

A Collection of Short Teachings on Meditation
from the Great Perfection Tradition

Jason Espada, editor

The Great Perfection Teachings

Introduction

To be able to present a well rounded introduction to any tradition implies a deep understanding, and comprehensive knowledge of its teachings. While I can't claim any complete realization of these teachings, or extensive knowledge, I have received and been inspired by the Great Perfection teachings these last 25 years. It also seems that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and my teachers all encourage me to study, and to practice, and to share what I can. Here then is a collection of my favorite teachings from this tradition. May it be of real benefit to whoever reads these words, and to all beings.

When we speak of Dzogchen, or the precious Great Perfection teachings, we are talking about a method of realization and freedom, as well as a twelve hundred year old tradition of teaching. As with other lineages, if a person has a good karmic connection, there are blessings that accompany the teachings, and these can certainly help a person to gain realizations. For someone without much faith, I know this idea may sound foreign, and fanciful, but this has been the experience of generations of practitioners in the lineage of the Old School, as well as other lineages and religious traditions. A person can gain some experience, no doubt, relying on their intelligence and diligence alone, but results come much more swiftly for those with faith and devotion to teachers, and the lineage.

As far as the method here goes, it is suitable for someone with a keen intuition, able to trust the natural unfolding of experience.

Being a Buddhist Wisdom teaching, the Great Perfection should bring *special insight*, or *vipassana*, equal to any gained by other methods, such those found in the Theravada, or through analysis and single pointed meditation.

The historical Buddha's profound insight was that of causality. He saw how the common, conditioned self is rooted in ignorance. Tracing back the process of what takes place in the mind, he uncovered the fundamental truth of our being here - that we suffer unnecessarily because we don't know our own nature fully and deeply enough. In his teaching that has been passed down on the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, ignorance is clearly identified as the source of craving, dissatisfaction, birth and death - the entire wheel of samsara.

As with other traditions of practice, some criticisms have come either from within, and been accounted for by skillful and compassionate teachers, or else valid critiques have been heard over time and have been responded to in the teachings. This is all quite marvelous to witness.

I had this question for quite a while, when studying the Nature of Mind teachings of the Great Perfection and Mahamudra. It came down to this: *is non-conceptual awareness enough to cut the root of samsara*, as it has been taught by the Buddha?

From where I stand today, the answer lies in the type of non-conceptual awareness that is used. Often, we don't use terms in English with enough precision, and so I have relied on the distinctions made in Sanskrit and Tibetan to help me here. Words such as Prajna, Sherab and Yeshe refer to the mind functioning more deeply than it does with ordinary awareness. The kind of awareness that can cut the root of samsara is *fully discerning; its nature is completely awake; it is non-dual discriminating wisdom*. It is not a blank dullness, and not the mere surface knowing of some object or experience. Such wisdom has the ability to cut through entanglements, and false views, projections, and illusions, and *this* is where it qualifies as liberating wisdom.

In the Great Perfection system, what is called the *alaya* - the mind not knowing its nature - is the basis of the six realms, whereas original wakefulness, knowing the nature of mind, dharmakaya, is the basis of liberation. As the Samantabhadra Prayers says, There is one ground, and two paths. So it is essential to understand this mind of ours, that can be either the ground of samsara, the world of misapprehending what appears to our mind and what is, and afflictive emotions, or that of wakefulness, nirvana, or peace.

The process of meditation here seems so simple that it is easy to miss, or to mistake it as simply resting in ordinary awareness. However, if we don't become attached to our experience, and if we continue with good guidance, joy and inspiration, our mind becomes more clear all by itself, and wisdom dawns - the kind that, as with other approaches, dissolves attachment to false views, ideas and projections, and brings the experience of great freedom, our birthright.

Hopefully the selections in this volume will engage the receptive student, and encourage practice. No doubt, if someone has the karma for it, hearing even one line of a teaching is enough to awaken the experience of what has been pointed out through the generations.

May we all find our way to liberating insight,
settle all our family in the Way of truth,
and may there be peace and harmony everywhere

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From Meditation on Buddha Nature, by Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche

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...

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.

(Meditation)

From Ground, Path, and Fruition, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

How can we be introduced to the nature of mind?

If we stay in a state
where we are not influenced by thoughts of the past,
we do not invite thoughts of the future,
and we are not disturbed by thoughts of the present,
in the fresh instant of the present moment,
there is a wisdom free from all concepts.

We should remain in this state without falling into drowsiness,
without allowing our mind to withdraw
or to wander to external objects.

From Rest in Natural Great Peace, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Mind itself, free of fabrication,
is one's authentic, original countenance;
Gaze nakedly at this intrinsic nature, without alteration,

Don't contrive, don't contrive,
don't alter your mind;

Free of distraction, free of clinging,
free of mind made meditation,

Remain in the nature of mind,
the Great Perfection.

From The Song of Encouragement, by Patrul Rinpoche

This effortless vajra pinnacle,
transcending conceptual mind,
Is uncultivated buddhahood, the naked space of empty awareness.
Even a lazy person can realize the dharmakaya in this,
When free from clinging to the idea of meditation,
practice and effort.

From Opening to Our Primordial Nature, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Once the body, channels, and wind are balanced, the next step is to keep your mind in the natural state through meditation. By simply maintaining the mind as it is, without adding or subtracting anything, one will reach the inner nature, which is unchanging and indestructible.

The instructions for this type of meditation are very simple. One begins by sitting with good posture on a cushion, because it is important to stay straight. Then, one simply maintains the natural clarity of the mind, without analyzing one's experiences or being disturbed by thoughts. In the dzogchen style of meditation, there is actually nothing to do except relax in the mind's nature of clarity and emptiness. Inner awareness is different than external awareness; it is called clear-light emptiness.

It is helpful to use the sky as an analogy for the true nature of the mind - when you let your mind mingle with the open space of the sky, you do not need any particular focus. Simply maintain the mind naturally, without discrimination or judgments, and experience its nature as being spacious as the sky.

During meditation you do not need to think any particular thoughts or make any effort to change what you are. Just simply maintain where you are and what you are, without trying to do anything unusual. If you meditate by simply maintaining the natural state, then everything unnatural will be removed. You do not have to do anything except remain on your cushion. In one sense this is something of a joke, but in another sense it is true. You simply relax on your cushion, and that's it!

Selections from Our Pristine Mind I, by Orgyen Chowang

The essential instructions

Here are the essential instructions for experiencing Pristine Mind:

Don't follow the past.
Don't anticipate the future.
Remain in the present moment.
Leave your mind alone.

To prepare, begin by relaxing your body, speech, and mind.

Make sure your body is comfortable and at ease...

Next, relax your speech by allowing yourself to be quiet. Just relax into silence.
Breathe naturally...

Next, relax your mind. This is the most important part of this preparation. Let your mind be relaxed and present, aware and alert...

After this preparation, the first step is *don't follow the past*. Do not get caught up in thoughts, memories, or images of your past, regardless of whether they occurred minutes ago or years ago.

Bring your mind fully into this present moment.

By not focusing on the past, we dissolve many of these thoughts. They slowly disappear from our perception.

Paying no further attention to our mental events and not creating new ones is the first step in dismantling the layers that cover our Pristine Mind.

The second step is *don't anticipate the future*. Remind yourself that this is not the time to pursue, plan, or follow any thoughts feelings, or imaginings of the future. Do not begin wondering or speculating about what will happen. Instead, just stay alert in the present.

At this moment, then, the mind is clearer and calmer. As a result, more of your Pristine Mind is slowly exposed to your view and realization.

Step three is to *stay in the present moment*. Just be present. There is nothing to do but to vibrantly experience your mind. The question here is not what to do. Your mind is just being natural and aware. Just let your mind be natural in this way.

Just as water is water, and blue sky is just blue sky, your mind is just what it is, remaining in the present moment.

It is important to note here that being in the present itself is not a passive and lifeless process. It is not simply “spacing out”. That will do little good. Instead, it is an active and dynamic process. In the beginning, it requires some effort. As you move into meditation, it is more tranquil, but still vibrant.

Apart from this, you do not need to do anything but be who you are.

Simply experience your awareness. Observe the clarity of your mind. Nothing else is necessary.

Step four is to leave your mind alone.

You don't have to expend effort pushing thoughts of the past or future out of your mind in order to remain in the present. Instead, just let all those thoughts melt away. Leave your mind alone, and the present moment will be there for you.

If you meditate properly and leave your mind alone, thoughts will subside. Thoughts and emotions originated from your attention to the past and the future. Now that you are no longer paying attention to the past or the future, the thoughts and emotions naturally dissolve.

We know that clouds cannot exist without the presence of certain circumstances. If no such necessary conditions are present, then clouds cannot continue to exist. They just vanish. They are gone. Similarly, if there are no supportive conditions for thoughts and emotions, then they too just vanish. When clouds dissolve or disappear, only blue sky is left.

The spacious blue sky of our mind has always been present, but it has not been visible because there are so many clouds of mental events obscuring it. As mental

events dissolve, our Pristine Mind naturally emerges. This is our fundamental nature. This is the ultimate reality. This is the true nature of our mind. (46-48)

From hazy mind to pristine mind

When we meditate as a beginner, if our mind is hazy it is still fine. In this hazy state, thoughts and emotions do not overwhelm us. While we cannot meditate effectively with a completely overcast mind, very, very few meditators practicing Pristine Mind meditation have a completely pristine state of mind at first. Most have a hazy mind. Still, we learn that the mind is pristine innately, and we have a glimpse of that pristine experience. We have a view of that state through a thinning layer of clouds of thoughts and emotions. Eventually those clouds burn off. Slowly our mental events become less dominant, and our hazy mind becomes a flawless Pristine Mind.

Pristine Mind meditation will even benefit a person with a mind full of thunder, lightning, and stormy weather. With diligent practice, the mental weather can calm down, going from stormy to overcast, from overcast to slightly cloudy, and ultimately, from hazy to flawlessly pristine.

At first the heavier, denser, more frustrating and more rigid mental events dissolve. Then, gradually, the subtler thoughts and emotions disappear as well. The wider the gap between these mental events becomes, the more our inner nature, the pristine state of mind, who we really are, surfaces. This is the awakening and blossoming of our true nature.

On Meditation, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Meditation is the fruit of study and contemplation. In this context, meditation doesn't mean merely sitting calmly and focusing the mind on an external object. Rather, this is meditation on the true nature. As the true nature pervades both internally and externally, meditation on it clarifies our view and helps us learn to penetrate both subjective and objective phenomena.

The focus in meditation itself should be on the nature of the mind. This will reveal everything. Meditation on the true nature yields a lucid clarity and profound openness which is very mysterious. Abiding continuously in that state will cause beautiful qualities, such as compassion and wisdom, to arise and shine naturally.

A Stream of Continuous Non-meditation, Flow of Unbroken Samadhi, by Shabkar
Tsogdruk Rangdrol

Once my fortunate spiritual son Kunzang Shenpen asked me, “How should one remain in the nonmeditation samadhi that is like a continuous stream? What is meant by ‘stream’? Is there any risk of confusing this with another state?”. My answer was this song:

Having received the faultless instructions on Mahamudra or on Dzogchen,
The unique path traveled by countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
If you wish to remain uninterruptedly
In the nonmeditation samadhi
That is like a continuous stream,
You must do this:

Keep your body still;
Keep your voice silent;
As to mind, don’t bind it: let it rest at ease.
Let consciousness relax completely.

At this time, attachment to “meditation” and “nonmeditation” clears,
And mind remains without any aim or fabrication
In self-luminous awareness, vast and transparent.

To remain just like this
Is the view of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.
If intellect does not tamper with this state,
And if you are graced by blessings of your root and lineage gurus,
The view arises, clear as the sky.

Preserving this view continuously
With awareness undistracted,
In a continuity unbroken like a flowing stream,
Is what is called “nonmeditation samadhi, continuous like a stream.”

If one has not recognized this,
One might simply let everything go
And lapse into an amorphous, ordinary state
That cannot be said to be this or that-
To be immersed in an indistinct vagueness.

This would be a mistake.

Although these two states are similar,
Insofar as neither is intentional meditation,
Nonmeditation samadhi that is like a continuous stream
Is just remaining in a vivid clarity (of knowing)
That is like a bright, cloudless sky - Limitless, pervasive, transparent.

The other is merely a dull state of mind
That is nothing in particular:
A constricted, fragmentary, biased state
Lacking lucid clarity,
A vague and hazy stupefaction.

Apart from confusing these two states,
There is no other error to be made.

From *Discovering Infinite Freedom*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

The mind has these five qualities: it is uncompounded; it is self-arising; it is infinite, vast, and spacious; it is inconceivable or inexpressible; and it is without the names or labels of samsara and nirvana, or free from samsara and nirvana.

Guru Padmasambhava is not speaking of someone else's nature somewhere else. This is his direct teaching on the nature of your own mind, and our own mind. Therefore, when you meditate and practice you should not look outside, thinking something else. Remind yourself of this nature and relax your mind in that state. When you relax your mind within this teaching, then everything - all dualities, fabrications, worries, sadness, loneliness - merge or dissolve into the original state of great emptiness, the original state of the mind. Then you continue to relax. As you relax more, great joy and happiness arise in the quality of richness and radiate, shining from space without blockage or hindrance. That is how the Dzogchen yogi and yogini should do it.

It is crucial to recognize and realize the base of the Dzogchen philosophy and teachings. First we should understand well and carefully the nature of rigpa. What is it, and what is mind? We use the term zhi or "base" for rigpa. That is important to know. And with that knowledge, we should practice or meditate. Meditation is the practice. We have to become more familiar with the nature of reality. Due to our habitual patterns, we have to keep courage, commitment, and joyful effort, to become familiar with rigpa again and again. We must continue until we realize this nature in the naked state, free from any conditions.

Briefly, then, when we practice Dzogchen meditation, what is the method? We should meditate on the uncompounded state of rigpa. We should meditate on the self-arising luminous state of the clear light. We should meditate on the infinitely vast state, on the inexpressible state, and on the state beyond samsara and nirvana.

We have to relax. According to the Dzogchen tradition, the meditation has nothing to do with effort. We have to merge into that state, and just be there in a natural way. Dzogchen, it is often said, is beyond effort and activities. That is very important. To relax means, first, to relax all your muscles and bones, relax your mind, and lower your blood pressure. Let your body be completely relaxed in a calm and natural state. Then rest in the natural state of the mind as it is. That is the method of the Dzogchen meditator.

The complete practice - from The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Before we begin this meditation, in order to ignite it, generate bodhicitta and reflect on impermanence.

Remember, at the present time the true nature is not realized by everyone. Pray that everyone will attain this wisdom, that they will understand the true nature exactly as it is, so that violence and suffering as well as their causes will be uprooted. (66)

We should also consider the special circumstances that connect us to this lineage teaching. We are among the luckiest people on earth - not everyone has the opportunity, inclination, and capacity to practice Dzogchen. We have every reason to feel joy, appreciation, and gratitude. With these beautiful thoughts, invoke and receive the lineage blessings with devotion.

Begin with these foundation practices, do them well, and then, as the great master Aro taught and as we discussed, identify and abide in the natural state with no distraction and no focus for as long as you can.

Following that, with great inspiration and bodhicitta, dedicate the merit for all living beings. This is the complete practice that encompasses all aspects of the true nature. (76)

From The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Bagom Sonam Gyaltzen discussed his realization of the true nature with the great Kadam master Atisha; the latter was very pleased. Then Atisha said to Bagom, “If you unite aspiration prayers of loving kindness and compassion with the Aro teachings, if you ever have trouble with your practice, Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara will come to your aid.” Bagom did as Atisha suggested, and from that time on, the hallmark of the second Aro lineage was the fusion of Kadam teachings stemming from Atisha with the Dzogchen Semde (mind) instructions of Aro Yeshe Jungne. (43, 44)

We begin with bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the foundation not only of Dzogchen but of all Dharma practice. Bodhicitta has two aspects: wishing or aspirational bodhicitta, and actualizing bodhicitta. Wishing bodhicitta does not mean only reciting the words of a bodhicitta prayer; it means to keep generating genuine care and concern for all beings from your heart.

Continually cultivate the four boundless thoughts: boundless love, boundless compassion, boundless joy, and boundless equanimity. Pray that all beings will enjoy life, health, prosperity, and the fulfillment of all their wishes that are in accord with Dharma. Pray that they attain complete enlightenment. At the same time, pray that your desire and ability to help all beings keeps growing. This is wishing bodhicitta. Actualizing bodhicitta means to help others according to your abilities and their needs - it is putting wishing bodhicitta into action in words and deeds.

We should cultivate and manifest bodhicitta in our hearts and minds, in our words, and in our actions. We should strive to increase, deepen, and expand our capacity to help others. This is the foundation of our Dzogchen practice. (49, 50)

We are going to abide with joyful effort in the natural state. You will notice that over time your conceptualizations, whether they are rough or smooth, big or small, will gradually wear away. In order to facilitate this more powerfully, while you are abiding in the natural state you should occasionally reactivate your feelings of closeness to the buddhas and the great masters. You should also reactivate love and compassion for all sentient beings, as well as appreciation for yourself. Invoke these beautiful thoughts, then continue abiding in the natural state. (87)

From a letter- on wisdom and compassion, by Jason Espada

I just wanted to mention one thing you repeated in your short note- about what Goenka said about compassion developing naturally as a result of vipassana or insight- I think that, in all fairness, sometimes it happens like this, and sometimes not (otherwise all Arhats would be Bodhisattvas, and that's not yet the case).

Actually, this 'wisdom leading to compassion' is the approach in the Zen tradition, as well as in the Theravada, and also, to some extent, it is the approach taken by the lineages in Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize wisdom practice more first, on the way to a full, complete realization.

(Just a note here: The Tibetan word 'San-gye', 'Buddha', translates to 'completely purified- and fully developed', meaning that all faults have been removed (which is the cessation without remainder), and all positive qualities are brought forth, *actualized*.)

So, to get back to my point- if it is so that sometimes liberation, the freedom of mind, leads to the full development of love and compassion, and sometimes not, then why not? Why does it sometimes happen and sometimes not? This is so important for us to consider as individuals, and so important for our world, really.

And here's the best answer I can come up with so far. First, there are different temperaments, so that in any one system or approach one person will flourish fully, accomplishing all the different aspects of development, while another person may need other instruction, and to engage in other practices to achieve the same thing.

Then, I've found the following teaching very useful to explain what is happening in any case. In the Tibetan tradition, they speak of 'the two obscurations' that keep us from seeing the truth of what is here. The first type is what they call the 'conceptual obscurations', or the 'obscurations of conceptual thought' (wrong views). These are corrected, or cleared away by samatha and vipassana- the quieting of the mind and cultivation of the strength of discernment- discriminating between the true and the false.

The Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan traditions that practice non-conceptual meditation clear away this type of obscuration, the obscuration of conceptual thought, very effectively. But what happens, quite often as it turns out, - it's the characteristic possible sidetrack to this approach- is that the other type of obscuration, called 'the

obscurations of afflictive emotions' (kilesa nivvana) is not always fully removed. Sometimes I've been calling these 'the qualitative obscurations'. And the all too common result is that people end up with a partial experience of the view of emptiness, or egolessness, one with the wrong concepts cleared away- but it is a cold, dark, meaningless, nihilistic experience, one that is lacking in the sense of worth, of the beauty and richness of what is here.

The emotional obscurations are cleared away by the development of all the qualities that we associate with the good heart: the development of love and compassion, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, humility, honesty, gratitude, joy, generosity... These change the quality of the mind so that when the conceptual obscurations are removed as well, the experience is warm; the mind is bright, appreciative, and loving; and the feeling is one of richness, of the great value of life.

The no-self teachings of the Buddha are further expressed in the Prajnaparamita Sutras, and the Middle Way is a further explanation of those teachings. The term 'Middle Way' refers to 'being free of the two extremes', the extreme of eternalism (ego-grasping), and the extreme of nihilism. According to Middle Way philosophy, all the mistakes that people can have regarding the View fall into one of these two categories.

Right View is accomplished by removing the two obscurations, conceptual and emotional, together with their seeds. So the development of love and the positive qualities of the heart are definitely an essential aspect of vipassana, or wisdom practice, seeing things fully as they actually are. Whether we arrive at this indirectly, or through our engaging in methods that directly cultivate both discernment and kindness, the need is there for everyone to have these elements present. That said, we should each practice what suits us best, and accomplishes a full result.

From Dzogchen - The Heart Essence of the Great Perfection, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Through the blessings of the master, the force of your merit, and your meditation on the pith instructions, (the nature of mind) can be directly introduced... This rigpa, which is present in the midst of all the thoughts, does not follow after outer objects or inner grasping, but is an awareness that is able to hold its own ground.

Gradually your experience becomes deeper, and you arrive at the alaya. This alaya is a blank, dull, as if unconscious state. It is tainted by a quality of dullness. Once you go beyond the alaya, it is like someone lifting a heavy hat off his head: an extraordinary quality of rigpa comes to the fore.

(When) this unique quality of the fundamental innate mind of clear light has been introduced, you focus on it as the key point, and, as a result, there dawns an experience unlike any other. This seems to me to be the extraordinary feature of Dzogchen.

Dodrupchen said

Clear light is brought forth by its very own subtle energy, and awakens into clarity; without allowing it to be reabsorbed and lost, you strip it bare and make it your unique focus.

Longchenpa:

Self-arising wisdom is rigpa that is empty, clear and free from all elaboration, like an immaculate sphere of crystal. Its very being is such that it never explores objects of the senses.

HHDL: Whatever phenomena of dualistic grasping arise, outwardly or inwardly, as Longchenpa says,

It abides as the ground for the arising of all this, but when it comes to its own true nature, whether anything arises or not is not the issue. And so it is vivid in its natural lucidity, unimpeded, and pristine...

HHDL: So whatever arises as subject or object, rigpa is not bound by any dualistic grasping whatsoever. Longchenpa continues:

When there is no recognition, and consciousness streams out towards concepts, this is what is called 'dualistic thinking' For a yogin who realizes the naked meaning of Dzogpachenpo, rigpa is fresh, pure and naked, and objects may manifest and appear within rigpa, but it does not lose itself externally to those objects. Dualistic grasping, the source of samsara, is erased, rigpa resides in all its pristine, naked freshness, and as a sign that it is not lost in objects, there is no fixation on appearances, nor any urge to suppress or indulge them.

The Place of Analytical Meditation

HHDL: In order to become a suitable vessel for the introduction to rigpa, you need the preliminary phase of searching for the hidden flaw of the mind, whereby you train your mind through the reasoning that examines ultimate reality.

(pages 178 - 191, lightly edited)

...

J.E. :

Here I would like to relate a story that connects with this last point. Back in the early 1990's I had the good fortune to receive teachings from the great scholar and accomplished teacher Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche. I remember that people were meeting with him privately with him at that time, to discuss their practice, and that during the break one day I met and spoke to one fellow student. This woman related to me how Kirti Tsenshab had recommended that she study the Middle-Way Buddhist wisdom teachings. The sense that I had of it at the time was that her mind was soft, diffuse, and 'wooly', and that he was recommending this to her to sharpen her critical faculties. Then whatever practice she would do would go deeper.

Studying the wisdom teachings that make use of analysis and reasoning, I learned, not only brings insights and understandings by our using that faculty, it also conditions the mind. It brings out the quality of discriminating awareness that then continues in other areas of study and practice.

From A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Nyoshul Khenpo would explain the specifically Dzogchen understanding of bodhichitta motivation:

What is arousing bodhichitta according to the uncommon approach of Dzogchen? This is something that is not even mentioned in the other vehicles.

It is "summoning forth or evoking mind as wisdom." There is a difference between "generating bodhichitta using the mind" and "summoning forth or evoking mind as wisdom."

What is the uniqueness of generating the heart of the enlightened mind "as wisdom"? It begins from the same premise as the motivation of the sutra vehicle, from the realization that "all sentient beings who do not realize shunyata and who are deluded wander endlessly in the ocean of samsara."

But the key point here is that all these sentient beings are recognized as having within themselves inherent wisdom, self-abiding dharmakaya—the self-knowing rigpa, the unity of space and wisdom, that is the actual lama who is the all-pervasive sovereign, the glorious primordial buddha Samantabhadra. That actually resides within us all, and so we wish: "May I be able to bring all sentient beings to the level where they realize this."

You could also call this intrinsic wisdom "self-arising rigpa" or "buddha nature," but whatever term you use, according to Dzogchen it exists spontaneously within all sentient beings, without ever wavering or fluctuating. It is because they fail to see or realize this that beings are deluded and cling dualistically to concepts of "self" and "others." So our aspiration is to bring them to the primordially pure level of Samantabhadra. However, this is not the attainment of enlightenment as something separate, or some buddhahood to be achieved, as it were, from outside, since it already exists within them. Rather, it is a question of actualizing the wisdom that they already possess within themselves.

Speaking of Dzogchen, from *The Nature of Mind*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

You can talk with people about Dzogchen. You can say that Dzogchen is the union of unconditional love, compassion, and wisdom. You can say that Dzogchen means going beyond thought, and no longer grasping and clinging to negative emotions.
(134)

Be Present, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Salute to self-existing presence.

See here, friends of the unchanging!

I am Unchanging Presence.

Be present when you see me.

Let unmoved mind look into itself.

I am the mirror of presence

clearly showing you right attention.

Be present, it's the essence of Dharma.

Be present, it's the main part of practice.

Be present, it's the mind's stronghold.

Be present, it furthers natural, wakeful knowing.

Absentminded, one strays into laziness.

Absentminded, every fault flows forth.

Absentmindedness doesn't fulfill any purpose.

Absentmindedness is like a heap of crap.

Absentmindedness is to float on lakes of urine.

Absentmindedness is like a heartless corpse.

So please, my friends, be present!

Through the wishes of all sublime teachers, may all friends attain a steady presence!

On meditation, by Dudjom Rinpoche

In meditation practice, you might experience a muddy, semiconscious, drifting state, like having a hood over your head: a dreamy dullness. This is really nothing more than a kind of blurred and mindless stagnation. How do you get out of this state? Alert yourself, straighten your back, breathe the stale air out of your lungs, and direct your awareness into clear space to freshen your mind. If you remain in this stagnant state you will not evolve, so whenever this setback arises, clear it again and again. It is important to be as watchful as possible, and to stay as vigilant as you can.

From Pointing Out the Great Perfection, by Dudjom Rinpoche

Awareness is first pointed out by your master. Thereby, you recognize your natural face, by yourself, and are introduced to your own nature. All the phenomena of samsara and nirvana, however they may appear, are none other than the expression of awareness itself. Thus, decide on one thing - *awareness!*
(Here, awareness is rigpa.)

Just as waves on the ocean subside again into the ocean, gain confidence in the liberation of all thoughts, whatever may arise. Confidence is beyond the object of meditation and the act of meditating. It is free from the conceptual mind that fixates on meditation.

If that's the case, you may say, "It's sufficient to not meditate!" No, that's ridiculous! Simply by recognizing awareness you haven't arrived at the state of liberation. Since beginningless lifetimes, we have been enveloped within the cocoon of deluded tendencies. Up until now, we have been spending our lives deep under the shit of this conceptual thinking.

At the time of death, you aren't certain where you will go, but you must follow your karma and undergo more suffering. Therefore, you should now practice sustaining the continuity of the awareness which you have recognized, and nothing other than that.

The great omniscient master, Longchenpa, said:

*You may have recognized your nature,
But unless you become familiar with it,
The enemy, 'thinking, ' will carry you off
Like an infant in a battlefield.*

Generally speaking, the word 'meditation' means sustaining the continuity of awareness with natural and innate mindfulness, resting in undistracted nonfixation and growing accustomed to the innate nature.

As for 'growing accustomed,' when meditating and a thought arises, just let it arise - there is no need to regard it as your enemy. Relax in its arising. If no thought arises, don't try to make it do so - just rest in its nonarising.

When meditating, it is very easy to recognize a coarse thought as it suddenly arises, but after a few subtle thoughts have arisen you don't notice anything. This is called an 'undercurrent of thought.' This undercurrent acts as a sneak-thief during your meditation so it is essential to place mindfulness on guard. If you can keep continuity through mindfulness in all situations - whether you are eating, sleeping, walking, or sitting, in meditation or in post-meditation - then that itself is sufficient.

The great master, Padmakara, said:

*Whether explained a hundred or a thousand times,
There is only one thing to understand -
Knowing the one that frees all,
Sustain the natural face of self-awareness!*

From A Light in the Dark, by Lama Mipham Rinpoche

When you practice, you should work mainly with the instruction to let pure being arise clearly on its own as timeless awareness by letting ordinary consciousness rest naturally, just as water becomes clear when it is not disturbed.

Don't reinforce conceptual thinking with theoretical speculation or by analyzing how to adjust your experience, e.g., "Is my meditation ordinary consciousness or timeless awareness?" as both peaceful resting and insight will be somewhat distorted.

The practice consists of peaceful resting, the steady continuity of attention when you rest in the natural flow, and insight, knowing that recognizes its own clarity and presence, joining through their own momentum.

The Essence of Mind, by Mipham Rinpoche

Namo Guru Mañjuśrīye!

The actual nature of things is inconceivable and inexpressible. Yet, for those fortunate individuals who seek to penetrate the profound meaning of *dharmatā*, I shall here offer a few words by way of illustration.

What we call “essence of mind” is the actual face of unconditioned pure awareness, which is recognized through receiving the guru's blessings and instructions. If you wonder what this is like, it is empty in essence, beyond conceptual reference; it is cognizant by nature, spontaneously present; and it is all-pervasive and unobstructed in its compassionate energy. This is the rigpa in which the three kāyas are inseparable.

It is therefore as the vidyādhara Garab Dorje said in his *Final Testament*:

This rigpa, which has no concrete existence as anything at all,
Is completely unobstructed in the arising of its self-appearances.

To summarize: the actual nature of mind—the way it has always been, in and of itself - is this innate pure awareness that is unfabricated and unrestricted.

When this is explained in negative terms:

- It is not something to be apprehended;
- Nor is it a non-existent void;
- It is not some combination of these two,
- Nor is it a third option that is neither.

This is the view of the absence of any identifiable existence, the fact that it cannot be conceptualised in any way by thinking, “It is like this.”

When explained in more positive, experiential terms, it is said to be glaringly empty, lucidly clear, vividly pure, perfectly even, expansively open, and so on.

To illustrate this using examples: without limit or centre, it is like space; in its

unlimited clarity, it is like sunlight flooding the sky; without clear inside and outside, it is like a crystal ball; in its freedom from clinging and attachment, it is like the traces of a bird in flight; and neither arising nor ceasing, it is like the sky.

To dispel any doubts or misunderstandings that might arise from this instruction, it is described as the great clarity that is beyond partiality, the great emptiness of freedom from conceptual reference, the great union that cannot be separated, and so on.

In terms of its meaning, as it cannot be pointed out by words, it is *inexpressible*; as it cannot be known with ordinary modes of consciousness, it is *inconceivable*; and as it does not fall into any extreme, it is the great *freedom from elaboration*. In the end, it is beyond all expressions, such as: it is all and everything, it is not all, everything lies within it, or does not, and so on. It remains an individual experience of self knowing awareness.

The names used to illustrate it are 'primordial purity' (*ka dag*) and 'spontaneous presence' (*lhun grub*), and, when summarizing: 'the single, all-encompassing sphere of naturally arising wisdom' (*rang byung ye shes thig le nyag gcig*).

As it is the pinnacle of all in terms of the qualities it possesses, it is also the transcendent perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) and so on.

Symbolically, it can be revealed by means of the sun, or a magnifying glass, a crystal ball, or a finger pointing into space, and so forth.

When you have a precious jewel in your own hand,
 Even if others should discard them, why be angry?
 Without losing your connection to these instructions,
 The pinnacle of Dharma, and your own good fortune,
 Even if others should criticize them, why be angry?

By Mipham.

Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2016, with the kind assistance of Alak Zenkar Rinpoche.

From Calling the Lama from Afar, by Dudjom Rinpoche

Since pure awareness of oneness is the real buddha,
In openness and contentment I found the lama in my heart.
When we realize this unending natural mind is the very nature of the lama,
Then there is no need for attached, grasping, or weeping prayers or artificial
complaints,
By simply relaxing in this uncontrived, open, and natural state,
We obtain the blessing of aimless self-liberation of whatever arises.

Rekindle positive thoughts - from The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Even when your meditation is going well, from time to time rekindle positive thoughts, as it is recommended in the Aro teachings. When your meditation is not going well, again use the assistance of skillful means - revitalize yourself by invoking joy, appreciation, love, and devotion, and return to Dzogchen meditation. At the conclusion of the session, dedicate the merit for all living beings.

From Rainbow Painting, by Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

We are taught: Keep company with the vajra (the indestructible nature) of pure wisdom.' Here, the purity of wisdom referred to is that of original wakefulness. This is our buddha nature, the enlightened essence, also called rangjung yeshe, self-existing wakefulness.

Self-existing wakefulness does not have to be thought of to be so. I expect you are all very intelligent, so pay careful attention to this: We all have something called self existing wakefulness that we do not need to create or manufacture.

(This) Rigpa is like sunlit space.

We cannot push the clouds away, but we can allow the clouds of thought to gradually dissolve until finally all the clouds have vanished. When it becomes easier to recognize, and when recognition is self-sustained, that can be called 'realization'.

...

It is not as if we need to decide, 'I hate these thoughts! I only want the awakened state! I have to be enlightened!' This kind of grasping and pushing will never give way to enlightenment. By simply allowing the expression of thought activity to naturally subside, again and again, the moments of genuine rigpa automatically and naturally begin to last longer.

...

We need to become used to this natural dissolving of thought through training.

We call this training 'meditation', but it is not an act of meditating in the common sense of the word. There is no emptying the mind essence by trying to maintain an artificially imposed vacant state. Why? Because mind essence is already spacious and clear. Similarly, we do not need to make this fundamental nature aware; awareness is already present.

All you have to do is leave it as it is. In fact, there is nothing whatsoever to do, so

we cannot even call this an act of meditating. There is an initial recognition, and from then on we do not have to be clever about it or try to improve it in any way whatsoever. Just let it be as it naturally is- that is what is called meditation, or even more accurately 'nonmeditation'.

What is crucial is not to be distracted for even a single instant. Once recognition has taken place, undistracted nonmeditation is the key point of practice.

...

Distraction is the return of all kinds of thoughts, in which the continuity of nondual awareness is lost. The training is simply to recognize again. Once recognition takes place, there is nothing more to do; simply allow mind essence to be. That is how the cloud-covers gradually dissolve.

...

Realization is achieved through repeating the short moment of recognition many times.

...

There are two types of mindfulness, deliberate, and effortless. By starting out with deliberate attention, the practitioner can make a clear distinction between being distracted or not.

For most people, especially in the Mahamudra system, the mindfulness of deliberate attention is essential in the beginning. Otherwise, by relying on only effortless mindfulness, you may not even notice whether you are distracted or not. Instead, it is much better to practice deliberate mindfulness even though it is subtly conceptual, and gradually progress to effortless mindfulness.

In the Mahamudra teachings, you often find the phrase 'original innate nature'. This is nothing other than buddha nature. The training is simply to become used to that.

To train, you must first of all be introduced to and have recognized the view. In Mahamudra, once the practitioner has recognized the view, he or she takes mindfulness as the path; it is a way of training in that view.

If mindfulness is lost, then we are led completely astray into the 'black dissipation' of ordinary habitual patterns. So either we remember the view and sustain it, or the practice is destroyed.

We need to know when we are distracted. Discursive thought is distraction, but once we recognize the essence of thought, we have arrived at non-thought.

...

For most of us there is no way around having to remind ourselves of the view by being mindful.

That which goes astray is simply our attention. Our mind becomes distracted, and that which brings us back to the view is called 'deliberate mindfulness'.

It's like this: if you want the light to come on in a room, a conscious act is necessary. You must put your finger on the light-switch and press it; the light doesn't turn itself on.

In the same way, the moment we are carried away, we think, 'I have wandered off'. By recognizing the identity of who has been distracted, you have automatically arrived back in the view. The reminder is nothing more than that. This moment is like pressing the light-switch. Once the light is on, you do not have to keep pressing it.

After a while, we forget again and are carried away. At that point we must reapply deliberate mindfulness.

This is a good example for the famous phrase, 'The artificial leads to the natural'. First apply the method; then, once you are in the natural state, simply allow its continuity.

After a while our attention begins to wander. Having noticed the distraction, apply mindfulness and remain naturally. The natural state is effortless mindfulness.

The first point is deliberate mindfulness. The next moment is seeing your nature. At that time you should allow for an ongoing state of naturalness. All the different speculations should be dropped completely.

In the moment of seeing, allow for a continuity free from thought. Simply rest freely in that.

...

Because we have been carried away from this state by conceptual thinking since beginningless lifetimes, we will again be swept away by the strength of habit. When this happens, you must notice, 'I am distracted'. Then look into 'Who is being carried away'. That immediately brings about the meeting with buddha nature. At that moment, leave it as it is.

...

We need the best relaxation. The difficulty comes from not having this. What becomes tired is the dualistic mind.

In the beginning the master will say, 'Look into your mind!' This watchfulness is necessary until you are used to it. Once that has happened you don't need to look here or there. You have caught the 'scent' of the nature of mind. At that point, you do not need to struggle. The nature of mind is naturally awake.

Very often meditation practice is an exercise in keeping up that conceptual state. This is not the state of true samadhi that is totally free of homemade constructs or fabrications.

The key phrase here is 'originally empty and ungrounded', a state that does not require our making at all.

People often experience a certain tiredness after this rather conceptual meditation. This fatigue is in exact proportion to how much effort was applied to maintain the state.

Try now in your meditation practice not to maintain anything whatsoever. We should be free not only from the superficial and underlying thoughts, but also from the deep-seated thought constructs as well, which are what conceptualize the meditation state.

The most important aspect of the view is to be free of holding any notions about it. Especially be free from the subtle notions of 'sustainer' and 'that which is sustained'.

...

One evening Patrul Rinpoche taught the daughter of Chokgyur Lingpa, Konchok Paldron. She remembered his words very clearly and later repeated them to me. She imitated Patrul Rinpoche's thick Golok accent, and said, 'Don't entertain thoughts about what has passed. Don't anticipate or plan what will happen in the future. Leave your present wakefulness unaltered, utterly free and open. Aside from that, there is nothing else whatsoever to do!'

What he meant was, don't sit and think about what has happened in the past, and don't speculate on what will appear in the future, or even a few moments from now. Leave your present wakefulness, which is the buddha nature of self existing wakefulness, totally unmodified. Do not try to correct or alter anything. Leave it free, as it naturally is, free and wide open like space. There is nothing more to do besides that.

Realizing the view, authentically and totally, melts away the obscurations of karma and disturbing emotions, and this allows the qualities of original wakefulness to unfold.

Two quotes

Dilgo Khyentse taught: 'Leave everything as it is in fundamental simplicity, and clarity will arise by itself. Only by doing nothing will you do all that is to be done.'

Patrul Rinpoche said, 'Don't prolong the past; don't invite the future; don't alter your innate wakefulness...'

From An Old Man Basking in the Sun, by Longchenpa

So stay here, you lucky people,
let go and be happy in the natural state.

Let your complicated life and everyday confusion alone,
and out of quietude, doing nothing, watch the nature of mind.

This piece of advice is from the bottom of my heart:

Fully engage in contemplation and understanding is born;
Cherish non-attachment and delusion dissolves;
forming no agenda at all, reality dawns.

Whatever occurs, whatever it may be, that itself is the key,
and without stopping it or nourishing it, in an even flow,
freely resting, surrendering to ultimate contemplation,
in naked pristine purity, we reach consummation. "

From The Flight of the Garuda, Song Six, by Shabkar

Despite the innumerable names that are tagged onto it,
Know that the real meaning is as follows:

Let your mind spontaneously relax and rest.
When left to itself,
ordinary mind is fresh and naked.
If observed, it is a vivid clarity without anything to see,
A direct awareness, sharp and awake.

Possessing no existence,
it is empty and pure,
A clear openness
of non-dual luminosity and emptiness.

It is not permanent, since it does not exist at all.
It is not nothingness, since it is vividly clear and awake.
It is not oneness, since many things are cognized and known.
It is not plurality, since the many things known are inseparable in one taste.

It is not somewhere else;
it is your own awareness itself.

The face of this Primordial Protector, dwelling in your heart,
can be directly perceived in this very instant.
Never be separated from it, children of my heart!

From The Prayer Kuntuzangpo

HO! All appearing phenomena and the possibilities of samsara and nirvana
 Have one source, but there are two paths and two results,
 Produced by a miracle of knowing and unknowing.
 Through this powerful prayer of Kuntuzangpo
 May all beings realize the perfectly enlightened state
 In the palace of dharmadhatu.

The source of everything is uncompounded,
 Self-arising, infinite, inexpressible,
 Beyond labels “samsara” and “nirvana.”
 Knowing this suchness is buddhahood,
 but unknowing beings wander compulsively.
 May all beings of the three realms
 Realize the nature of the inconceivable source.

Furthermore, I, Kuntuzangpo proclaim:
 The nature of the one ground is free from causes and conditions.
 The source is realized by spontaneously arising awareness.
 It is not named by errors of exaggeration such as “inside” and “outside.”
 It is not obscured by the darkness of mindlessness.
 Therefore, there are no stains of mistaken perception.
 Cultivate this fresh, pristine awareness,
 And the three worlds are free from destruction and terror.

By my powerful, compassionate prayer,
 May all beings of the three realms
 Be liberated from the ways of the six realms of classes of beings.

May all beings engulfed by desire and attachment
 Neither reject desire’s pleasure,
 Nor accept its sorrow,
 But relax mind into its own state,
 Restore self-refreshing awareness
 And realize discriminating wisdom.

May all sentient beings of the six realms

No longer cling to enemies when anger arises,
But relax their own mind,
Restore self-refreshing awareness
And realize mirror-like wisdom.

May all conceited beings
Ease their mind into its own state,
Restore self-refreshing awareness
And realize equanimity wisdom.

May beings with increasing competitive thoughts, who quarrel and fight,
No longer cling to enemies, but relax their own mind,
Restore self-refreshing awareness
And realize all-accomplishing wisdom.

May those who wander in the darkness of ignorance
Awaken the radiant clarity of mindfulness,
And by the power of this, realize the wisdom of dharmadhatu.

From Heart Advice in a Nutshell, by Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro

Abide in the totally free state of mind: open, spacious,
restful, content, and carefree

This unborn Dharmakaya, Rigpa
is uncreated by cause and circumstances
It is naturally arisen,
fresh, naked,
unstained by thoughts of 'I' and 'mine', 'this' or 'that',
unspoiled by mental fabrication

Abide in the silence of its natural simplicity

This is Rigpa, Emptiness, the Dharmakaya's actual face

From A Beautiful String of Jewels, by Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro

Rest in this natural state
of rigpa self-awareness:

Don't let the ordinary mind contrive and spoil it,
but release everything,
spacious and even.

Don't follow rising thoughts;
leave them be.

Let whatever appears unfold
and naturally liberate itself.

Advice in a Single Statement (from Khenpo Ngawang Palzang)
As recorded by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Homage to the lama!

"Here in Dzogpachenpo, we settle, without contriving, in what we call the essence (or the face) of mind: in other words, its basic condition, left simply as it is, its own inherent nature.

Then, it is said, "While undistracted, let the mind look into itself." Simply turning within lays bare our own naturally abiding capacity to know, our 'ordinary awareness' (tamal gyi shepa), and causes it to dawn.

Then, at all times, whether eating, sleeping, moving or staying still, if we can sustain this, with mindfulness and without forgetting, then, like an old man watching a child at play, having recognized the dharmakāya, which is the source of liberation, we will be able to take the thoughts that are its expression onto the path, and they will be liberated upon arising, without leaving any trace behind.

This advice in a single statement was taught by the great Khenpo Ngawang Palzang."

Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2015.

How Practitioners of All Levels Should Practice the Aro Teachings, from The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

When we put the Aro teachings into practice, we begin by generating bodhicitta - the thought of love and compassion for all sentient beings - and then cultivate the four boundless thoughts. Next we meditate on impermanence, reflecting on the fleeting nature, as well as the preciousness of the world and of ourselves.

We are beautiful beings and are intimately connected to these sublime teachings. We have the opportunity right here and now to open our minds to encompass and embody the infinite universe. We have the opportunity to help and inspire others to do the same. This is a cause for joy, appreciation, devotion, and celebration.

With the desire to benefit all beings firmly in our hearts, with the realization that now is the time to put the precious teachings into practice, and with courage and commitment to persevere in this, there is no doubt that we will accomplish something meaningful for ourselves and others. Then, when it is time to leave this world, we will do so with joy and fulfillment.

With these thoughts, feel the presence of Guru Padmasambhava, the Buddha, and all the Dzogchen lineage masters vividly and strongly. Pray for their blessings that we can fulfill their intentions as well as our own. These are the foundation practices.

Next introduce - or reintroduce - the nature of your mind. As the question, “Where is my mind?” When you ask this question, you do not receive an answer. All the great masters say that no answer *is* the answer; that the speechless state is enlightenment. Now that you have arrived at the answerless state, which is enlightenment itself, simply relax. This is known as the emptiness of mind. The mind is emptiness, so rest in its emptiness.

While you are experiencing the emptiness of mind, do not create, or harbor conceptions about the mind being empty. That is a fabrication - do not fabricate. Simply be in the moment. When thoughts come, do not reject or follow them. Thoughts appear or disappear on their own - nothing should be done about them.

Use mindfulness as a support for your practice. Maintain the natural state in this way for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. While you are practicing emptiness meditation, occasionally bring up joy, appreciation, and devotion, as well as love

and compassion for a few moments - then return to emptiness. This will bring more vitality to your emptiness meditation.

At the end of our session, once again generate bodhicitta, wishing good things for all sentient beings. Remember, at the present time the true nature is not realized by everyone. Pray that everyone will attain this wisdom, that they will understand the true nature exactly as it is, so that violence and suffering as well as their causes will be uprooted. The good wishes that should conclude every practice session are known as dedication prayers.

A Song to Introduce the View, by Khenpo Gangshar

Placing my head at the feet of the Dharma King, I offer homage: Bless me that I might see natural luminosity.

Hey, you of great fortune!

Sit without moving,
like a tent peg driven into hard earth!

Gaze with your eyes neither open nor closed,
like the eyes of a deity in a fresco!

And let your mind settle, loose and relaxed,
like a woolen blanket spread out on the ground...

At times like these, while resting in the utter brilliance that is the space beyond thought, which may be likened to a cloudless sky, you will experience unimpeded translucence like a faultless crystal.

This is none other than the view of the ultimate, the luminous Great Perfection. Resting in equipoise within the pure luminosity, vividly clear like the sky, dullness and agitation are naturally voided and do not arise anew – a faultless, brilliantly clear non-conceptual meditation. When thought arises, be it good or bad, it is recognized for what it is and will not disturb. Focus upon this method and view your genuine nature; effortless, it arises by relaxing into the expanse, and thoughts are pacified on their own ground.

When you are able to practice for longer periods, it can be like, for example, when muddy water is stirred up and then allowed to settle – the innate lucidity of the water becomes clearer. Similarly, when myriad appearances arise and are realized to be like reflections, they cause the natural clarity of mind itself to become ever clearer. This in turn leads to the effortless arising of various qualities, such as the various types of clairvoyance and so on.

Should even the Great Master of Oḍḍiyāna appear before you, he'd have nothing greater than this to say on the view of the Great Perfection.

Should even Longchen Rabjam appear before you, he'd have nothing greater to teach you on the practice of taking thought as the path.

Should even the twenty-five exalted disciples appear before you, they'd have nothing greater to say concerning this practice.

As for myself, a yogin, this is my practice, and I have no greater meditation instruction to offer you.

You may analyze meticulously, but when a wind blows it naturally disperses the clouds and the sky can be seen. Endeavor to see empty clarity, mind itself, in the same way – there is nothing greater than this understanding. If you don't stir up the silt, the water will remain clear; as such, don't analyze. Simply rest without contrivance and you will come to see the emptiness of mind itself. There is nothing greater to see than this!

There are many views, but that of the emptiness of mind itself, devoid of all grasping, is the unmistakable view of the Great Perfection. When death comes to yogis of this method they are able to seize the clear light of death.

Hearing about it is beneficial, but I pray the actual experience of clear light will become evident.

Written by the old ignoramus, Gangshar Wangpo. May it prove meaningful!

Translated by Sean Price, 2015

Selections from Our Pristine Mind II, by Orgyen Chowang

The Beauty of Pristine Mind

At its core, our mind is pristine. Pristine Mind is a beautiful, naturally vibrant state, brimming with life, self-sustaining in its capacity to provide a dependable, inexhaustible source of happiness and joy.

Sadly, most of us do not realize the true nature of our mind. We have become disconnected from it. Pristine mind becomes obscured by the mind's misperceptions and inner experiences - that pollute its true nature. As a result, we live in a mind that leaves us insecure, alternating between times of happiness and sadness. This robs us of the ultimate experience of life, deeply connected and aware of this pristine state of mind.

In Pristine Mind we are not detached or withdrawn from the world. We do not need to reject worldly pleasures. In Pristine Mind we are far more present to the world than we have ever been before. We experience life's pleasures more robustly, work more efficiently, and, above all, love more richly and more universally. Living in this way does not leave us dry and disconnected, but fills us with gratitude and energy. Our very life changes from one of fending off fear and despair to one of contentment, love, and splendor.

Fortunately, this happy state is in us right now. It is who we really are, so we can never really lose it. But in order to rediscover it, we must look for it in the right place. Any quest for unconditional happiness must begin with our own mind.

Who we are not

When we have ordinary, unenlightened perception, we see and perceive thoughts and emotions as just who we are. We think that our ordinary mind - our thoughts and emotions and the swirl of events in our mind - actually make up the "I" we speak of when we refer to ourselves.

Once we have directly perceived our Pristine Mind, that direct perception gives us a chance to experience the second aspect of realization: that our thoughts and emotions are just mental events, not who we really are. When we see who we are, we automatically see who we are not.

The more we remain in that pristine state of mind, the more we perceive all mental events - whether happy or sad, angry or desirous, positive or negative - as just passing across our mind. This aspect of realization is a direct, personal, firsthand experience of that reality, not just something we learn intellectually.

Once we become really familiar with the experience of Pristine Mind realization, no matter what kind of thought or emotion or other mental event arises, we no longer identify with it. We see any agitation in our mind as just a passing event. We think, "I know my mind is innately pristine. These experiences are just events passing through." We perceive them that way. We do not have to say this out loud to ourselves. We just begin to naturally see things that way once we have had some degree of realization of this truth.

Distinguishing Sem and Rigpa, by various teachers

From Naturally Liberating Whatever You Meet, by Khenpo Gangshar

Distinguishing

It is very important to distinguish the difference between mind (*sem*) and awareness (*rigpa*). The Great Omniscient One said:

*The big oxen pretending to know at these days
Claim that discursive thinking is awakened mind.
Such ignorant people, in their realm of darkness,
Are far away from the meaning of dzogchen.*

If you fail to distinguish between mind and awareness, you will likely engage in conduct that confuses cause and result, and thus turn away from the path in which view and conduct are united.

When experiencing the continuity of undistracted naturalness, awareness is free from a reference point, like space; and it has not even a speck of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, benefit or harm, whether you meet with positive or negative conditions.

The character of mind is evident the moment you get slightly distracted and encounter conditions that give rise to your feeling joy or sorrow. Having given rise to joy or sorrow, you will accumulate karmic actions. For example, mind is like the clouds gathering in the sky. Therefore, you must gain stability in awareness (*rigpa*), which is like a cloudless sky. You must be able to purify the aspect of mind that is like the clouds in the sky. Through this you will be able to separate mind and awareness.

From Meditating on the Nature of Mind, by the Dalai Lama

When distinguishing between sem and rigpa, rigpa refers to gnosis, or wisdom. Ordinary mental states are more adventitious, more temporary; by nature, they fluctuate. Rigpa is devoid of such fluctuation; it is ever-present and unchanging, with neither beginning nor end. So Dzogchen draws a distinction between these two kinds of minds.

From Dzogchen - The Heart Essence of the Great Perfection, by The Dalai Lama

The teaching known as the ‘Four Reliances*’ states: “Do not rely upon ordinary consciousness, but rely upon wisdom.” Here the term *namshe*, or ordinary consciousness refers to mind involved with dualistic perceptions. *Yeshe*, or wisdom, refers to mind free from dualistic perceptions. It is on that basis that the distinction can be made between ordinary mind and pure awareness. (pages 31 and 32.)

*The Four Reliances

Do not rely upon the individual, but rely upon the teaching.

As far as the teachings go, do not rely upon the words alone, but rely upon the meaning that underlies them.

Regarding the meaning, do not rely upon the provisional meaning, but rely upon the definitive meaning.

And regarding the definitive meaning, do not rely upon ordinary consciousness, but rely upon wisdom awareness.

When we come to meditation

Here the mind is not active. You do not entertain any thoughts at all, whether recalling the past or thinking about the future. Simply rest in the present moment of awareness, fresh and uncontrived. Without any kind of examining, or analyzing whatsoever, the mind dwells, tranquil and at peace, in a non-conceptual state. This is the basis from which you start.

This kind of consciousness that rests steadfastly without engaging any thoughts is, to use Dzogchen terminology, a calm, placid and undisturbed experience of alaya. (the ground consciousness) It is a state of mind that possesses a quality of slight stupidity and dullness, because, while not entertaining thoughts, it lacks the quality of clarity. So this is what is termed ‘the calm alaya, endowed with a stupid dullness.’

As you maintain this state and continue your practice over a period of time, the stupidity and dullness can, when certain factors come into play, be gradually removed. *Rigpa* - *because there is a distinction to be made between the ordinary mind and rigpa here* - becomes fully evident, extremely clear and lucid,

undistorted by the thoughts and concepts of the ordinary mind, and divested of the stupid quality of stable alaya. (*italics added*)

Rigpa is capable of being aware of anything, but is not sullied by ordinary thought processes or by grasping at and following after objects. This extraordinary essence of rigpa is what is to be recognized and experienced, and trekcho (cutting through) practice consists of maintaining the presence of that natural state of rigpa. (pages 109 and 110)

From *The Nature of Mind*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Question: What is the difference between mind and the nature of the mind?

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche: In Dzogchen, what we call “mind” (sem) is dualistic mind, the mind trapped in thoughts and emotions. The “nature of mind” (rigpa) is the mind when it is free from thoughts and emotions.

Dzogchen teachings have other names for dualistic mind and its nature. For example, conceptual mind is also known as *alaya*, and the mind free of concepts is often called *dharmakaya*.

There is also *marigpa*, (unknowing) and *rigpa*, which refer respectively to impure, twisted awareness, and pure awareness.

From *Meditation on Buddha Nature*, by Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche

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.

When a strong wind blows, the clouds vanish and blue sky appears. Similarly, when the powerful wisdom that understand the nature of the mind arises, the dark clouds of ego disappear.

~ Thubten Yeshe

From *As it Is*, by Tulku Urgyen

The Dzogchen tantras distinguish between sem and rigpa, teaching that rigpa is like mercury, while dualistic mind is like water. The perceived objects, the sense organs and the perceiving frame of mind are like dirt. Mercury doesn't get stuck, doesn't get caught up in any way whatsoever with these. It remains unmixed, unaffected by them. But the moment the water-like dualistic frame of mind touches dirt, it immediately mingles with it and becomes mud. Rigpa is innately stable; it is not caught up in the subject-object duality. Sem, like water, has no innate stability. The moment you pour water onto earth, it seeps in completely.

In every sentient being there is mind. The essence of this mind, whether known or not, is rigpa. Sentient beings have both mind and rigpa. A true yogi, a practitioner

of this path, abandons the dualistic frame of mind while allowing the state of rigpa to remain when sem falls away.

At Shukseb nunnery in Central Tibet, the great female master Ani Lochen expressed a single wish whenever someone requested her blessings. With an implement in her hand she would touch people's head, saying, "May you recognize the essence of mind." She repeated this to every person she blessed: "May you recognize the essence of mind." She would always say exactly the same thing. She never said "May you recognize mind," meaning sem. She always said, "May you recognize the essence of mind." In other words, may you no longer be caught up in dualistic mind, like water seeping into soil, but may you be innately stable, like mercury.

It is essential to distinguish between sem and rigpa. If you are caught up in sem, you are a semchen, which means sentient being, but if you master rigpa you are a rigpa dzinpa, which means vidyadhara, a knowledge-holder.

When to practice shamatha - from The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

When you are meditating and your thoughts become restless, practice shamatha. In this case, shamatha means to focus your mind one-pointedly on a single object. As soon as your mind is calm, release your mind from its object, and again rest your mind without focus. Resting the mind without focus is vipashyana. If while you are in the vipashyana state your thoughts once again become restless, go back to shamatha. Alternating between shamatha and vipashyana in this fashion will stabilize your meditation. (91)

A Lamp to Dispel Darkness

An Instruction that Points Directly to the Very Essence of Mind. in the Tradition of ‘the Old Realized Ones’, by Mipham Jampal Dorje

The Homage

Homage to the Lama, inseparable from Mañjuśrī, the embodiment of wisdom!

*Without having to study, contemplate, or train to any great degree,
Simply by maintaining recognition of the very nature of mind according to the
approach of the pith instructions,
Any ordinary village yogi can, without too much difficulty,
Reach the level of a vidyādhara: such is the power of this profound path.*

The Instruction that Cracks Open the Egg-shell of Ignorance

When you leave your mind in a state of natural rest, without thinking any particular thought, and at the same time maintain some kind of mindfulness, you can experience a state of vacant, neutral, apathetic indifference, called “*lungmaten*”, (a ‘no-man’s land’), where your consciousness is dull and blank.

In this, there is not any of the clear insight of *vipāśyanā*, which discerns things precisely, and so the masters call it marigpa (“non-recognition, ignorance, unknowing”). Since you cannot define it and say “This is what it’s like”, or “This is it!” such a state is called lungmaten (“undecided, indeterminate”). And since you can not say what kind of state it is you are resting in, or what your mind is thinking, it is also called *tha mal tang nyom* (“an ordinary state of apathetic indifference”). In fact, you are stuck in an ordinary state within the *ālaya*.

You need to use such a means of resting the mind, as a stepping stone, so as to give rise to the non-conceptual state of primordial wisdom. However, if there is not the self-recognition of primordial wisdom which is our rigpa, then it cannot count as the main (meditation) practice of Dzogchen.

As *The Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra* says:

A blank state, devoid of any thought whatsoever—
That is marigpa, the cause of delusion.

Therefore, when mind experiences this kind of dull state that lacks any thought or mental activity, *by allowing your attention to turn naturally and gently towards the one who is aware of this state—the one who is not thinking—you discover the pure awareness of rigpa, free of any movement of thought, beyond any notion of outside or inside, unimpeded and open, like the clear sky. (italics added)*

Although there is no dualistic separation here between an experience and an experienc-er, still the mind is certain about its own true nature, and there is a sense that, “There is nothing whatsoever beyond this.” When this occurs, because you can not conceptualize it or express it in words, it is acceptable to apply such terms as: “free from all extremes”, “beyond description”, “the fundamental state of clear light” and “the pure awareness of rigpa.”

As the wisdom of recognizing your own true nature dawns, it clears away the blinding darkness of confusion, and, just as you can see clearly the inside of your home once the sun has risen, you gain confident certainty in the true nature of your mind.

This was ‘the instruction (mengak) for cracking open the egg-shell of ignorance (marigpa).’

The Instruction for Cutting through the Web of Saṃsāric Existence

When you gain this kind of realization, you understand that this nature of reality has always been this way, timelessly, that it is not created by any causes or conditions, and that it never undergoes any kind of transition or change in the past, present or future. At the same time, you can not find even the tiniest fraction of something called “mind” that is separate from this nature.

You could also say that the state of mental blankness we looked at earlier is indescribable, but it lacks decisiveness, since you are completely unable to describe it in any way. Rigpa, on the other hand, is in essence indescribable, but at the same time it has a decisive quality that cuts through any doubt about what is indescribable. So there is a huge difference between these two kinds of indescribability, like the difference between blindness and perfect vision.

This covers the crucial point of distinguishing between the ālaya and the dharmakāya.

Therefore, because terms like ‘ordinary mind’, ‘mental non-doing’, ‘inexpressible’ and so on are used in two different ways—only one of which is authentic—when you come to know the crucial point of how the same words can have a higher level of meaning, you can you can come to experience the true meaning of the profound Dharma.

When resting in the essence of mind, some feel that what is to be maintained is a simple clarity, a simple awareness, and so they settle in a state of ordinary mental consciousness, thinking, “This is clarity.” Some focus their attention on the awareness of an absorbing sense of emptiness, as though their minds had ‘become’ empty. But, in both cases, there is some clinging to the dualistic experience of an aspect of ordinary mental consciousness.

When you find yourself in either of these states, look into the innate nature (bab) of that subtly fixated attention—the clarity and the one perceiving the clarity, the emptiness and the one perceiving the emptiness—and, by doing so, you will take away the support for the ordinary consciousness that perceives things dualistically. Then, if you can decisively recognize the innate nature of your own mind in all its nakedness—clear and open, without any limit or centre—and a state of lucid clarity arises, that is what is called, ‘the very essence of rigpa.’ With this, as rigpa sheds the covering layer of experiences involving clinging, its pure and pristine wisdom is laid bare.

This was ‘the instruction for cutting through the web of conditioned existence.’

The Instruction for Remaining in the Equalness which is like Space

This is how you should recognize the pure awareness of rigpa once it is freed from the various layers of ordinary thinking and experience, like a grain of rice freed from its husk—by settling naturally and making use of rigpa’s own self-knowing (or self-illuminating) quality.

It is not enough, however, simply to understand the nature of rigpa; you must be able to remain in that state with some stability through developing familiarity. And so it is very important that, without becoming distracted, you sustain constant mindfulness, so as to continue resting in an utterly natural state of awareness.

When you are maintaining that state, at times you might experience a vague and dull state with no thoughts, while at other times you might experience an unobstructed state (zang thal) with no thoughts that has the clarity of vipaśyanā.

At times, you might experience states of bliss on which you fixate, while at other times you might experience states of bliss free of such fixation. At times, you might have various experiences of clarity with grasping, while at other times you might experience a vivid clarity that is unsullied and free of grasping. At times, you might have unpleasant and disturbing experiences, while at other times you might have pleasant and soothing experiences. And at times, you might experience an extreme turbulence of thoughts which carries your mind away, causing you to lose your meditation; while at other times, you might experience unclear states of mind because of a failure to distinguish between mental dullness and vivid clarity.

These and other experiences come about unpredictably and to an extent you can not measure, like various waves produced by the winds of karma and habitual thoughts, which you have cultivated throughout beginningless time. It is as though you are on a long journey, during which you visit all sorts of different places—some of them pleasant, some fraught with danger—but whatever happens, you do not allow it to deter you, and continue on your own path.

In particular, when you are not yet familiar with this practice, and you have the experience of ‘movement,’ as all manner of thoughts stir in your mind, like a blazing fire, don’t become discouraged. Maintain the flow of your practice without letting it slip away, and find the right balance, so that you are neither too tense nor too relaxed. In this way, the more advanced meditative experiences, such as ‘attainment,’[1] will occur one after another.

At this point, investigate the distinction between the recognition and nonrecognition of rigpa, between ālaya and dharmakāya, and between ordinary awareness and wisdom. Through the master’s pith instructions, and on the basis of your own personal experience, have confidence in the direct introduction you receive. While you are maintaining this, just as water clears by itself if you do not stir it, your ordinary awareness will settle in its own nature. So you need to focus mainly on the instructions which clearly show how the true nature of this awareness is naturally arising wisdom. Don’t analyze with a view to adopting one state and abandoning another, thinking, “What is this that I am cultivating in meditation? Is it ordinary awareness or wisdom?” Nor should you entertain all kinds of speculations based on the understanding you have gained from books, because doing will only serve to obstruct both śamatha and vipaśyanā.

At some point, the aspect of familiarity or śamatha—which here means settling in an utterly natural way with stable and continuous mindfulness—and vipaśyanā—which here means the awareness that knows its own nature by itself—will merge

together automatically. When this happens, and you gain some stable familiarity with it, you come to understand how the *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* that are the primordial stillness of the natural state and the clear light of your own nature have always been inseparable, and the naturally arising wisdom that is the wisdom mind of Dzogpachenpo dawns.

That was the instruction for remaining in the equalness which is like space.

The glorious Saraha said:

Having gone beyond thinker and thinking,
Remain like a young child, free of thoughts,

This is the way to be. He also said:

Focus on the master's words and apply great effort—

Then, if you have received the master's instructions introducing you to your rigpa:

There is no doubt that your inherent nature will arise.

As he says, the naturally arising wisdom that is mind's inherent nature, and which has always accompanied your ordinary mind from time immemorial, will dawn. This is no different from the inherent nature of everything, and so it is also called the 'genuine clear light of the fundamental nature (*nyukma dōn gyi ösal*).'

Therefore, this approach of resting in a completely natural state and maintaining the recognition of your own nature, or rigpa, the very essence of mind, or the nature of phenomena, is 'the pith instruction that brings together a hundred crucial points in one.' This is also what you are to maintain continuously.

The true measure of your familiarity with this is the ability to maintain the state of clear light during sleep. The signs that you are on the right track can be known through your own experience: your faith, compassion and wisdom will increase automatically, so that realization will come easily, and you will experience few difficulties. You can be certain about how profound and swift this approach is if you compare the realization it brings with the realization gained only through great effort in other approaches.

As a result of cultivating your mind's own natural clear light, the obscurations of ordinary thinking and the habits it creates will be naturally cleared away (sang), and the two aspects of omniscient wisdom will effortlessly unfold (gyé). With this, as you seize the stronghold of your own primordial nature, the three kāyas will be spontaneously accomplished.

Profound! Guhya! Samaya!

This profound instruction was written by Mipham Jampal Dorje on the twelfth day of the second month, in the Fire Horse year (1906), for the benefit of village yogis and others, who, while not able to exert themselves too much in study and contemplation, still wish to take the very essence of mind into experience through practice. It has been set out in language that is easy to understand, in accordance with the experiential guidance of a great many old realized masters. Virtue! Mangalam!

| Rigpa Translations, Adam Pearcey, 2005.

This is a reference to five successive experiences that occur during the development of meditation in general, and śamatha in particular. They are termed 'movement' (compared to a cascade of water down a rock face), 'attainment' (compared to a torrent in a deep ravine), 'familiarization' (compared to a meandering river), 'stability' (compared to an ocean free of waves), and 'consummation' (compared to a mountain).

Prayer of the View, Meditation and Conduct, by Trulshik Rinpoche

Namo guru!

The primordial ground, the great, ever-pure primordial emptiness,
Which is free from all elaboration and change,
Is the very nature of uncompounded and self-arising awareness:
Bless me so that I may recognize the view, my very own nature.

To meditate without distraction in this uncontrived expanse,
Which has neither contraction nor expansion, is simply to settle,
Without thought or expression, in natural awareness – the three kāyas:
Bless me so that I may meditate like this, with decisiveness and ease.

All thoughts of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are unbound and naturally liberated,
And there is no need for effort-based antidotes
In this, the great, primordial liberation beyond adoption and rejection:
Bless me so that I may realize this great, all-encompassing liberation upon arising.

The supremely secret view, meditation, conduct and result of the Great Perfection
Are to be realized through the guru's kindness,
And the devotion of one's own awareness arising as the guru:
Bless me so that your inspiration and blessings may enter my heart.

*Written at the request of the faithful Changchub Chökyi Drolma by the one called
Chökyi Lodrö, i.e., Kyabje Trulshik Rinpoche.*

The Essence of Wisdom: How to Sustain the Face of Rigpa, by Mipham Rinpoche

To the glorious Primordial Protector, I pay homage!

There are three stages to sustaining the essence of rigpa: recognition, perfecting the strength, and gaining stability.

At first, refine your understanding until, through the guru's instructions, you come to see the actual face of rigpa, nakedly and without intellectual speculation.

Once you have arrived at certainty, it is crucially important that you sustain rigpa's essence by yourself. Mere recognition is insufficient; you must develop its strength.

Moreover, although you might recognize rigpa in the beginning, unless you settle in that recognition, it will soon be interrupted by thoughts, making it difficult to experience the naked, unadulterated rigpa. So, at this stage it is crucial that you settle without blocking or indulging thoughts, and rest repeatedly, and for periods of increasing duration, in an experience of uncontrived, pure awareness.

Once you have familiarized yourself with this again and again, the waves of thought will weaken and the face of rigpa that you are sustaining will grow clearer.

During meditation remain in this experience for as long as you can, and in post-meditation maintain the mindfulness of recalling the face of rigpa. If you can familiarize with this the strength of rigpa will increase.

Thoughts will continue to arise at first, but, without having to resort to any other remedy in order to stop them, they will be freed by themselves in an instant simply by leaving them as they are—like a snake uncoiling its own knots by itself.

Then, with further familiarity, rising thoughts will continue to bring some slight disturbance but will dissolve immediately by themselves, like writing on water.

As you become still more familiar with this state, you will reach a point at which rising thoughts no longer have any effect at all, and you have no hope or fear about their arising or non-arising. This experience beyond benefit and harm is likened to a thief entering an empty house.

By continuing to familiarize yourself with this, you will reach the level of perfect strength, at which point thoughts and the ālaya, together with any tendency to produce movement in the mind, all dissolve into unaltered dharmakāya, and rigpa is secure in its own place.

Just as you might search for ordinary earth and stones on an island of gold, without ever finding them, the whole of appearance and existence, without exception, arises as a dharmakāya realm, in which purity is all-encompassing. This is known as ‘gaining stability’, the point at which any hopes and anxieties about samsara and nirvana or birth and death are eradicated entirely.

Just as, in this way, daytime perceptions and thoughts are gradually brought into rigpa’s domain, during the night-time too, there is no need to rely on any other instruction, as this can be applied to dreams and the recognition of the clear light of light and heavy sleep. Having understood this, you must persist in the practice until you gain stability, with unflagging diligence like the continuous flow of a river.

This instruction was given by Mipham. May virtue and goodness abound!

Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2016, with the kind assistance of Alak Zenkar Rinpoche.

The Instruction of Pointing the Staff, by Padmasambhava

While the Great Master Padmasambhava was staying at Great Rock Hermitage at Samye, Sherab Gyalpo of Ngog, an uneducated 61 year old man who had the highest faith and strong devotion to the master, served him for one year. All this while Ngog didn't ask for any teachings, nor did the master give him any. When after a year the master intended to leave, Ngog offered a mandala plate upon which he placed a flower of one ounce of gold. Then he said,

Great Master, think of me with kindness. First of all, I am uneducated. Second, my intelligence is small. Third, I am old, so my elements are worn down. I beg you to give a teaching to an old man on the verge of death that is simple to understand, can thoroughly cut through doubt, is easy to realize and apply, has an effective view, and will help me in future lives.

The Master pointed his walking staff at the old man's heart and gave this instruction:

Listen here old man! Look into the awakened mind of your own awareness! It has neither form nor color, neither center nor edge. At first, it has no origin but is empty. Next, it has no dwelling place but is empty. At the end, it has no destination but is empty. This emptiness is not made of anything and is clear and cognizant. When you see this and recognize it, you know your natural face. You understand the nature of things. You have then seen the nature of mind, resolved the basic state of reality and cut through doubts about topics of knowledge.

This awakened mind of awareness is not made out of any material substance; it is self-existing and inherent in yourself. This is the nature of things that is easy to realize because it is not to be sought for elsewhere. This is the nature of mind that does not consist of a concrete perceiver and something perceived to fixate on. It defies the limitations of permanence and annihilation. In it there is no thing to awaken; the awakened state of enlightenment is your own awareness that is naturally awake. In it there is no thing that goes to the hells; awareness is naturally pure. In it there is no practice to carry out; its nature is naturally cognizant. This great view of the natural state is present in yourself: resolve that it is not to be sought for elsewhere.

When you understand the view in this way and want to apply it in your experience, wherever you stay is the mountain retreat of your body. Whatever external appearance you perceive is a naturally occurring appearance and a naturally empty

emptiness; let it be, free from mental constructs. Naturally freed appearances become your helpers, and you can practice while taking appearances as the path.

Within, whatever moves in your mind, whatever you think, has no essence but is empty. Thought occurrences are naturally freed. When remembering your mind essence you can take thoughts as the path and the practice is easy.

As for the innermost advice: no matter what kind of disturbing emotion you feel, look into the emotion and it tracelessly subsides. The disturbing emotion is thus naturally freed. This is simple to practice.

When you can practice in this way, your meditation training is not confined to sessions. Knowing that everything is a helper, your meditation experience is unchanging, the innate nature is unceasing, and your conduct is unshackled. Wherever you stay, you are never apart from the innate nature.

Once you realize this, your material body may be old, but awakened mind doesn't age. It knows no difference between young and old. The innate nature is beyond bias and partiality. When you recognize that awareness, innate wakefulness, is present in yourself, there is no difference between sharp and dull faculties. When you understand the innate nature, free from bias and partiality, is present within yourself, there is no difference between great and small learning. Even though your body, the support for the mind, falls apart, the dharmakaya of awareness wisdom is unceasing. When you gain stability in this unchanging state, there is no difference between a long and a short life-span.

Old man, practice the true meaning! Take the practice to heart! Don't mistake words and meaning! Don't depart from your friend, diligence! Embrace everything with mindfulness! Don't indulge in idle talk and pointless gossip! Don't become involved in common aims! Don't disturb yourself with worry of offspring! Don't excessively crave food and drink! Intend to die an ordinary man! Your life is running out, so be diligent! Practice this instruction for an old man on the verge of death!

Because of pointing the staff at Sherab Gyalpo's heart, this is called 'The Instruction of Pointing the Staff at the Old Man.' Sherab Gyalpo of Ngog was liberated and attained accomplishment.

This was written down by the Princess of Kharchen for the sake of future generations. It is known under the name 'The Instruction of Pointing the Staff.'

- From Advice from the Lotus-Born: A Collection of Padmasambhava's Advice to the Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal and Other Close Disciples, Translated by Erik Pema Kunsang; Rangjung Yeshe Publications: 1994, pp 101-3.

Realizing Absolute Truth - from The Nature of Mind, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Dzogchen is ultimately meditation on the absolute truth. At the present time you might have glimpses of the absolute truth, but only briefly, because your mind is still involved with thoughts. We have been investing in these thoughts for a long time. As a result, in the beginning stages of practice, recognizing absolute truth can be maintained only for a short time. Without even realizing it, we are thrown back into our world of thoughts. In other words, in the beginning stages of practice, dualistic mind is more familiar and comfortable, so it is inevitable that we will continually return to it.

Because of the strength of our habitual patterns, we should meditate on the absolute truth with great joy, devotion, and bodhicitta, and with courage and commitment. Whenever we practice with these skillful means, we will experience glimpses of the absolute nature. As we continue in our practice, these glimpses will become longer in duration, and they will become more stable, strong, and natural. In time we will be able to maintain the view of the absolute truth without being disturbed by any relative turbulence, and we will no longer revert to dualistic mind.

Even if your experience of the profound nature of the absolute truth is fleeting now, if you cultivate great joyful effort and keep practicing, it will expand and deepen. The fabrications of dualistic mind will completely dissolve and absolute truth will be all that remains. (123)

From Ground, Path, and Fruition, compiled by Surya Das with Nyoshul Khenpo

Buddha-nature, the essence of awakened enlightenment itself, is present in everyone. Its essence is forever pure, unalloyed, and flawless. It is beyond increase or decrease. It is neither improved by remaining in nirvana nor degenerated by straying into samsara. Its fundamental essence is forever perfect, unobscured, quiescent, and unchanging. Its expressions are myriad.

Those who recognize their true nature are enlightened; those who ignore or overlook it are deluded. There is no way to enlightenment other than by recognizing buddha-nature and achieving stability in that, which implies authentically identifying it within one's own stream of being, and training in that incisive recognition through simply sustaining its continuity, without alteration or fabrication.

All spiritual practices and paths converge, and are included, in this vital point. This recognition is the sole borderline between Buddhas and ordinary beings. This is also the great crossroads at which we find ourselves every moment of our lives. The illusory history of samsara and nirvana begins here and now; the moment of Dzogchen, the innate Great Perfection, is actually beyond past, present, and future alike a seemingly eternal instant of timeless time. This is what we call "the fourth time": timeless time, beyond the three times, the ineffable instant of pure ecstatic presence or total awareness, rigpa.

Rigpa, primordial being, innate awareness, is primordially awakened: free, untrammled, perfect, and unchanging. Yet we need to recognize it within our very own being if it is to be truly realized. Rigpa is our share or portion of the dharmakaya. Those who overlook it have forgotten their true original nature. Subject to suffering, karma, and confusion, we must recognize rigpa in order to actualize our own total potential, the sublime joy, peace, and freedom of enlightenment itself.

Hitting the Essence in Three Words

“The Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King”

The Root Text

Herein is contained The Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King, together with its commentary.

Homage to the master!

The view is Longchen Rabjam: infinite, vast expanse.
 Meditation is Khyentse Özer: rays of wisdom and love.
 Action is Gyalwé Nyugu, that of the bodhisattvas.
 One who practices in such a way,
 May well attain enlightenment in this very life.
 And even if not, what happiness! What joy! A la la!

1. Introducing directly the face of rigpa in itself

As for the view, Longchen Rabjam,
 Three statements strike the vital point.
 First, relax and release your mind,
 Neither scattered, nor concentrated, without thoughts.
 While resting in this even state, at ease,
 Suddenly let out a mind-shattering ‘phat!’,
 Fierce, forceful and abrupt. Amazing!
 There is nothing there: transfixed in wonder,
 Struck by wonder, and yet all is transparent and clear.
 Fresh, pure and sudden, so beyond description:
 Recognize this as the pure awareness of dharmakāya.
 The first vital point is: introducing directly the face of rigpa in itself.

2. Decide upon one thing, and one thing only

Then, whether in a state of movement or stillness,
 Of anger or attachment, happiness or sorrow,
 All the time, in any situation,
 Recognize that dharmakāya you recognized before,
 And mother and child clear light, already acquainted, will reunite.

Rest in the aspect of awareness, beyond all description.
 Stillness, bliss and clarity: disrupt them, again and again,
 Suddenly striking with the syllable of skillful means and wisdom.
 With no difference between meditation and post-meditation,
 No division between sessions and breaks,
 Always remain in this indivisible state.
 But, until stability is attained,
 It is vital to meditate, away from all distractions and busyness,
 Practicing in proper meditation sessions.
 All the time, in any situation,
 Abide by the flow of what is only dharmakāya.
 Decide with absolute conviction that there is nothing other than this—
 The second vital point is: decide upon one thing, and one thing only.

3. Confidence directly in the liberation of rising thoughts

At that point, whether attachment or aversion, happiness or sorrow—
 All momentary thoughts, each and every one,
 Upon recognition, leave not a trace behind.
 For recognize the dharmakāya in which they are freed,
 And just as writing vanishes on water,
 Arising and liberation become natural and continuous.
 And whatever arises is food for the bare rigpa emptiness,
 Whatever stirs in the mind is the inner power of the dharmakāya king,
 Leaving no trace, and innately pure. What joy!
 The way things arise may be the same as before,
 But the difference lies in the way they are liberated: that's the key.
 Without this, meditation is but the path of delusion,
 When you have it, there's non-meditation, the state of dharmakāya—
 The third vital point is: confidence directly in the liberation of rising thoughts.

4. Colophon

For the View which has the three vital points,
 Meditation, the union of wisdom and love,
 Is accompanied by the Action common to all the bodhisattvas.
 Were all the buddhas of past, present and future to confer,
 No instruction would they find greater than this,
 Brought out as a treasure from the depth of transcendental insight,
 By the tertön of dharmakāya, the inner power of rigpa,

Nothing like ordinary treasures of earth and stone,
For it is the final testament of Garab Dorje,
The essence of the wisdom mind of the three transmissions.
It is entrusted to my heart disciples, sealed to be secret.
It is profound in meaning, my heart's words.
It is the words of my heart, the crucial key point.
This crucial point: never hold it cheap.
Never let this instruction slip away from you.

This is the special teaching of the wise and glorious king.

| Rigpa Translations, 2008.

A Mirror to Reflect the Most Essential: The Final Instruction on the Ultimate Meaning, by Longchen Rabjam

Single embodiment of compassionate power and activities
Of infinite mandalas of all-encompassing conquerors,
Glorious guru, supreme lord of a hundred families,
Forever I pay homage at your feet.

Ema! Listen here, you fortunate yogis.

At present we have achieved the perfect human body of freedoms and riches. We have met the precious teachings of the greater vehicle. We now have the independence to genuinely apply the sacred dharma, so do not squander your life on pointless things. Instead, pursue the lasting goal.

The categories of teachings are endless. The entrance doors to the vehicles are innumerable. The words to be explained are extensive. Even if you succeed in memorizing millions of volumes of dharma scriptures, unless you are able to practice the essential meaning, you can never be sure that they will help you at the moment of death. And even if your education in studies and reflections is boundless, unless you succeed in being in harmony with the dharma, you will not tame your enemy, negative emotions. Even if you succeed in being the owner of a trillion worlds, unless you can curtail your plans from within with the feeling that nothing more is needed, you will never know contentment. Unless you prepare yourself with the attitude that your death could happen at any time, you cannot achieve the great aim that is surely needed at the time of death.

You must tame your own shortcomings and cultivate impartial pure perception, for a biased attitude will not let you shoulder the Mahayana teachings. Since all the sentient beings among the six classes in the three realms have without exception been your own parents, unless you make pure aspirations with ceaseless compassion and bodhichitta, you cannot open the jewel mine of altruistic actions. Unless you generate a devotion toward your kind guru exceeding even that of meeting the Buddha in person, you will not feel the warmth of blessings. Unless you genuinely receive the blessings, the seedlings of experience and realization will not sprout. Unless realization dawns from within, dry explanations and theories will not help you achieve the fruit of enlightenment.

In short, unless you mingle your mind with the dharma, it is pointless to merely sport a spiritual veneer. Keep to the bare necessities for sustaining your life and warding off the bitter cold; reflect on the fact that nothing else is really needed. Practice guru yoga and supplicate one-pointedly. Direct every spiritual practice you do to the welfare of all sentient beings, your own parents. Whatever good or evil, joy or sorrow befalls you, train in seeing it as your guru's kindness.

Within the vastness of spontaneous self-knowing, let be freely, uncontrived and free of fabrication. Whatever thoughts arise, be sure to recognize your nature so that they all dissolve as the play of dharmata. Even though you practice in such a way that there is not even as much as a hair tip of a concrete reference point to cultivate by meditating, do not stray into ordinary deluded diffusion, even for a single moment. Instead, make sure that every aspect of your daily activities is embraced by an undistracted presence of mind. Whatever occurs and whatever you experience, strengthen your conviction that they are all insubstantial and magical illusions, so that you can experience this in the bardo as well.

In short, at all times and in every situation, make sure that whatever you do turns into the sacred dharma and dedicate every virtuous action toward enlightenment. By doing so, you will fulfill your guru's wishes and be of service to the buddhadharma; you will repay your parents' kindness and spontaneously accomplish the benefit of yourself and others. Please keep this in your heart.

Even if you were to have met me in person, I would have had no superior advice to give you, so bring it into your practice in every moment and in every situation.

When my time has come, from Longchenpa

When my time has come and impermanence and death have caught up with me,
When the breath ceases, and the body and mind go their separate ways,
May I not experience delusion, attachment, and clinging,
But remain in the natural state of ultimate reality.