring peace and happiness to all beings.