

Becoming MAITREYA



By Lama Thubten Yeshe

Meditation Why does Buddhism put so much emphasis on meditation? It's because our mind is so gross and our memory so poor that we forget things easily and cannot recall our countless lives' experiences. The purpose of meditation, therefore, is to increase, or develop, our memory, or mindfulness, of reality.

Our distracted, fragmented thoughts, which we experience continuously every day, are countless. Nonsense repeatedly cycles through our mind, again, again, again, again.... It's like in the pictures of the wheel of life, whose hub shows a pig, a chicken and a snake going round and round endlessly. Like that, our pig, chicken and snake mentalities continuously reverberate in our consciousness, reducing our memory to almost nothing.

The meditation techniques that stop these three mentalities are very important. Without stopping these deluded minds we can't see the concepts of ego that we spontaneously experience in everyday life. They're very subtle, so without eliminating these gross minds it's impossible to see our ego's activity. That's why we meditate on the energy of our own conscious experience. By quieting and eliminating our gross mentalities we create the space we need to see the concepts of ego, to recognize the entity interpreted by ego, which is non-existent.

Normally, religious people miss the point – we circle around it but don't make much progress because we keep missing it. What is the point? The point is to become revolutionaries and totally destroy our entire concepts of ego. This is a much more revolutionary ideal than any of the theories propounded by Marx-Lenin, Hitler or Mao.

The concepts of ego project an independent, self-existent I totally unrelated to physical matter, time, space, cause, effect or anything else, existing somewhere, untouchable. Our ego holds on to the self-existent I and never lets it go.

Based on the results of his own practice, Lama Tsongkhapa said that by contemplating our conscious experience we can cut our superstitious, dualistic thoughts and thereby discover our ego projections and realize shunyata in a flash. Like throwing a switch, the moment we discover exactly what the false conception is, at that instant we discover non-duality.

The most difficult thing to recognize is the entity held by our ego, and the only way to do this is to meditate. According to Lama Tsongkhapa there's no way to do it intellectually. To prove this, he quoted Nagarjuna: "The person is not of the nature of earth, water, fire, air, space or even consciousness. The person exists only as a conventional designation." Lama Tsongkhapa totally agreed with Nagarjuna: all phenomena exist only in name. So we should just leave things as they are – superficial names projected by superstition – and not try to find some real, self-existent entity beyond that.

Some people think that first we have to study shunyata in order to understand it and then meditate. That's wrong. To realize shunyata, first we have to meditate.

The thing is that the gross symptoms of ego, the three poisonous mentalities I just mentioned, disturb, irritate and shake the mind, so without subduing them to a certain extent – and there are various levels to which they can be subdued – there's no way to see the unconscious levels of ego that hold the notion of an independent self-existent I. It's impossible. And that's the point. Therefore our approach has to be through meditation – the experience of contemplating the energy of mental clarity automatically eliminates those mentalities.

Otherwise, it's like Lama Tsongkhapa said – our enemy's hiding out in the jungle but we're looking for him in town. That's us – we practitioners are always busy doing something religious but never get anywhere because we miss the point and look for our ego in completely the wrong place.

Therefore it's very important to stop our "that-this" superstitious thoughts and we're capable of doing so. By simply remaining mindfully aware of the experience of our own energy without getting involved either subjectively or objectively in that-this thinking, focusing our mind and letting go, we'll no longer have a problem with distraction.

It's similar to our present situation. We're here in this peaceful Dharma center knowing that there are disasters and bloodshed happening all over the world but not getting emotionally disturbed. It's like that.

When I say "let go" I mean to focus on the clarity of mind and just remain there without expectation or emotional conversation. As I mentioned before, when the full moon

shines it doesn't have any expectation or thoughts such as "I'm illuminating the Earth." It doesn't think anything; it just illuminates. The fewer dualistic thoughts you have, the greater the peace, tranquility, satisfaction and bliss you experience – and satisfaction and bliss are antidotes to dissatisfaction, depression, aggression, distraction and all other emotional disturbances.

When we meditate on an object with continuous, focused attention, our sense perception no longer functions. In other words, we go beyond sense perception. Sense perception has a bad reputation in Buddhism because it's the door to delusion and superstition. Whatever our senses perceive is always an optical illusion; the nature of sense perception is such that it produces more ego and superstition.

Therefore meditators deem the sense world unimportant. Since whatever appears to their sense perception is illusory, they no longer trust or use it much, but Maitreya also emphasizes in his writings that the mind the meditator uses is the sixth, or mental, consciousness, which is not sense perception or sense consciousness.

When a fighter pilot first sees an enemy plane it might be a long way off but as that self-existent plane gets closer and closer he sees it more and more clearly and at a certain point can shoot it down. The moment it disappears he experiences a kind of emptiness, shunyata. Similarly, when our clear wisdom first tries to find our ego, it's not very obvious; it's hiding. But as our concentration deepens our ego finds it increasingly difficult to remain out of sight and eventually it appears right there in front of us. As soon as we recognize it we should destroy it, and the moment it disappears we experience shunyata. The nuclear missile we use to shoot down our self-existent I is mindfulness, the wisdom of intensive awareness, and we don't need dualistic thought to pull the trigger; the moment our ego appears, we shoot it down.

When we reach the point of experiencing the non-dual I in this way, we should just let go and focus on our mind with clear comprehension. Also, the "non" in non-dual shouldn't make us feel lonely: "I feel so empty, I have no dear friend." To experience non-duality is to experience the universe. We should feel, "I am the reality of all universal phenomena," or "The reality of all universal phenomena is me."

But again, these are not conceptual thoughts. What I'm talking about is pure experience, what we call the enlightened, or dharmakaya, experience and, in a way, we can say it's the experience of the omnipresent love and wisdom of Maitreya.

However, the dharmakaya experience is invisible, and in order to communicate with sentient beings we have to emanate in a visible form.

Emergence from emptiness

In the empty space of non-duality
Appear eight mighty snow lions
Supporting a precious jeweled throne
Upon which rests a lotus and moon disc.
And upon this vast, white moon disc
My mind manifests as a syllable HUM,
Brilliant golden light, the size of a sesame seed.

*(Let your mind sink into this syllable completely
and try to contemplate without differentiation of subject
and object. You are this golden syllable HUM.)*

From the space of non-duality, or non-conceptualization, your consciousness manifests as a fresh, new lotus flower in the center of which your wisdom manifests as a full moon disc. At the center of the moon disc, the essence of your consciousness manifests as a brilliant golden light syllable HUM and the vibrating sound HUMMMM. At the same time the sound of the Maitreya mantra automatically fills all of space.¹

Accomplishing the two purposes

From this syllable
Radiant light shines out in all ten directions
Making offerings of exquisite beauty to all buddhas
and bodhisattvas
And then purifying the negative energy of all
sentient beings,
Leading them to the state of enlightenment.
Once these two purposes have been accomplished
This light dissolves back into my mind.

Golden light radiates from the syllable HUM at your heart throughout all of space making offerings to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and touches all sentient beings, purifying them of all their hatred and giving them eternal satisfaction. It then returns and sinks back into the syllable HUM. Concentrate strongly on your unity with this golden syllable, which is your consciousness, your psyche. This golden light is you; you are this golden light.

Self-generation

Instantly
I become Maitreya Buddha,
With a clear light body, golden in color,
With one face and two arms.
My two hands are poised at my heart
In the mudra of turning the wheel of Dharma
In each hand I hold the stem of a lotus;
Upon the right is a wheel; upon the left is a vase.
My black hair is pulled back and tied in a knot
And my head is crowned with a
stupa of enlightenment.
My face wears a smiling, peaceful expression
And my body is adorned with the eighty qualities
And thirty-two marks of magnificence.
Precious ornaments decorate my body
And I emanate an aura of five-colored light
As I am seated in the majestic position
With my feet planted firmly upon the ground.
Three syllables adorn my body:
A white OM at my crown,
A red AH at my throat
And a blue HUM at my heart.

All of a sudden this golden light, your consciousness, transforms into Maitreya. Your body is made of reddish-golden radiant rainbow light and is huge, like 100,000 feet high. It is made of pure light and contains not an atom of physical matter. You are very youthful looking, have one face and two arms, and can be either sitting in the vajra posture or in a chair.² Since you have conquered the enemy of ego with universal love, your essence is universal love and compassion. Completely unify with the enlightened nature of Maitreya and generate divine pride: "I *am* Maitreya, in the nature of universal love and compassion; I *am* the liberator of the universe." Completely identify with Maitreya, the enlightened one. With focused awareness of yourself as the emanation of Maitreya, let go.

At this point spend time meditating on emptiness and the process of generating yourself as Maitreya. Actualize these two as much as you can.

So, let's finish here for now, but are there any questions?

¹ There are several Maitreya mantras. The one that Lama explained during this teaching is OM AH MAITRI SARVA SIDDHI HUM, perhaps because it is short and therefore easier to visualize and recite.

² The sadhana mentions visualizing yourself as Maitreya seated on a chair-like throne, which symbolizes his being the next buddha, ready to get up and descend to Earth to turn the wheel of Dharma. As Lama says, you can also visualize yourself as Maitreya in the more usual vajra posture, or what is often called the full lotus.

Q: Is it possible to be aware of awareness?

Lama: Yes, but just *be* awareness, that's all. Don't conceptualize, "I'm awareness; I'm awareness." Just let go. It's like driving a car; when you drive you don't have to keep thinking, "I'm a driver; I'm a driver." Just drive; just *be* a driver. New drivers get all caught up in "I'm a driver" and that's how accidents happen.

Q: I understand the word "meditation" and the importance of meditating but I have a problem when you talk about sensory experience. Some lamas teach that you should meditate by opening your senses and looking around because if you really use all your senses you can become more consciousness and aware of what you're doing and what's around you. Does this contradict what you're saying?

Lama: They might be talking about meditators on a higher level. If you have the penetrative wisdom that directly knows sense objects the way they are, it's OK to meditate like that. If you have wisdom you can be looking at a flower and at the same time be going beyond it, beyond the sense perception – the flower is so beautiful; just looking at it propels you further along the path to enlightenment. But if you don't have that kind of wisdom, looking at sense objects can just make you even more bananas than you already are.

Q: But don't you have to see sense objects well before you can go further?

Lama: No. My point is that if you don't have wisdom, you can be looking at something through your senses but not be aware of its reality. We're in contact with the sense world all the time – looking, tasting, touching – but we're never aware of, never touch, its reality. All we see is the superficial bubble.

Q: Can one have a negative experience after doing the meditation on emptiness because of being ignorant of what's happening?

Lama: It's possible, because if you try to stop all thought but don't have intensive awareness, you can end up with a heavy, sluggish, sleepy mind. Anyway, there are many teachings on the various hindrances to meditation, like sluggishness and distraction, and how to overcome them, and if you study those you will have a much better idea of how to make your meditation positive.

Q: How about the opposite situation, where you get too much energy from meditation?

Lama: Then the excess energy needs to be released. You need to find a way of directing it into the path to enlightenment. ☸

From Universal Love: The Yoga Method of Buddha Maitreya by Lama Thubten Yeshe. Edited by Nicholas Ribush. Published by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive 2008 \$US15 www.LamaYeshe.com

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