



## Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

### What Is Meditation?

In Buddhism, the first step is to establish the correct view on the nature of phenomena and then, we meditate on this view. This should not depend on blind faith, but it is something, which is grounded in both realisation and wisdom.

Once we have achieved this view, we cannot just let it be a mere theory, because that would not have the power to counteract our negative states of mind. We need to establish our understanding firmly in our minds. That is what meditation is for.

In Tibetan, the word that we use for this is '*gom*'. Often, it is translated into English as 'meditation', but I am not completely sure what is meant by 'meditation'.

*Gom* means become conditioned to what we have learned, or, to train ourselves in a way so it becomes automatic. That is the real meaning of the word '*gom*'. So I don't know if this is exactly the same meaning as '*meditation*' in English.

So what exactly do we need to get accustomed to? We have already quite naturally become familiar with many things since our childhood, either through our families, society, culture or laws. Some of these habits are helpful to our physical and mental well-being, some are harmful. To undo harmful habits, we aim to train ourselves in new, wholesome habits. This is what we do during meditation or *gom*.

For example, some people see everything from a negative point of view. The place they are in is not good, the weather is not pleasant, flowers are not their favourite colour and so on. This way of thinking is a habit we grow up with. To counteract this, we meditate on deities, or, pure lands for example. Slowly, through this meditation practice, the first thing we notice will be the positive ones, and not the negative ones.

When we talk about receiving spiritual attainments, or in Sanskrit *siddhis*, through our deity meditation, this doesn't mean that some kind of miracle happens. Instead, the negative traits of our mind, which make us tense and keep us from being happy, are replaced by more positive traits.

I heard that some psychologists ask their patients, who never show their anger, to express it by imagining a puppet to be the person they are angry with, and then they can say all the things they never said before or even physically express their discontent by beating this effigy. This is also a way of changing one's habits, even though I am not sure whether this is good or not. We replace a way of acting or thinking with another one, which is directly the opposite. This is also *gom*.

What I am trying to say is that *gom* in the Buddhist way of training is not only classical meditation, but more generally a way of habituating ourselves to more positive states of mind. So we can engage in *gom*, whilst we lie down, or walk along the street etc.

Science, medicine or psychology - all acknowledge that one of the main factors for unhappiness is excessive thinking. Therefore, we train in a type of meditation which does not focus on any particular object. I think that especially for this society, with its emphasis on competition and stress, this kind of meditation without an object is the most helpful one. If this is too difficult for us to start with, we choose one specific thing to concentrate or focus on. We call this type of meditation 'one-pointed meditation'. It helps us to reduce the power emotions have over our general well-being.

Normally we use techniques, which temporarily push great emotions like anger aside. For example, this includes watching a funny movie, when we are sad or upset; getting a massage, engaging in some sport etc.

For the period of time that we distract ourselves, the bothersome emotion diminishes. But then, we always need the help of these external circumstances to deal with our mind.

Through meditation though, we try to change our mind in such a way that we can handle any emotion, whether or not we can get a massage, do some sport etc. We train in a method, so that we gain the power to change our state of mind at any time. So both the meditation and the distractions aim to reduce the power of emotions and thinking. With meditation, however, we achieve mastery over our mind and therefore inner independence. Therefore *gom* is a way to empower the mind.

Now I want to talk about how we can practice *gom* and how we should act mentally and physically. When applied to meditation, there is a way of dealing with our mind and a way of positioning our body.

We are here in a psycho-somatic clinic, so you all know what I am talking about, when I refer to the strong connection between body and mind, which we acknowledge in Buddhism. Therefore, if we want to relieve mental problems, we have to work with our body and vice versa. If we are happy for example, we unconsciously walk straight, with hands on the back and a smiling face. There is no extra thinking involved. On the other hand, if we feel low, we walk hunched over with a serious face. This is very clear. This is the nature of our mind and body.

In Buddhism, we say when the body is straight, the channels in the body are straight. When the channels are straight, the energy of the body flows uninterruptedly. When the energy flows well, then the mind functions properly and is alert. Therefore, we need a certain kind of body posture for meditation. If we sit on the floor, our legs should be crossed over in lotus or half-lotus position and our backbone straight in a relaxed fashion without straining it.

If we strain our backbone too much, we will get tired after a few minutes. We should sit on a cushion, which is two, three inches high. If we have problems sitting on the floor, it is also okay to sit on a chair as long as we keep our spine straight and the legs slightly apart and not crossed over. A couch would not be suitable because we might slouch back. In daily life our shoulders are often drawn in front and we cave in at our chest. So it is good to first relax them by making wide circles with our arms. Then we should let the shoulders hang down without holding any tension. We can imagine a tent, which just has one rod in the middle and the fabric of the tent hangs down from it. Likewise our spine should be straight, but our shoulders and arms should hang down in a loose fashion. The whole body should be relaxed.

When we first sit down we should take a few seconds to check where we hold tension in our body and stretch that part or consciously release the muscle. Our hands can be over our knees or in the meditation mudra by putting the left hand on top of the right hand with the thumbs touching under the belly button.

Now our minds should not immediately get busy, thinking 'Oh now I am mediating', but we should relax and breathe deeply. Then our mind settles quite naturally. If we are on a high mountain or somewhere where we have a vast view, we can gaze in front. But if we are in crowded space like now, then it is better to look down in front of us, slightly following the shape of our nose.

Now I will get to the way we should hold our mind. The main objective is to stop all thoughts connected with the three times. If we focus on an object, then we should stop all thoughts of the three times connected to the object and if we don't use an object, then we should stop all thoughts connected with the three times in general.

Normally, the mind functions in the following way: either we remember past events, or, we contemplate plans for the future. The third option is that we get mentally involved with whatever happens at the moment, judging whether something is good or bad or white or red etc.

Therefore during our meditation we shouldn't remember the past, not make plans for the future and not make judgements about the present moment. The best approach is to follow the saying: 'The past is history, the future is a mystery and the present is a gift.'

Whether or not we treat the present like a gift depends on how judgemental we are. If we think: 'Oh, this is not working out. This is not right. I don't agree with this', then the present has no chance to become a gift, but rather turns into poison.

If you need an object to focus on during meditation, because you are used to this, then the best one for Buddhists is a statue of Buddha, which appears smiling and peaceful.

For anyone who follows another religion, you can use a representation of a saint or deity according to your belief. But he or she should have a peaceful expression and not one that is upsetting. If you are not religious, you can take whatever inspires you as long as it has a peaceful appearance like a flower or candle.

The statue, picture or object should not be too big, about four fingers long, so we can look at it in one glance and don't need to look up and down to take it in fully. If we opt to meditate without focusing on an object, then we would just let the mind rest without engaging it in any thoughts.

For beginners at meditation, the advice is to do many, short sessions. If we decide to meditate for half an hour, then we should not try to sit the full half hour without a break, but meditate for five minutes, then relax for a minute or two and then again meditate for five minutes and so on. The great meditators also did some yoga exercises between sessions to invigorate their bodies. Slowly our body will become more accustomed to sitting and our mind will become more stable. Then we can have longer sessions.

The most important point here is to relax the mind.

In general, it is important to think, but during meditation we try to settle the mind peacefully.

Of course our thinking does not simply stop and even if we achieve some peace of mind, thoughts pop up again and again.

There are three ways of reigning in the mind: 1) gently, 2) wrathfully and 3) peacefully.

If we are too strict and forcefully try to subdue thoughts, we have to use a lot of effort, and the chances are that we won't be very successful. We might get disheartened, thinking that we are simply not able to meditate. Therefore it is important that we truly relax our mind.

We shouldn't scold ourselves: 'Ah, there is another thought! Oh no, I am distracted again!' We might actually cause mental problems by being too strict. If thoughts arise, we should treat them gently. Either we simply refocus on our object or we just relax the mind without developing the thought.

Another way can be to just watch what the thought does, like we would watch a movie.

For example, if we think about our dinner plans for tomorrow, then we should notice this and just keep on thinking: where will I go for shopping, what ingredients will I buy, what will I do when I get back from shopping? etc. The mind will naturally settle itself again on the object after a while, or, it will abandon the thought and relax. We can liken that to a dog that we keep on a tight leash. If we free it, it will run around for while, but come back to us after a few minutes.

When we settle the mind, it should settle naturally without any alteration. That means without even thinking: 'Oh, I should sit like this. I should not think of anything.' This still stirs up the mind. For example, if we have dirty water and want to clean it by swirling it around, then the dirt will rise up again and again. But if we just let the water be, the dirt settles to the bottom and the water becomes clear.

*Heinrich-Heine-Klinik, Potsdam, 03.12.13*

*Translated from Tibetan by Daniela Hartmann*

*Edited by Jacqueline Bourbon*