

From The Supreme Siddhi of Mahamudra Retreat, by Ani Tenzin Palmo,  
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Commentary on the meditation section of Advice for Mountain Retreat, by  
the Eighth Kamtrul Rinpoche

Saturday, June 9th, 2018, evening session

*Never let your mind wander or be without concern for your practice. Always rest naturally in the conviction that the essence of the self-arising mind has been empty from the very beginning. Do not grasp at the natural expressions of the mind, the experiences of bliss and clarity, or the union of these two, but relax at ease. Avoid acceptance and rejection, such as manipulating your meditation by thinking: "This is meditation; I am doing this; this is what I need."*

*Do not be absorbed by a continuous state of delusion in which you are not recognizing the undercurrent of subtle wandering thoughts. Whatever thoughts of subject or object arise, simply recognize them. Without grasping, relax in that state of awareness. Other than this, forget about the fabricated process of struggling with remedies to eliminate the undesirable, which is suppressing something and pursuing something else...*

*{Once you have recognized the stark, clear awareness that transcends dualistic mind and is absolutely uninfluenced by thoughts of the three times, keep it always present through mindfulness, with or without effort. Thus, go about your daily activities without desire or clinging. The essential teaching, expounded from many points of view in all the sutras, tantras, and profound ways, is none other than the means of seeing the naked, empty awareness, the real face of the ultimate nature. Therefore, exert yourself unremittingly in this.}*

Ani Tenzin Palmo:

So this is just the essential instruction on how to meditate, from a Mahamudra point of view. The important thing is that the mind should be

very relaxed, and spacious, and we shouldn't try to manufacture, or fabricate anything. There shouldn't be the idea that if our mind is calm this is good, when it's thinking, that's bad, or, when our mind's very clear, that's good, when it's confused, that's bad, but just *allowing* whatever comes to come, and knowing it. Alright? So we'll go through this instruction a little bit, bit by bit.

*Never let your mind wander*

So the main point of practice is to be *at rest*, not tense, but non-distracted. In other words, whatever is happening in the mind, to know it at that moment, but without rejection or acceptance, just knowing, and so the mind stays very open and spacious, whatever occurs just occurs, and departs again, without our trying to create a situation which we think is meditation. Right? You understand? Just being.

So, *don't let your mind wander*, because the big problem is that we're trying to meditate on whatever, and our mind's gone off somewhere else, that's the main problem. Just try to keep the mind merged with what we're doing, without forcing it. If our mind wanders, just knowing it's wandering, and bring it back, I mean, everybody knows this from meditation, just keep bringing it back.

*and without any concerns for the practice*

So again, not wanting to *attain* anything, I think for Westerners especially, this is really an essential point, because so much of our life is spent trying to get somewhere. Right? We've always got a goal. When you're studying, you know, you've got to pass your exams and graduate, and then in your job, you've got to do well. You know, you're always got agendas that we have to fulfill, always, always, always goal oriented, scrambling, scrambling, scrambling - if we use that kind of mindset in our meditation, we're completely off track. It's not about attaining anything, it's not about *gaining* anything, it's about... letting go, and just being.

And so, not to make our meditation into another form of acquisition, or of structuring it the way *we* think it should be - "*Now I'm meditating*" - that's what he says here - you know - "*Now I'm meditating*" - *This is the right way*" - it's not that. That just plugs into our usual, habitual, conceptual thinking mind. We've got to gain something, we've got to get something, this is right, that's not right. So, leaving go of all that, just being, just sitting.

So, *Always rest naturally...* just rest. It's *resting* the mind, not *doing* something.

*in the conviction that the essence of the self arising mind...*

The mind just arises of itself. We don't have to manufacture thoughts and feelings - just naturally, they come and they go. But *all* our thoughts, *all* our feelings *are empty*. It's like a bubble, you know, we see a bubble and it's so bright and shining and substantial looking... you know, children, they blow all these bubbles - and they're so pretty and so fascinated, but, click - empty. Where did the bubble go?

So this is our mind. This is how our emotions are. Good thoughts, bad thoughts, high thoughts, low thoughts, they're just *thoughts*. They're just empty.

It's very important not to grasp at our thinking, and not to believe our thoughts. Just because we're thinking it doesn't mean that it's true. (laughter) It's all empty.

The point of meditation is that we can see that. It gives us the space in which we can just observe. Thoughts just arise - we don't try to make them come. They just naturally arise. We look into their nature, and we see that they're just empty bubbles, and they disappear. Alright? You don't have to *do* anything.

Ok so, *always rest naturally...* just rest, don't even try '*Now I've got to rest*' (laughter) And watch... all these thoughts coming, flowing by, nothing to do, just know. Don't get swept along.

All we have to do is not get swept along in the current. Right? Sit on the banks of the river, watch the river go by, and not jump in the river and get swept along. That's all.

*So, Always rest naturally, in the conviction that the essence of our self-arising mind*

that's all the thoughts and feelings which keep coming up -

*have been empty from the very beginning*

They don't have substance - just because we think something does not... you know, we *solidify* so much of what we think - our memories, our ideas, our opinions, our aspirations, all becomes very heavy, and real, and solid, but if we look, we see it's nothing. They're just flowing by, flowing, flowing, flowing...empty in their nature.

*Do not grasp at the natural expressions of the mind, the experiences of bliss and clarity, or the union of these two, but relax...*

You know, once the mind starts to really clear itself up, then all sorts of experiences can arise. In the Tibetan Tradition there are these two expressions: one is *nyam*, one is *togpa*. So we have *nyam-tog* - they talk about that all the time. Nyam is everything which is not togpa.

Togpa is realization of the nature of the mind. Right? It's the empty, luminous, clarity, the cognizant nature of the mind itself, our Buddha nature. That's togpa. Everything else which arises in meditation - all our

experiences, blissful, and terrifying, are nyam, which is usually translated as *experiences*.

So, certain experiences are very common. We have pleasant experiences, especially clarity, the mind becomes very clear, or it can become very blissful, non-conceptual, no thinking - just open, spacious clarity, and we think - *aaahh*... It fades, so it's just nyam.

So there are good nyam. I mean, nyam is not a bad thing, nyam is nice, and encouraging... We also get nyam of fear. Some people get a lot of fear come up, or very traumatic memories. Or some people shake, or they get upshoots of energy, all sorts of experiences when you meditate, and that's not good nor bad. It's just nyam. It's impermanent.

I love the story that Jack Kornfeld tells, of when he was in Thailand. He was studying as a monk with Ajahn Chah, and Ajahn Chah's thing was, you know, practicing sweeping, and just everyday life, nothing special. He was very like a Dzogchen master. But then Jack went off to Burma, and was doing these very intensive vipassana courses, and then he got all these incredible experiences, of bliss, and clarity, and, you know, of vast spaciousness, all sorts of really exciting things finally started happening. And then, when he returned after a year to Ajahn Chah, he told Ajahn Chah about all these extraordinary experiences he had had. And Ajahn Chah said, 'Wow! That's fantastic!... More things to let go of...' (laughter)

So that's the point. I mean, all those experiences can be, if they're not the fearful ones, the good ones, they can be very encouraging, as long as we don't grasp, as long as it doesn't become another form of clinging. You know, it's very easy for that to happen, so that when we meditate, we *expect* to feel blissful or clear, and if we don't, then what's wrong? - but then, that is just another form of grasping.

And so whatever happens, whether it is something beautiful, or something terrifying, it's just nyam. Yes? We see it, and we let it go. We don't grasp.

And so, he says,

*Do not grasp at the natural expressions of the mind, such as experiences of bliss and clarity, or the union of the two, but just relax...*

- whatever comes up - it's like watching a movie, really. You know, you can see lovely, romantic, beautiful movies, or you can see you know, those horror movies, and action movies, you know and... it's all just a movie. You know, whatever is happening on the screen, however much at the time we might be viewing it, and absorbed in it, we *know* it's just a movie. So, like this, with the play of the mind, the whole *display* of the mind, we know it's just the mind's movie. It's not me, it's not mine - it's just the play of the mind.

Because if we grasp at nyam, we probably will get more, and then we get really sidetracked, into always wanting... You know, some people always want a high when they meditate. They're always looking for that high, that zap, of bliss, or whatever, and you'll get it if you want it, but *that's not* what it's all about. And then we get totally sidetracked into something else, which is just another ego - enhancement, and it will take us away from recognizing...

The thing is, the nature of the mind itself is very boring. I think he talks about the nature of the mind in a minute, but, I mean, it's not fascinating, like all the rainbows and thunder-claps (psshh - thunder sound) - it's just sky.

So, that's why a lot of people like all these other, much more exciting experiences, rather than dealing with looking at the nature of the mind, which, in itself, is, you know, not that thrilling. It's a little bit like looking at a blank screen.

*Avoid acceptance and rejection, such as manipulating your meditation by thinking: "This is meditation; I am doing this; this is what I need."*

It's important not to try to fabricate our meditation, and have the idea, asking ourselves, 'Am I doing it right?', 'Is this right?', 'Is this not right? Just relax. Relax and just watch. It's not a matter of manipulating the mind into a certain way of being, it's just a matter of relaxing into being.

... Where are we?...

*Do not be absorbed by a continuous state of delusion in which you are not recognizing the undercurrent of subtle wandering thoughts.*

So, what we're trying to do, really, here, is simply to know the thoughts as they run through, not favoring some, and rejecting others, but just observing how the mind just flows, and that each of these thoughts, however powerful some of them might be, in their nature are just empty bubbles.

We shouldn't favor one thought over another, while we're sitting in formal meditation. During the day then, we can be careful to cultivate the positive thoughts and, you know, transform negative thoughts, but when we're just sitting in formal meditation, or just sitting, then we shouldn't favor one kind of thought over another. We should just recognize they're all just thoughts, *empty phenomena rolling on*, as Buddhaghosa says...

They're not... you know, a thought isn't a thing, it's just an impulse of energy in the brain, so we don't need to grasp at some and reject others, we just have to be aware, spaciously, not tightly...

So,

*Do not be absorbed by a continuous state of delusion in which you are not recognizing...*

... you know, we can sit there, you know, another thing that tends to happen sometimes for some people, is we sit there and we kind of literally space out, and that is also a big danger. The important thing is not to space out, you're spacing *in*. We're getting the mind so that it's extremely awake.

It's like, the example the Tibetans give is of a big bird, like an eagle, or falcon, when they fly, they've got such a big wingspan, that they're just kept up by the currents, they don't have to make any effort. Little birds are flapping their wings, keeping up, a lot of effort, but the big birds, once they're up, they're just there, floating on the air current, but they're not asleep. Those birds are *totally* focussed...

It's said that an eagle can see a little rodent ten miles away. They have incredible eyesight, and are completely focussed on their next dinner, running down there. So, likewise, we are without effort, floating, we are up there, sustained, mind open, spacious, totally relaxed, but yet totally aware of what happening on the ground, without effort.

So it's like that, on the one hand, extremely awake, and focussed, but on the other hand, completely effortless.

So we're not trying to fabricate anything. We're not trying to fabricate, even, concentration. We're just relaxing the mid. We're not *forcing* the mind into a mode, we're just *opening* the mind to be just completely aware...

So,

*Whatever thoughts of subject or object arise, simply recognize them.*

- that's all we have to do, as thoughts come up, we're not trying to stop thinking. Thoughts are not the problem. The problem is our lack of awareness. As long as we recognize the thoughts as they come up and disappear, we're doing it correctly.



*Whatever thoughts of subject or object arise, simply recognize them. Without grasping, relax in that state of awareness. Other than this, forget about the fabricated process of struggling with remedies to eliminate the undesirable, which is suppressing something and pursuing something else.*

So, some practices, are, you know, dealing with trying to get the mind concentrated on positive thinking, or doing loving kindness meditations, and so forth, these are good in their own way, but this is not what this is about. This is being *un-fabricated*. We're not trying to *make* or change anything. The *only* thing we are doing is sitting there, and thinking, and being aware of thinking that's all - but in a very open, spacious way, just like clouds come up, rainbows, thunderclouds - *anything* can appear in the sky - but the sky remains unchanged.

It's very akin, in a way, to Zen meditation, also, this ability to be aware of being aware. It's a very open, relaxed state of mind. We're not trying to *do* anything. We're trying to recognize what's already going on in the mind, that's all.

So, of course, especially Dzogchen meditation but to a certain extent also Mahamudra meditation normally depends on the prior recognition of the nature of the mind, and this again is one of the reasons why especially in those traditions the lama is important for pointing out the nature of the mind, but even without that, because the nature of the mind *is* our nature, we can discover it for ourselves. We don't have to wait for someone to point it out. It's quicker, obviously, if someone points out, 'Look you're going in that direction over there', but, if not, then you can consult your gps and keep going.

So,

*Once you have recognized the stark, clear awareness that transcends the dualistic mind and is absolutely uninfluenced by thoughts of the three times, (past present*

and future) *keep it always present through mindfulness, with or without effort. Thus, go about your daily activities without desire or clinging. The essential teaching, expounded from many points of view in all the sutras, tantras, and profound ways, is none other than the means of seeing the naked, empty awareness, the real face of the ultimate nature. Therefore, exert yourself unremittingly in this.*

So, ok. What all these meditations, Mahamudra and Dzogchen in particular are designed for, is to help us to recognize the nature of the mind.

The nature of the mind goes by many, many different names. It's called nirvana, dharmakaya, non-self, self, Buddha nature, dharmata, any name. It's just names which we're putting onto space, but in all Buddhist schools, what everyone is aiming for, initially, is that breakthrough. In the Theravada system, it's called entering the stream, and in Zen it's called kensho. In Mahamudra and Dzogchen it's called seeing the nature of the mind.

So this is what we are trying to get first, is a direct recognition of the nature of the mind. My lama, Khamtrul Rinpoche, the author of this, said that 'Once we realize the nature of the mind, then we can *start* to meditate', because the whole point is that once we've recognized what we're looking for, then we can start to open up that glimpse, (snaps fingers) and make it longer and longer.

The main problem is that once you want to do it, you won't get it. Right? So a lot of people when they first sit down to meditate, they have no idea what they're doing, they're just very relaxed, 'Ok, they said do this, so I'll just do it', blah, and then *bwhooooaaah!* you know? and they get really very powerful experiences because there are no expectations, but then after that the ego takes over, and wants to reproduce that, and of course that immediately blocks the gate, the door is no longer open. It's closed again.

So the subtlety of reproducing that experience more and more until it becomes very stable, and at the same time not expecting or wanting it, because that's going to stop it from appearing, is where it gets very tricky.

Do you understand what I'm talking about? Right? I mean, you know, because the ego gets involved - 'Oh, now I've got it, ah finally! ha!' and then, what's got it? You know? Door's closed again.

So this initial breakthrough is very important because then we understand what it is, and that we *do* have this, and *yes*, it's so obvious, and yet then after that, the important thing then is always this sense of relaxing, not expecting anything, just observing. This is why it's stressed as being so important *not to fabricate anything, not to hope for anything*, just to become more and more aware.

...

So, normally in Mahamudra, the first step is shamatha meditation. As in most Buddhist schools, the first thing is to tame the mind, and get it quiet, and at the same time one pointed - our attention skills - to hone our ability to stay single pointed on one object.

When I first started, my meditation teacher was this old yogi, we called him Togden Rinpoche, but his name was Chu-lek. The first thing he did... was to say to me:

(knocks on table)

'This table, is it empty or not empty?'

so I said, Aah, it's empty.

'Do you see it as empty?'

No...

'The mind, is it empty or not empty?'

Oh, it's empty.

'Do you see it as empty?'

No...

So what is easier, to see the table as empty, or your mind as empty?

and I said, oh well to see the mind as empty

and he said, 'Ok, then you belong to us.'  
and I said, 'and if I said the table?',  
he said 'Then I would have sent you to Sera Monastery down the road.'  
(laughter)

Because, scholars debate the emptiness of tables, yogis look at the emptiness of the mind, essentially.

So, then he gave me a pebble, a little stone, and said, put it there and just concentrate your mind on that. So this step number one is concentration. They use a pebble because it's not very exciting. You can't think too much about pebbles, and at the same time it trains the mind because in the Tibetan Tradition the eyes are kept a little open when they meditate, and sometimes wide open, and so it trains the attention so that the eyes don't flicker around. They just stay on the pebble. So, that was the first thing I did, was meditation on the pebble.

Then, the second stage would be meditation on the breath. This is again a very widespread Buddhist practice, not just Buddhist, Hindus also meditate on the breath. \*The breath is very useful, as I'm sure most of you have all done some meditations on the breath at some point. It's very useful because of course the mind and the breath are very connected. Our state of mind is reflected in how we breathe, and also, of course, we cannot breathe in the past or the future, we can only breathe now. And so, if our mind is really resting on the breath as it comes in and out, we're in the present.

So, also the breath is, you know, it's not that subtle, and we're always breathing, so the breath is always with us. We don't have to carry little pebbles around. We can just breathe, and know we're breathing.

So once the mind has learned how to settle into watching the ingoing and outgoing of the breath without comment, and just staying focussed on the breath without getting caught up again in our mindstream, we are doing two things, one is that we are helping to calm the mind down, that rushing

torrent of the mind begins to calm, as our concentration deepens, and at the same time we are developing this quality which is called mindfulness which is an extremely important quality of the mind - that we are *aware*.

So, I mean, all the time we are breathing. Normally we are not conscious of that we are breathing, now we are giving our attention to the breath.

So, as more concentration deepens, naturally, our background noise, the television on in the back of the mind, begins to quieten down, and at the same time our ability to stay focussed and attentive is strengthened. Right?

So this is why in all Buddhist schools mindfulness of the breath is usually taught, at least first, because it's a very easy and skillful way of learning to train the mind to be more attentive and single pointed.

Then when our mindfulness becomes such that we can settle on the breath, at least for a certain extended period of time, in other words, once we learn how to be aware of what's happening, and not just caught up in all the stream of thoughts going on in the background, now we're separated from that stream of thoughts, that's still going chatter chatter chatter in the background, but like, if one is in a room, and we have the television on, but we are reading a book or working on the computer, our attention is on what we're doing, not on the background chatter. We haven't stopped the background chatter, but we're not caught up in that. Our attention is elsewhere.

So that's what happens, is that our attention now is on the breath, and the background chatter is still chattering, but we're ignoring it. And so, as we begin to ignore it and our attention is focussed somewhere else, then naturally that background chatter will begin to slow down.\*

So, then, when that is fairly clear, and we are able to ignore the background chatter and be caught in the attention to the breath, then we turn that attention, that mindfulness, onto the mind itself.

This is still shamata. We are now focussing our attention on the mind, the thoughts, all that stream of thoughts. We're not stopping them, but we're also not fascinated by them. Right? As I said, normally, the stream of thoughts, the river going by, we're *in* that river, being swept along, submerged completely in all our thoughts and feelings. Now, we are sitting on the bank, watching the river go by. We're not trying to dam up the river, we're just knowing the river as it goes by, not judging the thoughts, fascinated by interesting thoughts, rejecting unwelcome thoughts - thoughts are just thoughts, they're empty bubbles, we're just letting them flow by, and just, just observing. Right?

So if we do that, it's like watching a movie, that's the other idea of it - is that, you know, you're watching a movie, but, you know, we're not *in* the movie, we're just watching the movie. We know what the movie is, but we're not fascinated by the movie. We know 'this is a movie'.

So here, the thoughts are just going by, and they're just thoughts. (This is) a very good way of recognizing that we are not our thoughts, because if we were our thoughts, we could not observe them. Right?

And so these thoughts are not me, they're not mine, they're just thoughts, not good, not bad - they're just impulses in the brain, I mean, they're not who we really are, so we don't have to identify with our ideas, and our opinions, and our memories, and so forth. That's not who we really are. We're observing.

This is still all shamatha.

Now, mindfulness, this awareness, this ability to observe without being caught up, normally has an object. We are mindful of the breath. In the Goenka system, we are mindful of sensations. We can be mindful of body postures. We can be mindful of the mind, but always there is this subject-object duality - the observing subject, and the object of the observation. So then, the next step is to drop the object. Right?

So, here we are sitting, and we are watching the thoughts going by, or we're watching the breath, or whatever we're watching, observing, then to drop the object and just *be aware of being aware*. Right? This is object-less shamatha... still shamatha, but now, we are just conscious of being conscious... aware of being aware, just that... not aware of anything in particular, just aware.

So, this ability to recognize our awareness is like *a bridge*, back to the nature of the mind, because, if you can think of it, it's like our gross surface of our consciousness is all our mental chatter. Then our ability to be aware, to be *mindful* of that is a more subtle level of consciousness, but it's still dualistic. There's still an observer and and observed. Right? So, what we're trying to do is to now *shift, to make a whole shift in our consciousness*, 'a turning about in the seat of consciousness', as the Lankavatara Sutra puts it, to our fundamental awareness which is non dualistic. There's no subject and object. This is why ... it's not something which you can grasp at. It's compared to space. It's compared to space because space we cannot see, we cannot taste, touch, or grasp at it, and yet everything exists because there is space. Right?

I mean, if you said, what is in this room, if you had to write down what was in the room, you would mention there's a shrine, there were cushions and chairs, there was a table there was a microphone, there were people, but *really* what there is is space.

But space, we cannot see it, we cannot grasp it, and yet it's everywhere. Where is space not? I mean, even this table (knocks on table) is space. This is one of the reasons why His Holiness the Dalai Lama and others are so fascinated by quantum physics, because it has validated what the yogis have been saying for thousands of years. Now they've suddenly discovered, 'Hey guess what, this is space'.

And you know, we are space. There are always the two truths, the ultimate truth and the relative truth. Relative truth is also true. I mean this may be a

table, and it may be empty but if I hit you with it, you would bruise. Right? So it is, on a relative level, a solid object.

This this neurophysicist, this neuroscientist that we were talking to, the other thing he said which I thought was fascinating, was that we make up *everything* that we experience, that *nothing* which we experience out there is *anything* like what it really is. Yes, there is something there but it's *nothing* like our senses and our brain interpret it for us as human beings, which is exactly what Buddhism has been saying for millennia.

It's *not* saying there's *nothing* there. It's *like* an illusion, it's *not* an illusion, but it's *like* an illusion because how we see things depends on the kinds of sense organs and brain machinery which we as human beings share with our common karma - but things are not the way they seem to be. Anyway, this is not the point.

Here we are. We are looking at the mind, all the thoughts going through, then we drop our interest in the thoughts going through, and just are *conscious of consciousness*.

Again, this eagle in the sky, floating, effortlessly... Usually that experience of our awareness lasts for a short duration in the beginning, because then the ego again catches it, and says, 'Hey, look, I got it' and then it's gone, but nonetheless there is this experience, suddenly, of this open, spacious awareness which then can lead back to a deep experience of our fundamental nature.

The fundamental nature is compared to space, because like space, it's empty. You know, all these other experience which come up, bliss, and clarity, and visions, and all sorts of wonderful, exciting things, all very lovely and encouraging but, they're just *nyam*. The actual *togpa*, the actual *experience* is very naked, which is why it's called naked awareness. Like space, you can't see it, you can't grasp it, and yet it's all pervading.



So, this is why the mind - all our thoughts and feelings are like the clouds in the sky, but behind the clouds is the vast sky. It's very useful, in planes, when you go up through all that heavy cloud layer, and then suddenly (phwoosh...) there's the clear blue sky. It's always there. The clouds *come from* the sky, they *go back* into the sky, but the sky, whether black clouds, white clouds, rainbows, whatever, it's not effected, and yet those clouds only exist exist because there is the sky. But the sky in itself is just... it's not very exciting.

So, the nature of the mind is like the sky. But, although the sky, and space, have a similarity of being empty, ungraspable, nonetheless, space is just space, whereas *the nature of the mind* is the nature of awareness.

So, in Tibetan it's very simple, The nature of the mind is called *tong-sel*. *Tong* is empty, and *sel*, *selwa*, is one of those words which there isn't really a translation of - it means luminous, clear, and cognizant, all at the same time. It's that luminous clarity of the mind which is the *knowing* aspect of the mind. *Rigpa*, which is the Dzogchen term for the nature of the mind, it just means to know. In Sanskrit it's *vidya*, and it really just means 'know'. So it's that *knowing* quality which underlies everything. If we didn't have that we would be, you know, like zombies, we would be corpses.

What makes us who we are, not just humans, but all beings, all sentient beings, is the fact that we have consciousness, that we're aware. But normally, it's so caught up with all the other stuff, like in the space, it's so caught up with the people and the chairs and the tables, we don't recognize the space.

And yet none of us could exist, we *are* space, and we couldn't exist if there were not space. Likewise all our thoughts, all our feelings can only exist because we are aware - but how to get back to that naked, non-dual awareness which is *the nature, the very nature* of the mind, and has no ego.

The point is that it's egoless. So you don't have to look so serious, this is good news. (laughter) This is good news because it's who we are. We don't have to manufacture it, we just have to recognize it.

And so, all these meditations are to lead us back to this deeper, fundamental level of our awareness, which is our true nature, but which normally we are so busy that we don't notice.

In Mahamudra, the nature of the mind is called *tammaji shepa*, which means ordinary mind. So, they don't call it rigpa, they call it ordinary mind, but of course it doesn't mean our ordinary ordinary mind. But it means it's ordinary in the sense that it's *not embellished*, not *anything exciting*. It's just our natural, ordinary mind, if we recognize it.

So, the problem is that a lot of people are expecting lots of fireworks, and exciting displays, but in fact it's just the nature of mind, and then everything is *the effulgence, the projection*, of that nature, of our awareness which we project out, and then treat as something self-existent from its own side, not recognizing that we're contributing the whole time to what we are experiencing. We think that even if now I cease to exist, everything else would still be there the same way it is, but *it isn't like that*.

Many many years ago I read a report from a neuroscientist who said that 30% of what we perceive, we make up in the brain. Now they are saying 80% of what we perceive we make up in the brain, some people say even 90%. They're saying now absolutely we're just fabricating our own, reality.

What we actually receive through the sense doors is very gross, and then the brain manufactures its own movie. So this again is why His Holiness and others are so fascinated by neuroscience, because they are saying exactly what these yogis have been saying again for millennia. It's not something we're just making up, but now they are beginning to recognize in science that actually this seeming reality in which we are so engrossed is all made up.

So, what they are trying to do, the yogis, is to go back to the source of *how* it all got fabricated by our minds...What is the underlying reality behind it all? That underlying reality is this clear, pure awareness, this luminous clarity which projects our external reality like a movie. You know, the projector just sends out, and makes the movie, and then we see the movie and we believe it.

So if we can get back into contact with that essential nature, then everything resolves. While we are caught in duality then we have problems, but once we really experience how we are projecting, then we can relax. This is why great beings move through the world without being trapped in the way that we are trapped. The expression often given of that of ... *aaahhh*, relief, like we've been carrying this big backpack of rocks on our back for so long, and then suddenly we let it go... *aaahhhh*... So it's a sense of ease, and open, joyous awareness... there is a joy there, of course, the joy of release... *aaahhhh*...

The point is only that that is our true nature. Our true nature is wholly good for us, and good for everybody else too.

So, it's not about *doing* something. Meditation isn't about doing something. It's about *just relaxing* on deeper and deeper levels until the whole thing just opens up. We can't *try* to see the nature of the mind, because that very *effort* is the ego wanting to own something which is beyond the ego. This is why, as I say, it's tricky, because the more we want it the less we will get it. On the other hand you've got to want it otherwise you're not going to make any effort.

So, it's a balancing act, and a lot of the meditation instructions for that is that learning how to cultivate the awareness but without any expectations, going beyond any hopes and fears, just doing it for the sake of doing it, and then whatever happens happens. Because otherwise this hope and fear - hope that we'll get something, and fear that we won't, that we'll fail - is just the ego.

So, how to practice without... yeah, I'm back at that eagle up there, just flying... that sense of *ease*, without any, you know, expectations... just honing our ability to become present, to be completely open and aware...

In the Mahamudra - since this is called Mahamudra, but it's not really on Mahamudra - this first part, the shamatha side, is called *sey-chik*, which means, one-pointedness, because we're emphasizing shamatha, and that has to do with honing our attention skills, so it's called one pointed.

And then the next part is call *tudrel* (spelling?) - which really means away from elaborations or complications, so sometimes it's translated as simplicity, and that is vipassana.

So in the mahamudra form of vipassana, they practice vipassana on the mind, enquiring of the mind... in the beginning, the difference between the moving mind, our ordinary moving mind, and when the mind becomes very still, and the awareness *that knows* that it's still, that it's moving, and the question, *Are these three the same? Or are they different? What's going on there?*

And then from there, it moves to looking at the mind - What is a thought? Where do thoughts come from? Where do they go to? What *is* a thought?

And then, all the sensations which come through the various sense doors - our sight, and hearing, and tasting, also examining that - Where is it coming from? Is there a connection between what is being seen, and the the organ of seeing, and the consciousness which picks up the stimuli which they receive from the organ of senses?

So again, examination of that - what's *really* going on in the mind?, examining the mind to pieces, in order to understand, *we are not* our thinking mind. We can *use* the thinking mind, the thinking mind is very *useful*, but that is not who we *are*.

And then gradually going backwards and backwards, the next one, once we really understand, through examining the mind, the deeper levels of consciousness, and the nature of the mind, then we go on to another level called *rochig* (spelling?), which means one taste, where you are not discriminating between good and bad, nice and nasty, and so forth, but just being there and knowing it all, with awareness. And then from that, once that becomes very strong, and we're no longer liking or disliking, just knowing, then the final is called *go-meh*, or *me gong*, which means *not meditating*. We don't need to meditate any more. We *are* the meditation.

This old yogi that I told you about, on his wall was written *mai-yang - me-gong*, which means *non-distracted, no meditation*. So, when we moved to Lahore, we put on our wall *mai-yang*, which means *non-distraction*. We left off the *me-gong*. We're already not meditating, so we didn't need to write that one up.

So, eventually the mind becomes so completely at one with the nature of the mind, our unborn, non dualistic, pure awareness, our naked awareness is who we *are* the whole time, twenty-four hours a day, even in sleep, then you don't need to talk about meditation. There is no meditation anymore. The mind is just in a state of pure, open awareness the whole time.

So...

*Once you have recognized the stark, clear awareness that transcends the dualistic mind and is absolutely uninfluenced by thoughts of the three times, (past, present and future) keep it always present through mindfulness, with or without effort.*

So in the beginning we have to make effort to be more mindful, because mindfulness doesn't come naturally for most people - unmindfulness comes naturally. It's very hard for us to really stay present with what's happening, not only with our actions, but with our thoughts.

The advice of Guru Rinpoche, Milarepa, or I'm sure Tsong Khapa, Atisha, definitely, and so forth, was, the essential teaching is to observe the mind at all times. So, our natural inclination is *not* to observe the mind at *any* time - we get just swept along, we're not just standing back and observing it, so to learn *how to observe the mind* needs training. This is why, you know, people learn *how* to be mindful, because we tend to be mindless, and it is a counter current, to develop this inner awareness. It takes effort. This is why people go on retreats.

I mean Buddhism always talks about practice - and so that's what we're doing, we're practicing, we're *practicing* again and again and again, like a musician. You know, you're playing your scales, and then you're playing again and again and again, thousands of times... They say to become a professional musician it requires at least *thirty thousand hours of practice*. They'd spend hour after hour just twiddling their fingers, to become proficient, so what to speak of becoming the master of our own mind? *Of course* it takes time, *of course* it takes application, but this is something which we carry, not just for this lifetime, but in all our future lifetimes, not just for the benefit of ourselves, but for the benefit of all beings, so it's the most important thing we can learn to do.

*And*, it doesn't prevent you from becoming a professional musician too, because many musicians, and artisans of *any* kind, you know, they really are so focussed, their mindfulness is very powerful, their concentration is very powerful, so if you take that *ability of the mind* and turn it back into a spiritual practice, you know, it's all very very helpful... how to stay present, how to stay aware...

So, therefore,

*keep it always present through mindfulness, with or without effort...*

Eventually it becomes natural, like with with anything, like in the beginning, if you're learning an instrument, you have to be very mindful,

and you play it and you hit all the wrong keys, but eventually, slowly, until eventually, through practice, over and over and over and over, the music plays through. And when a great musician, or a great dancer, or a great *sportsperson*, when they play, it's like *effortless*. You know, you listen to a great musician, the music is playing *through* them. Their ego is dropped, and it's just playing through them, but it didn't just happen like that. They had to spend hours and days and weeks and months and years, practicing over and over and over, *until*, it just became natural.

And so, truly, I am saying, that even if in ordinary, secular arts this is true, how much moreso for becoming the genuine master of our own mind? So we shouldn't think that, you know, this (snaps fingers) is just a quick fix. This is something we which have to work on over and over and over, during our daily life, as well as in times of formal practice, otherwise nothing's going to transform.

So, he says:

*Thus, go about your daily activities without desire or clinging.*

Just be very open, and aware, and spacious, then we don't cling, you know? We cling because we're inattentive. If we are really conscious and aware, there's no clinging. Things just arise, and they leave. Then our life becomes much more easy, much more effortless. We create our own problems. *The ego* creates its own problems, because for the ego, then it makes life interesting, you know, *a soap opera, ha!* You know soap operas have to be dramatic, otherwise they're boring. If everybody is nice and friendly and there's no problems, *blaaah* - turn it off and let's get to another program, err, blowing people up.

So, you know soap operas are full of drama, full of people shouting at each other, and getting all emotional, and so forth - that's what keeps us interested, so, it's hard for people to believe that actually it's much more

restful not to get so emotionally involved. We exhaust *ourselves*. We stress *ourselves* out.

They discovered, among other things, that of course, as you know, when people have very stressful jobs, it's not because they have especially more work to do, it's that the mind, being untrained, stresses *itself*, right? often by trying to do multitasking, which now they have discovered is not a good thing, but also because of all this extraneous thought and emotion which we're putting into things, which it *doesn't need*, and then we get exhausted, and stressed, and upset and fragile, but it doesn't make it more efficient actually it makes it less efficient.

And we're expending so much energy on all the stuff which we don't need to expend energy on, because we can't just be we can't just be focussed, and merged with what we're doing. So we have all this *bubububurrrr...* stuff going on, and we end up ... exhausted, and, not that we've accomplished any great amount, just that we've exhausted ourselves, stressed ourselves out...

This is why now, as you know very well, all these big organizations are teaching people to be mindful - it's not because they want them to get enlightened (laughter) they want them to be efficient, and so it's efficient... You know, it's like it oils the wheels of the mind, instead of always rasping. Things flow, when we're not grasping and clinging and *reacting* to everything that happens, to make it *dramatic*. It just is...

... Since I'm talking about Rinpoche because we're doing this book...

We lived up in this hill station called Dalhousie where many Tibetans were staying because they liked to be in the foothills of the Himalayas, and also it was nice and cool there - in the Winter, a lot of snow, but they liked it, you know. But the Indian government felt that they were lowering the tone of the town, which they wanted to be a nice, fancy hill resort, so they wanted to move all the Tibetans out. So they were sending them down...



I mean, actually, the Indian government was very kind to the Tibetans, for a start, they let them in, which nobody else did, including all the other Buddhist countries. And then, they really tried to find them employment. They gave them food, when they first came in, and also they tried to find them land so they could settle; and they allowed them to have their own government - with China just across the border, and the Indians actually they allowed them to have the Tibetan Government in Exile, with Prime Ministers and Ministers, and everything. They allowed them to build their own schools, and gave them funding, to have their own hospitals, to build their own monasteries anywhere they felt like it. I mean, India was extraordinarily kind to the Tibetans... But anyway, they didn't want them in their fancy hill stations (laughter)

So they were sending a lot of them down South because, you know India is very crowded, I mean you know, Indians themselves have so many problems, and they were really very kind to give attention to what to do with the Tibetans. So they sent tens of thousands of them down South, which is where the big Gelugpa Monasteries, like Drepung and Ganden and Sera, they're all down South, and also big lay communities, down South.

But another place they were sending them was a state called Madhya Pradesh. Madhya means in the middle. It's a central province, and it's very hot - very very hot. They have lions and tigers there, I mean, it's a very rural area, lots of jungle but very *primitive*, I mean, a very poor state, and extremely hot. And so, we were told that we were going to be relocated down there, so we were not very happy about that.

And then, one evening, I remember, Tulku Chogyal Rinpoche, who was my teacher, he came and he was *so excited* because we had gotten a letter which said that they had changed their mind, we didn't have to go to Madhya Pradesh, and we could remain in Himachal Pradesh, which was where we were, which was in this state up in the Himalayas. And so, Chogyal and I, we were so excited, and threw our arms around each other and jumped up

and down, and we were just so relieved that we weren't being sent to Madhya Pradesh. Then he said, *Oh, we must tell Rinpoche! We must tell Rinpoche!* So, we ran off, and there Rinpoche, he was an artist, so he was drawing, so Chogyal said to him, *Oh look we got this letter from the government, and we're not going to Madhya Pradesh! We can stay in Himachal Pradesh!*

(and Rinpoche said: *oh oh...*) (laughter)

And, another time, when Khamtrul Rinpoche's best friend, Choling Rinpoche, he was the incarnation of Chokyi Lingpa, who was a great terton of the nineteenth century, and Rinpoche's very best buddy - he got killed in a jeep accident coming back to his settlement. In those days, the jeeps didn't have doors, they were like army jeeps, and so, it swerved and he fell out, and he died. And, he wasn't very old. And again, when Rinpoche was told that, and that was his very very best friend - I remember one time, they were sitting together holding hands, and Rinpoche gazed at him and said *I love him... We are one...* and they gazed at each other.... and Choling Rinpoche was the father of many famous tulkus, including Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Khyentse Yeshe and Da Lok (?)

So, he was told that his best friend had just died, and again... (silence) and that was it...

So, it's said that, spacious, open mind, thunderclouds can arise, rainbows can arise, flowers can fall, but it doesn't effect the spacious, open nature of the mind. That's the point - that you don't go up and down. It's not a big drama - *it's dharma*. (laughter) (audience member: 't-shirt opportunity!')

Which doesn't mean that that these lamas are all blank - I mean, they're great fun, and they love to laugh and joke, and they're very warm, and kind, and good, but they're not effected the way that we are by happenings, they just really see that ultimately it's just a movie...

So anyway,

*The essential teaching, expounded from many points of view in all the sutras, and tantras, and profound ways, is none other than the means of seeing the naked, empty awareness, the real face of our ultimate nature...*

That's what *all* of this is about. It's all about coming back to our fundamental, naked consciousness, which is nirvana. Nirvana, again, is very difficult for scholars to quantify. The Buddha hardly talked about nirvana, actually, even in the Pali Sutras. He didn't talk about it because you can't talk - *there's nothing you can say*, I mean, anything you can say about it, *it's not that*. So, sometimes he would say, *Yeah, well, yeah, it's kind of blissful*, but, you know, *that's not it* because if we grasp at the idea of bliss, then we're again caught up in conceptual thinking, right?

It's a *total revolution* in the consciousness, from our usual ego-bound, sense oriented way of perceiving, to this open, spacious clarity, which is naked. It's naked because we're not coloring it with anything we're seeing things how things *really are* and not how it's presented through our distorted lens of our egocentric consciousness. It's a whole other way of seeing, and we don't have anything in conceptual language to explain that, because conceptual language only can explain things from a conceptual point of view. So therefore the Buddha didn't talk about it much. He said, when you get there, you'll know it. Until then, anything we say distorts it.

I mean, one time, I saw this documentary, and they were interviewing this Russian Orthodox Priest, and he said that, in the novitiate, when you start, the first thing they were taught was that *anything* you say, or think about God - it's not that. Spot on. (laughter)

You know, *whatever name* we give to the ultimate reality is just a name, it's not what it is, and immediately our conceptual mind tries to grasp it and make a picture, but it's not. It's something beyond what our conceptual mind can grasp.

I think the clearest explanation, is, when we're dreaming, we believe our dreams. Physically, the body believes our dreams too. If it's a frightening dream, the heart beats, and, you know, whatever kind of dream it is, our body reacts to that kind of dream. It believes it, but when we wake up, we think, *oh that was just a dream, now we're awake.*

So, *really* awakening, which is what the word *budh* means, is exactly the same. There's such a more sharp level of awareness, that our ordinary, conceptual awareness seems like a dream. We awaken from the dream of our illusion, right? And it's, again, the *ultimate awakening*. We call it enlightenment, but actually it means to wake up. That's what the word *budh* means, it means to wake, to awaken.

So he's the Awakened One, and we're all trying to wake up. But, you know, while you're dreaming, we cannot imagine... we think we're in an awake state, right? until we do wake up from the dream, then we realize that was just a dream. So this is the next step up, to *really* wake up, but you can't describe it...

The Buddha also called it the unconditioned, and he called it the deathless, or the unborn, because it goes beyond the three times. Past, present and future is part of our delusion. It's a whole different dimension. This is why it's so important, to wake up.

So, he said that therefore,

*it means the empty awareness, the real face of the ultimate nature, so therefore, exert yourself unremittingly in this.*

I mean, we really need to wake up...

From Sunday, June 10th, 2018

So, the whole point is to recognize the nature of mind. If, in the meantime even if we haven't recognized the nature of the mind, it's very important to maintain mindfulness, even though mindfulness is still a dualistic state of mind, it's very, very important. Even in Dzogchen or Mahamudra, mindfulness, and the ability to over look the mind, called in Tibetan *she-shin*, is very, very important.

And the stronger our mindfulness, then, when we *do* recognize the nature of the mind, the longer we will be able to sustain that, because the mind is well trained. If our mind is wild and all over the place, then even if we get a glimpse of the nature of the mind, we won't be able to sustain it. It will just be a glimpse. If our mind is well trained, through mindfulness, then that will be of enormous benefit for recognizing our unborn, pure awareness, and being able to sustain that.

So, don't think that if one hasn't recognized the actual, fundamental awareness that one cannot practice, because mindfulness is extremely important, and we can all do that.

The Buddha himself said that cultivating mindfulness is the way to enlightenment, and without mindfulness we can't do anything. Mindfulness here means *being conscious, aware* of what's happening in the present moment, without elaborating, because normally when we see something, when we hear something, when we see something, we immediately clothe it - the bare moment of perception, we clothe with our ideas, or opinions, our likes, our dislikes. We don't see things as they are, we see things how we present them to ourselves, with all our elaborations.

So, mindfulness is a way of helping us to to strip back down to naked perception. We see things, *how they are*, without pinning all our ideas and concepts onto the object. Do you understand?

So, it's a matter of just being present with what's happening, as it comes up, and seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, but just... *there...* in bare awareness, without having to make all our concepts, unless we need to, then we knowingly do that. But we don't do it automatically, if you see what I mean, you know, because that gives us an inner freedom, and it stops the mind from grasping and clinging and being sticky.

Our minds are sticky, they're like... velcro, right? - little hooks which cling to everything we see, and so this makes it into a *teflon mind*. This is what we need - a teflon mind, non stick. *So that, it cooks well, but it doesn't stick.*  
(laughter)

So, mindfulness helps us towards this. You know, being present, seeing things as they come into our senses, through our sense doors, and the mind door, but without sticking. Ok?

So that was what it was dealing with.

