

Teachings on Mahamudra

Volume Two

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In some places they say, 'Now we are going to sit in calm meditation, after that we'll do insight meditation', but we don't divide them like this...
Actually, you can only divide them in speech...

Tranquillity is the base which gives rise to wisdom, and wisdom is the fruit of tranquillity.

- Ajahn Chah

When we meditate on Mahamudra or Dzogchen, this is not analytic meditation, but primarily it's resting meditation...

We practice resting without altering the mind in any way, as a way to allow the wisdom that is present within us to manifest.

- His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa

In 'The Ocean Of Definitive Meaning', it says,

Rest the mind naturally and in a relaxed way. Within that state of relaxation look nakedly and vividly at the mind...

Now, *nakedly* here means without any kind of barrier between that which is looking and the mind that is being looked at, without any kind of filtration such as a skin or packaging...

You are not packaging the mind with ideas about it; it is naked and unwrapped...

And, *looking vividly* means that you are looking at it right now with the awareness of right now as a vivid direct experience, something that is clear and present to you right now, rather than considering the mind and thinking about the mind that was or the mind that will be...

Further, the text says,

And look in this way, nakedly and vividly, without distraction...

This means that, while remaining relaxed, you remain undistracted from direct observation of your mind...

The nature that you experience when looking at your mind in this way is what we call Buddha-Nature, which, as the Buddha taught in the final dharmachakra, is something that each and every being possesses.

Buddha-Nature does not need to be created, it is not bestowed upon us by anyone; it is what we possess innately.

About Buddha-Nature, it is said in the Uttaratantra Shastra,

*There is nothing in this that needs to be removed
There is nothing that needs to be added to this
When you look at that which is genuine in a genuine way
and you genuinely see it, you will be liberated.*

From the Commentary on The Ninth Karmapa's Ocean Of Definitive
Meaning

- Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche.

From Advice for Mountain Retreat, by Khamtrul Rinpoche

Never let your mind wander,

and 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.

From A Commentary on Leveling Out All Concepts, by Atisha

The Entering the Middle Way states,

*Ordinary beings are chained by concepts,
While the yogis free of concepts become released.
*That which reveals the concepts to be false
Was taught by the learned as the fruit of a thorough analysis.*

{Furthermore,}

All the sacred words and treaties of the Great Vehicle, like these here cited, state that, {past a certain point}, concepts are a great obstacle to the attainment of enlightenment. It is therefore vital to not let laziness overcome you.

This means that if you harbor too many thoughts you will not reach the final goal. Therefore, *even in relation to the profound truth that will liberate you, remain without the proliferation [of thoughts] and concentrate all your energies on this single aim, that of destroying your false conceptions.

It has also been stated in sutra that {there comes a time when} all forms of elaboration are just the acts of negative forces.

Therefore, coordinate all your aspirations, relate all the grounds and paths, such as the paths of accumulation, seeing, and meditation, to the destruction of these concepts as they arise by applying their antidotes.

Continue this until the attainment of complete liberation and full enlightenment.

From Lama Yeshe's Teachings on Mahamudra, August 1981:

Universal reality is like a seal.. All levels of existence- organic, non-organic, permanent or impermanent- are of the nature of non-self-existence.

Guru Shakyamuni said something like,

Not seeing is the perfect seeing

Sounds strange, doesn't it? {The meaning is that} Not perceiving phenomena as dualistic is the perfect experience of seeing.

The particular characteristic of mahamudra is an emphasis on how to experience shunyata, rather than explaining what it is.

When you have a small experience of Mahamudra you drop out of heavy concepts, such as feeling that your body is a difficult combination of atoms rather than a transcendental experience.

To develop mahamudra, concentration is not enough. Lama Tsongkhapa said,

Samadhi is not enough to eliminate the concept of ego

We need the unity of concentration and Mahamudra to achieve that, but first of all we need to neutralize the mind with breathing meditation. Then we slowly use the mind to watch our thoughts, but this is not watching in the usual sense.

Language is a problem here. Take sunlight, for example. The sun doesn't have to say, "I am shooting out sunlight." Similarly, this "watching" doesn't have a thinking process, it is just being.

I want you to understand: Mahamudra is beyond words, beyond growing, beyond cessation. Don't just trust my words. It doesn't matter how much I use words, it still comes from my conception. So go...touch...then go beyond the words. Just watch and let go.

Mahamudra emphasizes no intellect. At a certain point intellect is the enemy. Then the real transformation comes.

When I was first studying I thought that if one were to understand all of Buddhism- the philosophy, Madhyamaka and everything- then one would certainly knock out the ego. First I thought that, but then I checked and realized that my conception was not true. People could learn the words and ideas of the doctrine, by way of teachers, but somehow this did not stop all problems of the ego. That is possible. I was surprised. That's why I feel that the Mahamudra teaching is in touch with the heart.

Your view of yourself, your own intuition and simultaneously born ego- these have to be investigated. Fundamentally, you have to understand that anything you perceive on the basis of your five sense consciousnesses will be perceived dualistically as inherently self-existent. Everything. The moment you open your eyes everything is perceived in an entirely deluded, dualistic way.

Traditionally, when we teach Mahamudra, instead of sitting inside meditating, the student walks around in order to be able to experience moment to moment. In that way the student captures the thief of the ego's projections. So this time, even during the break times, you should try skillfully to investigate and discover the non-self-existence of the perceived absolute quality of the "I."

At a certain point, when you seek the I in that way, then you- the I that is being sought- and the seeker you, both are dissolved. Subject and object both dissolve. That is the experience. The fantasy concept of I that we hold

is so built up that when it dissolves you may experience fear. This is a natural reaction. Leave it. Just let go.

Lama Tsongkhapa always emphasizes the unity of hearing, analytical checking and penetrative meditation. Take, for example, my own practice. I teach Westerners meditation, but some of my geshe friends think that first you have to study for thirty years, just as we Tibetan monks studied. After that you meditate. They negate what I am doing, but I just do. I don't know why I do. That's really my answer.

*Now, in Mahamudra the unique way of presenting universal reality is a particular emphasis on meditation on our own consciousness as the object. Normally our meditation object is something like Buddha's image, the figure of a deity, and so on, but this time we contemplate our own consciousness.

The characteristic of consciousness from the Buddhist point of view is its clean clear nature. It is like crystal, a mirror that takes on a reflection. Consciousness doesn't have substantial physical energy. It has no color, no form. It is like space energy. Its nature is non-duality. Meditation on consciousness easily leads to Mahamudra, which is why at the beginning you concentrate on your own consciousness.

First you clear your mind by focusing on your breathing. When you have reached a point where your mind is clear and quiet, then do not start thinking concepts like, "How beautiful, how wonderful." No. You just rest there, being continuously mindful...

It is not necessary to reach a state in which your mind is completely bright and clear. If you achieve the object to some extent, then that's good enough; just let go...

And at the same time use your subtle mind for analytical checking, such as perceiving whether the ego is existent or not. When you investigate such a

concrete entity as the I, it naturally ends up disappearing, automatically. It cannot stand up to investigation. So at the same time you experience non-duality, or Mahamudra.

This is the way to develop penetrative insight (Skt. vipasyana). Your own subtle mind moves like a fish, which swims through the water without disturbing the ocean.

First it seems that the I has some sort of existence, but when you reach a certain point it dissolves. The experience is that both subject and object dissolve. At that point you let go...

Lama Tsongkhapa says that at this point we should never allow any kind of object- such as form, color or deity- to arise. So even if a special fantastic vision comes, do not follow it...

The Method of Developing Bhavana, by Ajahn Dune

One begins with the body posture that is comfortable whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, whatever is convenient.

One should then make oneself fully aware with just bare awareness, not trying to be aware of something, just knowing itself alone. One then keeps the citta there continuously, just in bare awareness...

There is no need to be discursive or analytical. Don't force it but also don't let the citta be free to follow events.

After a while the citta will go out following sense objects before one can catch it. This is normal for a beginner and when the citta is satisfied with that sense object, one will then again become aware of oneself.

When one becomes aware, one should investigate by comparing ones state in still awareness and ones state when the citta is following sense objects.

What is the difference?

This is a method to make the citta notice and remember.

After this carefully and gently keep the citta in a state of still awareness as before...

When one is not mindful, not being careful enough, the citta will again go out to seek some sense object and remain until it is satisfied and then one will again become aware. When one is again aware, reinvestigate and then gently keep the citta in the state of still awareness as before...

By this method, it will not be very long before one is able to control the citta and finally attain Samadhi. One will then be clever in the ways of the citta without having to learn it from another.

Do not meditate when the citta is in a state of emotional turmoil. This would be of no use and may even cancel out ones former efforts resulting in one losing the desire to practice further.

When one is unable to practice in the way given above, one should try thinking "Buddho" {"awake"}, or any other word as long as it isn't a source disturbance or aversion.

One just continues to think this word and then tries to notice where the word is clearest and that will be the "base" of the citta.

One should notice that this base does not remain stationary at all times, one day being one place and another day somewhere else. The base of the citta, becoming clear with "Buddho", will never be external but always internal within the body. When we investigate this, however, we will not be able to pinpoint the exact place within the body, making it hard to say whether it is external or internal. When this happens, this means one has arrived at the correct base of the citta.

When one has correct attention, and "Buddho" is clear in the mind's eye, one tries to continue on without break, because if there is a break, the citta will zip out to a sense object again.

When it is satisfied with the sense object, one will then again regain awareness and continue "Buddho" as before, according to the same method as mentioned above. Slowly one will finally be able to control the citta by oneself.

Remember that in being aware of (or fixing) the citta, one must have in mind the aim of developing the citta to the desired state. This aim is virtue (Sila). Reciting "Buddho" alone, without this purpose of virtue, will be of no use at all and will negate our efforts making meditation difficult in the future.

If ones purpose is firm, however, ones development of the citta will, without doubt, bear fruit every time to varying degrees but always to the satisfaction of the practitioner.

In using "Buddho", clear, fixed thought and consistency must be coupled with diligent effort. I have compared firm and consistent purpose to a man watching the sword blade of an enemy ready to strike. The man watches the sword blade thinking, "Whatever way it comes at me, I must counter it to be safe". This determination must be firm in order for Samadhi to arise, if it is not, then don't waste your time and ruin your faith.

When the citta slowly, step by step, goes into calm, the citta's habit of going out to the senses and their objects will slowly lessen until one will be aware as soon as it occurs. When one gets to this stage, the word "Buddho", mentally recited, will disappear on its own because the recitation word is a gross object, and when the citta goes beyond this gross object stage it will abandon it.

When the preparatory word has disappeared one need not recall it. Just keep the citta at the base constantly and notice the feelings and tendencies of the citta in that base.

In the mental recitation method for one-pointedness of the citta, notice who is reciting Buddho.

One should look at the citta when it is calm. Let mindfulness watch the base, and when any sense object arises, let the object go and continue watching the citta...

One should not worry or (use) force but just try to keep and attend to the citta at its base having mindfulness (Sati) there, to quietly be aware of things.

One should not speculate about the citta as to what is happening or what arises, just be aware...

Letting this go on continuously, one will begin to understand the ways actions of the citta.

Does the citta create the defilements (Kilesa) or do the defilements create citta?...

Understand the objects of thought, and notice the three types, which are greed (Raga), hate (Dosa) and delusion (Moha).

Don't send the citta outside. Be aware of the one object (the citta), and don't let it go outside to objects.

When the citta does go out, mindfully return it to its base and awareness.

One should try to maintain clear comprehension (Sampajanna) always.

With the exception of normal vision (Rupanimitta) one should pay no attention to mental images (Namanimitta).

While the citta is not thinking about external things notice the activities of the citta in following the six senses.

One must attain knowledge (Nana) in order to see the citta just as the eye sees form.

When one has watched the behavior of the citta for some time and when one understands the conditions and causes of the various thoughts, the citta will then be as fast as these thoughts and they will steadily be abandoned until the citta is free of these objects. The citta will then be free and separate from the body-based feelings, remaining at its original base.

Seeing this way is seeing with the eyes of wisdom. However much we think we will not know. When we stop thinking, then we will know, but to do this we must use thought.

Separate "copied form" (Vinnana) with knowledge (Vijja) by way of the citta (Maggacitta). {what is known and knowing itself}

When one is able to understand that the citta and body are separate, one then continues to watch the citta to see if there is anything remaining in its base or not...

One should use mindfulness to watch the citta, keeping the citta calm continuously, until one understands the activities of the citta intricately, level by level.

One must understand about causes and results, and that these, in fact, come from the thoughts that originate in the citta, compounding, adding to, creating, and being born without end. These are the illusions that deceive people.

The citta will rid itself of these things continuously until they are gone. This means developing the citta to the point where one can ignore the smallest atom of consciousness (Rupa-Paramanu-Vinnana) {'ripple', habitual tendency, or seed}, in the citta.

One must abandon both causes and results. When one has developed the citta to the point where it is free of thoughts and compounding (empty), one no longer depends on cause and results. The citta will then be free and above states based on thought, being free of all adulteration and called Pure Dhamma of freedom (Samucchedadhamma). All "debts" are then paid and one would be beyond the cause of birth.

When one abandons the smallest atom of attachment, the gross kamma that was fixed, recorded, or imprinted in that "Atomic Rupa" will not have a chance at fruition in the future.

The debts are no longer increased when (the citta) is contacted by internal or external conditions, it is just contact with no continuing resultant. One has escaped the gross kamma in the former "being" and has paid all debts with no further affairs, responsibilities or ties to cause rebirth in order to repay kamma.

Because ones debts are paid and there are no further attachments, the gross kamma that caused one to go on to rebirth cannot again bear fruit and this is called "going beyond the cause of birth".

One who knows (or is enlightened) does not say what that knowledge is. When all Dhamma has been transmitted, then how can that which is called Dhamma be Dhamma?

That which is said "to have no Dhamma", that is the Dhamma complete (the one who knows is real, but the known is not).

When the citta is empty of various activities, it will attain true emptiness with nothing further to notice. One will then know, in truth, that the citta has no form, it is one with emptiness. This means that it has no boundaries or limits. It is part of all things and the citta and the one who knows is one and the same.

When the citta and the one who knows are one in emptiness, then there is nothing to give or knowledge to impart. There is no "thing" to know the state of anything; there is no state to know a "thing".

When one knows the original state of the citta then "citta clearly sees citta". The citta will then be above all states of conventional labeling, beyond all having and being, beyond all words and past talking about.

It is "Pure Nature" and light coalesced in emptiness, unadulterated and the brightness of the original universe, it is called "Nibbana".

The emphasis in Dzogchen and Mahamudra Practice

Accepting that there will always be problems means opening to all of life, not only to what is positive, but to everything. Dzogchen does not attempt to overcome problems or correct their causes, nor does it renounce problems or attempt to transform them.

In the pure Dzogchen view, there is no such thing as a problem. When a thought or feeling or sensation arises it is left as it is. It does not cause a reaction. And if there is a reaction, the reaction is not further engaged. The practitioner does not relate to what arises as an object of a subject who must deal with it. It just is - and then it is not.

Because there is no engagement on the part of the practitioner, whatever could be a problem dissolves into empty awareness. The problem is directly experienced as empty luminosity and then has no effect. Because there is no reaction, there is no new karmic trace.

In Dzogchen {and Mahamudra}, rather than work on problems, the practitioner works on recognizing and abiding in the natural state of mind. That is the actual resolution to problems, not in their particulars but as an end to “problems” as a category of experience. In Dzogchen it is said that to know one is to know all.

To really know the nature of any problem is to know the nature of all problems - they are all empty luminosity.

~ Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche

The emphasis in Dzogchen and Mahamudra is on recognizing and abiding in the natural state of mind.

How is this done?

Emptying out Misconceptions – Making sense of Madhyamaka, by Pema Khandro

The Buddhist teaching on emptiness offers radical perspective that breaks through the chains that bind us, the concepts and assumptions that obscure our perception. But emptying out misconceptions about emptiness requires a journey through the wide wonderful world of Buddhist philosophy.

Early Buddhism centered around the radical idea that at the core of the person there is no fixed, eternal self. In a time and place where the culture orbited around the belief that atman – a true self was the answer to the spiritual journey, the Buddha's teaching suggested that clinging to fixed concepts of self is actually the driving force behind dissatisfaction.

Instead, the world as we know it is entirely relational, made up of interrelated parts. No person exists apart from all the factors that have made up that person, including the components of the individual, the input from others, and the dependence on others to live and thrive.

We are all made up of each other in a network of interdependence. We are made up of a matrix of causes, conditions. Even our thoughts did not originate from an independent space, they arise from a culture, dependent on a language and learned patterns. Recognizing this interrelatedness is a key to the wakefulness, knowledge and love that is possible.

From the perspective of the Great Perfection teachings of Buddhism, discovering our "true self," could be supplanted by the more present moment goal of finding our "true state," our a way of being that is not constructed or contrived, but is naturally present. Instead of looking for "true self," we could look for the "natural state."

Beyond Concepts

As Mahayana Buddhism spread, the emphasis on the doctrine of no-self was expanded, extended to all phenomena. This view points that there is no fixed and intrinsic reality underlying anything. In other words, reality as we know it is interdependently arising and thus everything is empty of any inherent independent existence.

Wakeful presence in real reality is what Buddhism aims for. So for this goal, Buddhism offers practices and perspectives for encountering reality with greater clarity, without barriers of concepts, conditions and assumptions standing in the way.

A potent way this clear perception was accomplished is through what is known as Madhyamaka – the middle way teachings most famously taught by the Indian pandit, Nagarjuna. Madhyamaka provides a way of looking at ourselves and reality that deconstructs all our fixed ideas. It suggests that no concept is thoroughly complete, it always falls short. This especially includes our dualistic frameworks such as ideas of good and bad, pure and impure, self and non-self. Ultimately reality itself defies dualistic concepts.

If concepts are the primary way we engage with reality, then this is bound to be dissatisfying, because it's not reality itself. It is like trying to eat a drawing of a chocolate cake. Concepts represent the reality but they are not the reality itself. They are just conventional designations that function practically to point towards something experiential. Thus Buddhism offers methods for more direct experience – engaging with reality in way that doesn't need to negate thinking but emphasizes modalities for operating present moment wakeful experience, rather than fixed identities and rigid concepts.

Madhyamaka suggests that our dissatisfaction, suffering and confusion comes from believing that reality is more solid and definite than

it really is. It points out how we impute onto reality qualities that are not intrinsic to it so we fail to see how much more open-ended, impermanent and dynamic things are. This the great teaching known in english as “emptiness,”.

Even though the doctrine of emptiness can seem abstract, practically speaking it has positive implications for every day experience. Even though we experience our obstacles and neurotic mind states as solid, definite and somewhat inevitable, they don't actually have that quality. Our own habit of perceiving things as solid is what causes a patterned, predictable, solid experience. In actuality, ultimately the web of concepts that bind us to conditioned scripts is made up of something quite tentative, quite empty. This view a cure for all fixed concepts.

Not Nothing

Thinking of emptiness is a way of continuously unravelling fixed preconceptions. While this could be disorienting, it also has another effect. Buddhist views are not just questions of ontology – the question of what is reality – what is not reality. *Instead the teachings themselves are evocative of particular experiences.* What is the result of dismantling our concepts? We are left with a heightened sense of non-conceptual presence.

It could be seen as states of meditation evoked through Buddhist philosophy – when concepts are used to dismantle concepts, what modes of experience does that leave us with?

This became an important nuance of interpretation for Buddhist philosophers. Shunyata, the paradigm of emptiness, indicates that reality is empty, but what does this really mean? We can see various approaches to understanding this in the various Buddhist vehicles and lineages.

However to say reality is empty is not to say that things are void, devoid or absent. This was emphasized by philosophers, Buddhist Yogis such as Longchenpa and the Nyingma lineage's Great Perfection teachings.

Understanding that reality is permeated by emptiness could lead to reifying emptiness. This is what Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, in his work on Mahamudra, would refer to as "clinging to emptiness," (1) a way of getting stuck on emptiness as an intellectual concept.

Eventually, as meditative understanding matures, he says that both emptiness and non-emptiness are unified in the experience of the expanse of reality. (1)

The take home message is this – if there is clinging to emptiness this can lead to one the four extremes known as nihilism. That would be the idea that underlying everything is nothing, that nothing exists. It in its least extreme manifestation it is a way of talking about reality in terms of what it is not. Or in its most extreme interpretation it is a way of talking about reality as being completely illusory.

However various schools of Buddhist thought, especially the Nyingma, Dzogchen and Kagyu Mahamudra teachings and general Buddha-nature discourse, took another approach to talking about reality, using positive terms, pointing to what it is and highlighted the importance of not reifying emptiness. This perspective makes way for the Buddha-nature teachings – in early times these ideas were found in Yogacara and became a foundation for Great Perfection teachings.

In order for those ideas to be understood, an insight of emptiness itself has to arise – if everything is empty, then one would need to be careful not to make emptiness a thing itself. In other words, in this perspective says emptiness is also empty. In that case, learning the Buddhist paradigm of emptiness and sorting out its meanings becomes a jumping off point for uncluttering experience and it ultimately leads beyond itself.

Emptiness of Other

One way of understanding this is through the Tibetan Madhyamaka philosophy known as other emptiness vs emptiness of itself, the “zhentong” and “rang tong” teachings.

“Other emptiness” suggests that we understand what we are as being empty of everything else, empty of everything false, empty of anything other than its natural luminosity.

Empty yet not “nothing,” instead the buddha-nature presence takes place as underlying reality. This can be contrasted with the “emptiness of itself,” perspective advocated by what is known as the Prasangika Madhyamaka paradigm – that reality is empty – period. In this case that is a matter of saying what reality is not, without articulating what it is. It is deconstructive.

Luminous Presence & Emptiness

Another way of understanding this concept of emptiness is through the lens of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, which posits that reality’s emptiness is not separate from gnosis, the knowing wakeful fresh presence.

Being takes place. It is empty, yet it appears and manifests. These two qualities are not contradictory. Instead it is a matter of co-emergence of emptiness, presence and appearances. Emptiness is not seen as absolute but instead a facet of the illusory like nature of apparent phenomena.

Emptiness is a process, a kind unfolding, a dismantling of constructed realities, but the focus turns to the presence that those realities obscured. In some sense it is emptying out the fixation on anything *but* that presence itself.

“The methods of fathoming the freedom from extremes and the like, according to the traditions of this Natural Great Perfection are generally similar to the Prasangika Madhyamaka. However in the Madhyamaka, emptiness is calculated to be an emptiness like space and is made the basis. Here, the mere constancy of gnosis, ever-pure, naked, all-penetrating and unaccomplished is made the basis. The phenomenon that arise from the sphere of such a basis are apprehended free from extremes, like space.”

– Longchenpa Lungi Terdzo – quoted in Van Schaik (2).

Conclusions

Why does this matter? The paradigm of “emptiness” is a Buddhist method for dismantling our assumptions about reality. It is a shift towards a focus on experience and the desolidifying of intellectual constructs and assumptions.

Since our obstacles are held together by the unconscious assumptions generated from the matrix of concepts that obscure our true nature – understanding the idea of “emptiness” is a basis for emptying out our greatest obstacles. This goes beyond just identifying problematic concepts themselves, but instead is a matter of seeing that our reliance on concepts as permanent, definitive and total indicators distorts reality.

However ultimately, what the paradigm of emptiness does is – make room – it makes room for the experience of presence, and wakefulness. By dismantling rigid concepts, it makes room for another mode of experience, the awareness of the presence of gnosis that is the natural state.

(1) Namgyal, Dakpo Tashi, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Mahamudra: The Moonlight — Quintessence of Mind and Meditation. Trans. Lobsang P. Lhalungpa. 2nd edition. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006. Print.377.

(2) Schaik, Sam Van. *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyingtig*. Simon and Schuster, 2013. Print.

From the teachings on Mahamudra and Medicine Buddha, by Lama Lodu Rinpoche, Healing Arts Center, St. Louis, August 30th, 2012

Great Mahamudra practitioners will say that you need to understand how to relax your mind. If it's too relaxed, that's not good. And if it's too tight, that's not good either. If you can find the balance, then you can look at the view of emptiness, transcending everything.

Don't think, *I'm meditating, I should tighten my body and mind* - that's not good. If you're adjusting your meditation too much, just relax. But not so much that the mind is not clear. Find the right balance.

Not too tight, or agitated; but not sleepy and dull. You have to be awake.

Not too relaxed, but not too tight, then you have the view that is totally empty, without any kind of conceptualization there.

The great master Saraha also said

*Holding things as real, that's being like a cow;
but clinging to nothing, that's even worse..*

Clinging to things as real, you can't meditate on emptiness, but clinging to emptiness as a blank emptiness, that means you don't believe in Dharma, or karma - that's much worse.

At least someone who believes in the apparent reality of things will believe in good and bad. Then, even though they are not liberated, at least they won't fall down into the lower realms. They know negative as negative, and positive as positive, and that keeps them in the upper realms.

But not believing in anything, that's more serious, and results in being born in the lower realms.

Mind is empty, but don't have it be a blank, nothingness. Empty, but fully aware, you can see, you can hear, you can smell, you can taste, but without clinging to anything, that's the important thing.

You can hear - don't cling.

You can see - don't cling.

Smell - don't cling; taste - don't cling; feel - don't cling...

The great master, Milarepa, said,

*Meditation is clear light,
completely without clinging*

He's talking about not clinging also. Even clinging to emptiness, that's wrong too. When you're totally relaxed, in the state of Mahamudra, then you have to let go of everything...

The difference between Mahamudra and an experience not being Mahamudra is whether or not there is clinging. If you're clinging to anything - that's not Mahamudra. If you're not clinging to anything - that's Mahamudra...

Because of that, Milarepa renounced everything, with a sense of revulsion for all samsaric activities. He didn't care about clothes, food, living in human society, or in a house - he lived in the mountains, with nothing. He didn't cling to anything, and he realized the actual, true nature of mind, clear light, without clinging...

At last he said, 'I was afraid of death, because of all my negative actions' - so he escaped society, lived in the mountains, alone, without distraction, and meditated on death. And after practicing, he was able to say, 'I no longer have fear of death' - this was after meditating on impermanence.

Whenever he would think of coming down the mountain, and going into town, he'd tell to himself, 'Don't go! If death comes while you are down there, it will be trouble. Sit where you are, and keep practicing, guard the true nature of mind!'

Many times he thought of going, but he convinced himself to practice.

That's the way to meditate, if you want to realize Mahamudra. We're just meeting for one day, two days, or one hour, two hours and talking about Mahamudra, it can't be done that way.

In Mahamudra practice, we need lots of purification, and lots of the accumulation of merit, *and lots of calm abiding practice.*

Calm abiding practice is very important for Mahamudra. Then you need the perfect view of emptiness. Then you introduce Mahamudra, simply, and it's possible to have the experience.

Then, you have to go through all these practices - like the Four Thoughts: Impermanence, Precious Human Body, the Law of Karma, and Samsaric Suffering.... just meditate on these for a long time...

When your mind really understands these, you realize you can use this precious opportunity to get enlightenment, to become free from suffering forever, and *that this is a great, great opportunity.* This chance may not come again...

So then you renounce, and any teaching you receive from a qualified teacher you will understand. You'll be able to practice with few obstacles, or, if there are obstacles, you'll be able to overcome them, because you've let go of everything else. To let go of everything is freeing in a way, by itself.

When you have completely renounced, and you bring to mind love and compassion, which are very important for Mahamudra, love and compassion can come easily. Love and compassion can come infinitely...

The Buddha himself said,

*'Limitless as the sky,
all sentient beings pervading space are afflicted with suffering,
and my prayer is
May all these beings be free from suffering...'*

The Buddha dedicated himself in that way.

We also have to train our minds very well in love and compassion. As I talked about last night, not like individual love and compassion, but infinite - non referential love, and non referential compassion, without clinging.

This is easy to come, if you renounce. And this loving kindness and compassion makes everything you do become Dharma. Whether you're talking, walking, eating, or drinking, all become Dharma, because you're mind never wavers from bodhicitta. Everything becomes Dharma. You're destination is close, and your progress is continuous...

Then, if you go to the meditation on emptiness, it comes easily; if you meditate on deities, it comes easily; if you recite mantras, then your speech, mind and body are on the path to liberation, without obstacles hindering your practice. See?

Then you can go to the different kinds of view of emptiness, through the different stages of meditation. Then you can be introduced to Mahamudra. If you go step by step, when Mahamudra is introduced, you don't need anything else.

Teachers give these teachings to students who have purified. Before they are ready, they won't give them. He'll just have them continue with purification. Then when the teacher sees that the student is ready, they will give the teachings, and (snaps fingers) the student will realize.

One example, is Tilopa, who transmitted Mahamudra to Naropa. Naropa performed twelve great and twelve lesser difficulties, to purify, and make his mind suitable to receive Mahamudra teachings, but he took this as his purification...

Tilopa had accomplished the practices of wind, channel, and bindu, so he could fly, and one day while Tilopa was walking in space, Naropa was walking in sandy water. Meanwhile it was very hot weather, and Tilopa wanted him to follow more quickly, but it was impossible. So finally, expressed himself as if he was so angry, and he took off his sandal and hit Naropa in the face with it. When Naropa regained his consciousness, he realized Mahamudra.

How's that?

So, Mahamudra is simple, but you have to be ready for it.

Also, in Tibet, there was one yogi who was very scholarly, a very high yogi. The Tibetans put him in jail, because they thought he was a Chinese spy. He went to England, but the Hinayanas couldn't relate, but he became very learned. The Tibetans were a little afraid of him, and didn't know what to do with him. So they put him in jail, and he stayed in jail a long time, but it didn't effect him at all.

At one point they realized there was nothing they could do to make him suffer, so they just let him go, and all the scholars in Tibet went to see him. They realized he was a great master, but he didn't teach them at all.

They came, and wanted to chase them out, so he lit a cigarette and blew smoke in their face. They were learned, but they weren't qualified to receive teachings. To scare them away, he even put his cigarette out on the top of a Buddha statue. They must have thought he was mad. He tried to make them dislike him, but they wouldn't leave.

One of his disciple though, Dawa Zangpo, wanted to receive Mahamudra teachings, and he asked for them many times. One day though he agreed, and said, you have to listen to everything I say. Dawa Zangpo agreed, and said, Ok, if you give Mahamudra, I'll follow your instructions.

The teacher said, Ok then, I really like to drink. So I want you to go out and get the best chang (Tibetan beer) from all over town, and bring it to me! I want to drink. He said, Ok, why not?

He went and got the beer and said, here is my offering, now give me the teachings (point out my mind).

He said, ok, pour me some chang first, which Dawa Zangpo did...

And the yogi drank and he drank, but the disciple got drunk. He passed out, and when he woke up, he realized Mahamudra.

Again, that student had the karma, from many lifetimes.

And this teacher, from the 19th century, everybody put him down, but now His Holiness the Dalai has asked that everyone collect the stories of this yogi. And the book is amazing. It is very interesting for Tibetan Culture and Tibetan Religion.

In any case, this is the way that Mahamudra is simple. It can be transmitted in all kinds of ways. If the disciple is ready, and the guru is capable, it's possible.

Even if we have some kind of sense of realization, better we go step by step.
Even if you are qualified, it's good to do that.

Black Friday Song

This Black Friday,
turn a profit!

The Buddha said that
contentment is the greatest wealth

and those without it wander the triple world,
insatiable

You already have everything you need,
and many times more than enough

So while others are breaking down doors
to get more of what they don't need -

go sit in a field of flowers,

watch a sunset,

embrace your child,

welcome music

Be like someone who suddenly finds a jewel in their pocket,
and has enough to give

Tell your family,
tell your friends

we need only stop running
and receive the gift

* * *

Hmmm...

Perhaps this is all about knowing our Buddha Nature, our inner wealth, how blessed we are, and the traditional teachings they call 'apranihita' - ('aimlessness, or 'wishlessness'), which is one of the Three Doors of Liberation (Emptiness, Signlessness, and Wishlessness) .

Thich Nhat Hanh described this as 'when we don't place something in front of ourselves and chase after it...'

Knowing the truth about ourselves, whatever our changing situation, there is greater stability, and peace, and inner resourcefulness too, of course.

Also, knowing what this day is for a lot of people, I thought to jest about it a little, and seek the Dharma in the midst of it all.

The Three Doors of Liberation

From *The Heart of Buddha's Teachings*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Three Dharma Seals¹ are the keys we can use to enter the Three Doors of Liberation - emptiness (*shunyata*), signlessness (*animitta*), and aimlessness (*apranihita*). All schools of Buddhism accept the teaching of the Three Doors of Liberation². These Three Doors are sometimes called the Three Concentrations³. When we enter these doors, we dwell in concentration and are liberated from fear, confusion, and sadness.

The First Door of Liberation is **emptiness**, *shunyata*. Emptiness always means empty of something. A cup is empty of water. A bowl is empty of soup. We are empty of a separate, independent self. We cannot be by ourselves alone. We can only inter-be with everything else in the cosmos. The practice is to nourish the insight into emptiness all day long. Wherever we go, we touch the nature of emptiness in everything we contact. We look deeply at the table, the blue sky, our friend, the mountain, the river, our anger, and our happiness and see that these are all empty of a separate self. When we touch these things deeply, we see the interbeing and interpenetrating nature of all that is. Emptiness does not mean nonexistence. It means Interdependent Co-Arising, impermanence, and nonself.

When we first hear about emptiness, we feel a little frightened. But after practicing for a while, we see that things do exist, only in a different way than we'd thought. Emptiness is the Middle Way between existent and nonexistent. The beautiful flower does not *become* empty when it fades and dies. It is already empty, in its essence. Looking deeply, we see that the

¹ Impermanence, nonself, and nirvana.

² The Theravada School does not emphasize this wonderful teaching, but it is there.

³ Right Concentration

flower is made of non-flower elements - light, space, clouds, earth, and consciousness. It is empty of a separate, independent self. In the *Diamond Sutra*, we are taught that a human being is not independent of other species, so to protect humans, we have to protect the non-human species. If we pollute the water and air, the vegetables and minerals, we destroy ourselves. We have to learn to see ourselves in things that we thought were outside of ourselves in order to dissolve false boundaries.

In Vietnam, we say that if one horse is sick, all the horses in the stable will refuse to eat. Our happiness and suffering are the happiness and suffering of others. When we act based on nonself, our actions will be in accord with reality, and we will know what to do and what not to do. When we maintain awareness that we are all linked to each other, this is the Concentration on Emptiness (*shunyata samadhi*). Reality goes beyond notions of being and nonbeing. To say that the flower exists is not exactly correct, but to say that it does not exist is also not correct. True emptiness is called “wondrous being,” because it goes beyond existence and nonexistence.

When we eat, we need to practice the Door of Liberation called emptiness. “I am this food. This food is me.” One day in Canada, I was eating lunch with the Sangha, and a student looked up at me and said, “I am nourishing you.” He was practicing the concentration on emptiness. Every time we look at our plate of food, we can contemplate the impermanent, nonself nature of food. This is deep practice, because it can help us see Interdependent Co-Arising. The one who eats and the food that is eaten are both, by nature, empty. That is why the communication between them is perfect.

When we practice walking meditation in a relaxed, peaceful way, it is the same. We step not just for ourselves, but for the world. When we look at others, we see how their happiness and suffering are linked to our happiness and suffering. “Peace begins with me.” Everyone we cherish will, someday, get sick and die. If we do not practice the meditation on

emptiness, when it happens, we will be overwhelmed. The Concentration on Emptiness is a way of staying in touch with life as it is, but it has to be practiced and not just talked about. We observe our body and see all the causes and conditions that have brought it to be - our parents, our country, the air, and even future generations. We go beyond time and space, me and mine, and taste true liberation. If we only study emptiness as a philosophy, it will not be a Door of Liberation. Emptiness is a Door of Liberation when we penetrate it deeply and we realize Interdependent Co-Arising and the interbeing nature of everything that is.

The Second Door of Liberation is **signlessness**, *animitta*. "Sign" here means an appearance or the object of our perception. When we see something, a sign or image appears to us, and that is what is meant by "lakshana." If water, for example, is in a square container, its sign is "squareness." If in a round container, its sign is "roundness." When we open the freezer and take out some ice, the sign of that water is solid. Chemists call water "H₂O." The snow on the mountain and the steam rising from the kettle are also H₂O. Whether H₂O is round or square, liquid, gaseous, or solid depends on circumstances. Signs are instruments for our use, but they are not absolute truth, and they can mislead us. The *Diamond Sutra* says, "Wherever there is a sign, there is deception, illusion." Perceptions often tell us as much about the perceiver as the object of perception. Appearances can deceive.

Practicing the Concentration on Signlessness is necessary for us to free ourselves. Until we can break through the signs, we cannot touch reality. As long as we are caught by signs - round, square, solid, liquid, gas - we will suffer. Nothing can be described in terms of just one sign. But without signs, we feel anxious. Our fear and attachment come from our being caught in signs. Until we touch the signless nature of things, we will continue to be afraid and to suffer.

Before we can touch H₂O, we have to let go of signs like squareness, roundness, hardness, heaviness, lightness, up, and down. Water is, in itself,

neither square nor round nor solid. When we free ourselves from signs, we can enter the heart of reality. But until we can see the ocean in the sky, we are still caught by signs.

The greatest relief is when we break through the barriers of sign and touch the world of signlessness, nirvana. Where should we look to find the world of no signs? Right here in the world of signs. If we throw away the water, there is no way for us to touch the suchness of water. We touch the water when we break through the signs of the water and see its true nature of interbeing. There are three phases - water, not water, true water. True water is the suchness of water. Its ground of being is free from birth and death. When we can touch that, we will not be afraid of anything.

“If you see the signlessness of signs, you see the Tathagata.” This is a sentence from the *Diamond Sutra*. *Tathagata* means “the wondrous nature of reality.” To see the wondrous nature of water, you need to look beyond the sign (appearance) of the water, and see that it is made of non-water elements. If you think that water is only water, that it cannot be the sun, the earth, or the flower, you are not correct. When you can see that the water *is* the sun, the earth, and the flower, that just by looking at the sun or the earth you can see the water, this is “the signlessness of signs.”

An organic gardener who looks at a banana peel, dead leaves, or rotting branches can see flowers, fruit, and vegetables in them. She is able to see the nonself nature of flowers, fruit, and garbage. When she can apply this insight to all other spheres, she will realize complete awakening.

Politicians, economists, and educators need to practice signlessness. We put many young men in jail. But if we meditate on signlessness, we will discover where their violence comes from. What is our society like? How are our families organized? What is taught at our schools? Why should we lay all the blame at the feet of the young people? Why can't we acknowledge our own co-responsibility? Young people harm themselves and others because life has no meaning for them. If we continue to live the

way we do and organize society the way we do, we will continue to produce so many thousands of young people who will need to be imprisoned.

Signlessness is not just an idea. When we look deeply into our children, we see all the elements that have produced them. They are the way they are because our culture, economy, society, and we ourselves are the way we are. We can't simply blame our children when things go wrong. Many causes and conditions have contributed. When we know how to transform ourselves and our society, our children will transform also.

Our children learn reading, writing, math, science, and other subjects in school that can help them earn a living. But very few school programs teach young people how to live - how to deal with anger, how to reconcile conflicts, how to breathe, smile, and transform internal formations. There needs to be a revolution in education. We must encourage schools to train our students in the art of living in peace and harmony. It isn't easy to learn to read, write, or solve math problems, but children manage to do it. Learning how to breathe, smile, and transform anger can also be difficult, but I have seen many young people succeed. If we teach children properly, by the time they are around twelve, they will know how to live harmoniously with others.

When we go beyond signs, we enter the world of no-fear and no-blame. We can see the flower, the water, and our child beyond time and space. We know that our ancestors are present in us, right here and right now. We see that the Buddha, Jesus, and all of our other spiritual ancestors have not died. The Buddha cannot be confined to 2,600 years ago. The flower cannot be limited to its brief manifestation. Everything manifests by means of signs. If we get caught by the signs, we become afraid of losing that particular manifestation.

When an eight-year-old boy who had lived at Plum Village suddenly died, I asked his father to be fully aware of the presence of his son in the air he

was breathing and in the blades of grass beneath his feet, and he was able to do this. When a well-known Vietnamese meditation teacher passed away, his disciple wrote this poem:

*Dharma brothers, do not be attached to the sign.
The mountains and rivers around us are our teacher⁴.*

The *Diamond Sutra* enumerates four signs - self, person, living being, and life span. We get caught in the sign "self," because we think there are things that are not self. But when we look deeply, we see that there is no separate, independent self, and we become free of the sign of self. We see that to protect ourselves, we have to protect everything that is not ourselves. We get caught in the sign "person." We separate humans from animals, trees, and rocks, and feel that non-humans - the fish, the cows, the vegetation, the earth, the air, and the seas - are there for our exploitation. Other species also hunt for food, but not in such an exploitative way. When we look deeply at our own species, we can see the non-human elements in it, and when we look deeply at the animal, vegetal, and mineral realms, we see the human element in them. When we practice the Concentration on Signlessness, we live in harmony with all other species.

The third sign is "living being." We think that sentient beings are different from insentient beings. But living or sentient beings are made of non-living or non-sentient species. When we pollute the so-called non-living species, like the air or the rivers, we pollute living beings as well. If we look deeply into the interbeing of living and non-living beings, we will stop acting this way.

The fourth sign is "life span," the period of time between our birth and our death. We think we are alive for a specific period of time that has a beginning and an end. But when we look deeply, we see that we have never been born and we will never die, and our fear dissolves. With mindfulness,

⁴ The disciple was a court official in the Ly Era (1010-1225). His name was Doan Van Kham.

concentration, and the Three Dharma Seals, we can unlock the Door of Liberation called signlessness and obtain the greatest relief.

The Third Door of Liberation is **aimlessness**, *apranihita*. There is nothing to do, nothing to realize, no program, no agenda. This is the Buddhist teaching about eschatology. Does the rose have *to do* something? No, the purpose of a rose is *to be* a rose. Your purpose is to be yourself. You don't have to run anywhere to become someone else. You are wonderful just as you are. This teaching of the Buddha allows us to enjoy ourselves, the blue sky, and everything that is refreshing and healing in the present moment.

There is no need to put anything in front of us and run after it. We already have everything we are looking for, everything we want to become. We are already a Buddha so why not just take the hand of another Buddha and practice walking meditation? This is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Be yourself. Life is precious as it is. All the elements for your happiness are already here. There is no need to run, strive, search, or struggle. Just be. Just being in the moment in this place is the deepest practice of meditation. Most people cannot believe that just walking as though you have nowhere to go is enough. They think that striving and competing are normal and necessary. Try practicing aimlessness for just five minutes, and you will see how happy you are during those five minutes.

The *Heart Sutra* says that there is "nothing to attain." We meditate not to attain enlightenment, because enlightenment is already in us. We don't have to search anywhere. We don't need a purpose or a goal. We don't practice in order to obtain some high position. In aimlessness, we see that we do not lack anything, that we already are what we want to become, and our striving just comes to a halt. We are at peace in the present moment, just seeing the sunlight streaming through our window or hearing the sound of the rain. We don't have to run after anything. We can enjoy every moment. People talk about entering nirvana, but we are already there. Aimlessness and nirvana are one.

*Waking up this morning, I smile.
 Twenty-four brand new hours are before me.
 I vow to live fully in each moment
 and to look at all beings with the eyes of love⁵.*

These twenty-four hours are a precious gift, a gift we can only receive fully when we have opened the Third Door of Liberation, aimlessness. If we think we have twenty-four hours to achieve a certain purpose, today will become a means to attain an end. The moment of chopping wood and carrying water *is* the moment of happiness. We do not need to wait for these chores to be done to be happy. To have happiness in this moment is the spirit of aimlessness. Otherwise, we will run in circles for the rest of our life. We have everything we need to make the present moment the happiest in our life, even if we have a cold or a headache. We don't have to wait until we get over our cold to be happy. Having a cold is a part of life.

Someone asked me, "Aren't you worried about the state of the world?" I allowed myself to breathe and then I said, "What is most important is not to allow your anxiety about what happens in the world to fill your heart. If your heart is filled with anxiety, you will get sick, and you will not be able to help." There are wars - big and small - in many places, and that can cause us to lose our peace. Anxiety is the illness of our age. We worry about ourselves, our family, our friends, our work, and the state of the world. If we allow worry to fill our hearts, sooner or later we will get sick.

Yes, there is tremendous suffering all over the world, but knowing this need not paralyze us. If we practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, and working in mindfulness, we try our best to help, and we can have peace in our heart. Worrying does not accomplish anything. Even if you worry twenty times more, it will not change the situation of the world. In fact, your anxiety will only make things worse. Even though things are not as we would like, we can still be content, knowing we are

⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, Present Moment Wonderful Moment

trying our best and will continue to do so. If we don't know how to breathe, smile, and live every moment of our life deeply, we will never be able to help anyone. I am happy in the present moment. I do not ask for anything else. I do not expect any additional happiness or conditions that will bring about more happiness. The most important practice is aimlessness, not running after things, not grasping.

We who have been fortunate enough to encounter the practice of mindfulness have a responsibility to bring peace and joy into our own lives, even though not everything in our body, mind, or environment is exactly as we would like. Without happiness we cannot be a refuge for others. Ask yourself, What am I waiting for to make me happy? Why am I not happy right now?

My only desire is to help you see this. How can we bring the practice of mindfulness to the widest spectrum of society? How can we give birth to the greatest number of people who are happy and who know how to teach the art of mindful living to others? The number of people who create violence is very great, while the number of people who know how to breathe and create happiness is very small. Every day gives us a wonderful opportunity to be happy ourselves and to become a place of refuge for others.

We don't need to become anything else. We don't need to perform some particular act. We only need to be happy in the present moment, and we can be of service to those we love and to our whole society. Aimlessness is stopping and realizing the happiness that is already available. If someone asks us how long he has to practice in order to be happy, we can tell him that he can be happy right now! The practice of *apranihita*, aimlessness, is the practice of freedom.

The Sky Dragon's Profound Roar and Commentary, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso

For the sake of all sentient beings, who are limitless in number as space is limitless in extent, I will exert myself in listening to, reflecting on, and meditating upon the excellent dharma.

When one realizes this nature of mind that is the awareness and the expanse undifferentiable, then all conceptual fabrications are pacified and the darkness of ignorance is completely dispelled.

The Sky Dragon's Profound Roar

Up in the sky's expanse, true being, unborn, forever pure
 Beautiful is the world below me- how many colors do I see
 But when I look I can't find anything that's born or has a root
 So the time has come to meditate on true reality, of ego-clinging free

All my possessions, all that I enjoy, are like rainbows in the sky
 Even their smallest parts have no essence- they don't exist at all
 So when I enjoy illusory pleasures, empty-appearing tea and beer
 It's time to rest in mind's full moon- empty awareness, radiant clarity

The stages of practice of the Tathagata's view and meditation
 Are skillful methods that clear away ordinary thoughts
 So I train in appearance and mind being without base or root-
 When sickness and death suddenly strike, I'll be ready, without regret

In the pattern that the world and life's appearances weave
 Visions of parents, relatives and friends are like illusions and dreams
 Like morning mist, they are fleeting, and at the time they dissolve
 That's the time to search for unborn confused mind's basic reality

In the baseless, rootless and empty confused appearances of life
 We suffer from heat and from cold and from so many other things
 But diligence in Secret Yana's practices, so powerful
 Makes fox-like cowardice be free all by itself- the time has come!

To what we beautify with hats and clothes- to this heap of elements
 We offer tasty food and many other things- whatever we may find pleasing
 But the carelessness and craziness of this life will end one day
 So be ready to be without fear of the judgment of the mighty Lord of Death

From the country of great snow mountains- a realm of Dharma
 Having crossed many hills and valleys and now flying through the sky
 I purify illusory flesh and blood into empty-appearing deity
 Paths and bhumis' realizations self liberated- in this I train

Ha Ha! Dechen Rangdrol's conduct that's attachment-free
 A Ho! It's time to fly in the expanse of sky of spacious Mother

Composed by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche.

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The Sky Dragon's Profound Roar - Commentary by Khenpo Tsultrim
Gyatso Rinpoche

We practice the genuine dharma because it is a method for clearing away the temporary stains that obscure our vision of the true nature of mind.

The abiding nature of our mind is clear light. It is the buddha nature, the undifferentiability of clarity and emptiness. In its essence, it is primordially pure and primordially free from any stain at all. It has been free and pure from the very beginning. Yet, although this is the basic nature of mind, there are temporary, adventitious stains, which are not of the nature of mind but which, nevertheless, prevent us from realizing what it is.

The fact that the true nature of mind could be this clear light, the buddha nature that is completely free of any imperfection at all, and yet be obscured by temporary stains, is called the first of the "four inconceivable points" in a text called the Gyü Lama. This text presents the highest view in the continuum of the Mahayana teachings. Why is this point inconceivable? It seems to be quite a contradiction to state that the basic nature of mind is pure and, at the same time, there are stains that prevent us from seeing it. If the true nature of our mind is pure, why then don't we realize this?

The situation is like gold that is pure and yet is obscured by some coarser mineral; it is like water that is pure in essence, and yet is muddied by dirt; it is like the sun that is shining and yet is blocked from our view by clouds. The purpose of practicing dharma is to clear away these temporary stains so that the essence of mind shines forth. At that time, mind will be like pure gold that is refined of all impure materials. It will be like pure water, uncontaminated by any trace of dirt. It will be like the sun shining in a cloudless sky.

We can understand how this apparently contradictory point is not contradictory when we consider such examples. On the surface, there might appear to be a contradiction while, fundamentally, there is not.

The qualities of the basic nature of this clear light, or buddha nature, are that it is naturally open, spacious and relaxed. When a person realizes this directly, they are freed from the bondage of their conceptuality; they are no longer bound by conceptual mind. Further, this realization benefits not only those who have experienced it directly, but it also benefits us while we are still in the process of listening to and reflecting upon these teachings. As we develop our understanding, we progressively gain certainty that the nature of this mind will help to release us from the bondage of our thoughts, and from the bondage of our own anger and desire.

Awareness and the Expanse

The glorious Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, described the true nature of mind as the “undifferentiability of awareness and the expanse.” The quality of the “expanse” refers to the transcendence of all conceptual notions; it cannot be described in words or grasped by thought. It is the great openness transcending all conceptuality. The quality of “awareness” describes the natural state of the mind, which is clear, luminous, and bright. This quality of luminosity is what is meant by awareness.

This description by the Third Karmapa of the basic nature of the mind as the undifferentiability of awareness and the expanse is the perfect unification of the intention of the Buddha’s speech in both the Second and the Third Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma. The description of this mind as being in the nature of the expanse is the aspect that is in harmony with what is taught in the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The Second Turning sutras of the Transcendent Perfection of Wisdom, or the Prajnaparamita, describe the basic nature of reality as transcending all conceptual fabrication, as being beyond any conventional name, term, or

description. Furthermore, the awareness aspect, the natural clarity and luminosity of mind, is in harmony with the Buddha's intention in the sutras on buddha nature, which constitute the Third Turning of the Wheel.

When one realizes this nature of mind that is the awareness and the expanse {the transcendent} undifferentiable, then all conceptual fabrications are pacified and the darkness of ignorance is completely dispelled. It is through our realization of the aspect of the expanse- the transcendence of all conceptual fabrications- that conceptual mind is completely pacified; and it is through our realization of the aspect of awareness- the luminous nature of mind- that the clarity of awareness dispels the darkness of ignorance.

When one gains stable certainty that, in fact, the nature of reality is "awareness and expanse undifferentiable," then realizing the nature of reality as bliss-emptiness, mahamudra, or as awareness-emptiness, dzogchen, becomes quite easy.

The great scholar and master, Mipham Chokle Namgyal, said, "If one seeks to master the basic nature of alpha purity, or kadak, it is necessary to perfect one's understanding of the view of the Prasangika, or the Consequence School." Alpha purity describes the basic nature of mind as it is expressed in the dzogchen descriptions.

If one wishes to realize dzogchen, alpha purity, or trekcho, as it is also called, then one must perfect one's understanding of the Consequence School. That is, one must realize that the nature of reality transcends all conceptual fabrications; it cannot be described by any conceptual terms. This is the aspect of the "expanse." If one recognizes this, then it is easy to realize the mahamudra because, as Milarepa sang:

The view is original wisdom which is empty
 Meditation clear light free of fixation
 Conduct continual flow without attachment
 Fruition is nakedness stripped of every stain.

“The view is original wisdom, which is empty,” describes awareness, which is empty of any flaw, empty of any type of conceptual fabrication, and cannot be described by any conventional terms.

If one is able to gain certainty that the nature of mind is awareness and the expanse undifferentiable, then one will perfect the intention of the glorious Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, who expressed this realization again and again.

The buddha nature, itself, is nothing other than the awareness and the expanse undifferentiable. It is very important for us to gain certainty that this is the case through the practices of listening and reflecting. This has been a brief explanation of the view of the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, and the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, which expresses the true nature of reality as awareness and the expanse undifferentiable.

The Sky Dragon’s Profound Roar

Many people have asked Rinpoche to tell his life story. In response, Rinpoche composed this song, which tells about the past, the present and the future. This is a brief explanation of these words.

Up in the sky’s expanse, true being, unborn, forever pure
 Beautiful is the world below me- how many colors do I see
 But when I look I can’t find anything that’s born or has a root
 So the time has come to meditate on true reality,
 of ego-clinging free

In the first line, the true nature of reality, which is forever pure, primordially free, unborn, is likened to the expanse of the sky. In this expanse of sky, Rinpoche looked down from an airplane and saw the world below him with all of its beautiful colors. Thus, the second line describes an experience of the past. This was, nevertheless, a present experience, a time when the past had ceased and the future had not yet arisen. In that very

present moment, this is what he saw: “But when I look I can’t find anything that’s born or has a root.” Rinpoche comments that, “No matter how I examine this world’s experiences, I find that nothing ever really happens.

Nothing is born. Things do not arise from themselves; they do not arise from something other than themselves; they do not arise from both themselves and something other than themselves; and they do not arise without any cause at all. Consequently, they just don’t happen. They never arise. They are without any root, without any ground.”

Realizing that this is the case, in the next line, Rinpoche reflects on what he must do in the future. Therefore, Rinpoche says, “the time has come to meditate on true reality, of ego clinging free.” The time has come to meditate on the nature of reality, which is free of clinging to this constant thought of “I,” “I,” “Me,” “Me.”

This explanation of things as being without any ground or root is in harmony with the words of the glorious Shepa Dorje, Laughing Vajra, otherwise known as Milarepa, who sang:

The true nature of appearances is that they’ve never been born
 If birth seems to happen it’s just clinging, nothing more
 The spinning wheel of existence has neither a base nor a root
 If things seem to be stable, that’s only a thought

The first verse of The Sky Dragon’s Profound Roar and these explanations are inharmony with the words of Milarepa’s song.

All my possessions, all that I enjoy, are like rainbows in the sky
 Even their smallest parts have no essence- they don’t exist at all
 So when I enjoy illusory pleasures, empty-appearing tea and beer
 It’s time to rest in mind’s full moon- empty awareness,
 radiant clarity

“All my possessions, all that I enjoy, are like rainbows in the sky.” In this line, Rinpoche is saying that whatever things he might possess or whatever experiences he might enjoy, all of these are just mere appearances, nothing more than that. Each of these experiences is just like a rainbow in the sky, something that merely appears without any substantial essence.

Even the tiniest components of these things have no existence because they are neither one nor many. They have no more reality than the things we enjoy in dreams. This refers to a past experience, to what Rinpoche has come to understand.

The next line, “So when I enjoy illusory pleasures, empty appearing tea and beer,” refers to a present experience. Here, tea, beer, and other enjoyments are all seen as being just empty appearances; they are appearance-emptiness undifferentiable, like illusions.

Following this, Rinpoche sings about the future. He says, “It’s time to rest in mind’s full moon- empty awareness, radiant clarity.” Here, the luminosity, the clarity of mind, is compared to the fifteenth day of the lunar month when the moon is completely full and bright.

Rinpoche remarks that at this moment he is warning himself to be careful. He is saying, “Now it is time to rest like this” and if he doesn’t, it could be dangerous.

Thus, now is the time, while the mind that is focused outward is enjoying pleasurable experiences, for the mind that is focused inward to just rest in its own basic nature, to settle into its own clarity.

The stages of practice of the Tathagata’s view and meditation
 Are skillful methods that clear away ordinary thoughts
 So I train in appearance and mind being without base or root-
 When sickness and death suddenly strike, I’ll be ready,
 without regret

The Tathagata, the “thus gone one,” refers to the perfect Buddha. The stages of practice of the Tathagata’s view and meditation are as follows:

First, one learns about, reflects upon and meditates on the selflessness of the individual, as taught in the basic level of meditation. One then reflects on the view of the Mind-Only School, through which one determines that the nature of reality is consciousness, empty of the duality of perceiver and perceived.

Subsequently, one reflects upon and develops an understanding of the view of the Middle Way Autonomy School, the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka, which describes the nature of reality as being “emptiness like space.”

The next step is understanding the explanations of the proponents of the Middle Way Consequence School, the Prasangika, which describe how the nature of reality transcends all conceptual fabrications as to what that reality might be.

Finally, through reflecting on the view of the Shentong, or the Empty-of-Other School, one determines that the nature of reality is the buddha nature, the undifferentiability of the awareness and the expanse. This is the Buddha’s explanation in the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The point of all of this is expressed in the line that says, “They are skillful methods that clear away ordinary thoughts.”

What do ordinary individuals think? They think that things are real. Thus, the stages of practice are methods that clear away this type of clinging to things as real. These two lines describe Rinpoche’s past experience, the way that he has understood things to be.

Given such an understanding, what is there to do? Rinpoche says, “So I train in appearance and mind being without base or root.” {unfindable}

In other words, there is no reason to think about the past mind, because it is finished. There is no point in thinking about the future mind, because it has not arisen yet. It is time to focus on the mind that is occurring at this present moment and understand that it, itself, is without any base or root. "Training" in this context also has the notion of purifying or cleansing thoughts that think things are real. {that they truly exist as they appear}

The last line, "When sickness and death suddenly strike," refers to the future. "Sickness" refers to a time when the four elements that compose our bodies are disturbed or out of balance, and "death" refers to the time when the life force in our body is going to cease. Usually, these experiences do not come upon us gradually. Sickness and death are more often sudden occurrences, happening with little or no warning. Thus, when they suddenly strike, Rinpoche says, "I'll be ready without any regret."

This again is Rinpoche's warning to himself: "When sickness and death suddenly strike, I had better be ready. I had better not have any regrets at that time." In short, this means to be without any regret now, because if you wait until the time you are about to die, it is too late. Being without regret now is the best preparation.

Rinpoche is talking to himself about how he needs to be, but he says that it is probably the case that this advice will benefit us all.

In the pattern that the world and life's appearances weave
 Visions of parents, relatives and friends are like illusions and
 dreams
 Like morning mist, they are fleeting, and at the time they dissolve
 That's the time to search for unborn confused mind's basic reality

"In the pattern that the world and life's appearances weave"- this pattern is a beautiful picture if you just look at it as an image passing by. However, it is important to realize that, in this beautiful picture, all of the "visions of

parents, relatives and friends are like illusions and dreams.” They have no more reality than that because they are appearance-emptiness.

This line is describing Rinpoche’s past experience, the way that he has thought about it and the certainty he has come to regarding it. Rinpoche then remarks that these visions are “like morning mist, they are fleeting and at the time they dissolve”- this refers to how, when it is cold, the mist can gather on the ground; but later, that mist just disappears. It vanishes by itself, of its own accord.

In a similar way, our visions of parents, relatives and friends are fleeting appearances, and when they dissolve, “that’s the time to search for unborn confused mind’s basic reality.” This mind, which never actually comes into being, while appearing to be confused, is by nature unborn and transcends all conceptual fabrications.

Thus, this mind that never actually happens, that never comes into being, while appearing to be confused, its actual nature is unborn and it transcends all conceptual fabrications. However, now is the time we must search for the basic reality of this mind, because if we wait until these appearances dissolve, it may be too late.

In the baseless, rootless and empty confused appearances of life
 We suffer from heat and from cold and from so many other things
 But diligence in Secret Yana’s practices, so powerful
 Makes fox-like cowardice be free all by itself- the time has come!

The entirety of samsara is confused appearances, but the nature of all these appearances is emptiness. The nature of this emptiness is that it is completely groundless; it has neither base nor root. Although that is the case, we still take these empty appearances to be real. They appear to our thoughts to be real, and we think they are as they appear. Because of this, we suffer from so many different things. We suffer from heat and cold. We suffer from meeting people we don’t like and not meeting the people we

like. There are many things that cause us suffering; in fact, there is little point in trying to enumerate them all.

Here, Rinpoche is describing his own past experience. He is saying, "I understand this. This is the way it seems to be." However, Rinpoche also says that when one has great enthusiasm and "diligence in Secret Yana's practices, so powerful," referring to the vehicle of Secret Mantra, the Vajrayana, then "foxlike cowardice" is freed all by itself.

A fox is an animal that will not stand up to anyone. They are afraid of everything and tend to just run away. This is the type of cowardice where we think, "I can't do it. I'm not good enough for this. I don't have the ability to do this now, and it's only going to get worse for me in the future."

If this is our past experience, then what is it time to do now? Rinpoche says, "The time has come to set this type of thinking free all by itself, because if I don't do it now, later it will be too late. I'll be discouraged and disheartened for the rest of my life, and when I die, I'll be discouraged and frightened in the bardo. Then, in my next life, I will be even more of a coward, and this cowardice will only become greater and greater and greater. Therefore, now it is time to set it free, before it is too late." Rinpoche says this is his own advice to himself.

To what we beautify with hats and clothes-
to this heap of elements
We offer tasty food and many other things-
whatever we may find pleasing
But the carelessness and craziness of this life will end one day
So be ready to be without fear of the judgment
of the mighty Lord of Death

Our body is basically a heap of four elements. Yet we beautify this heap with hats and clothes and dress it up with earrings and other ornaments.

We offer to this aggregate of the four elements tasty, delicious food and all the other things we like. We take this mass of matter and make it into an object of offering and veneration. This can go on and on in a careless and crazy way; however, the fact is that this life is quite short, and we need to be aware of the reality that it is going to end.

When our life ends, we go before the mighty Lord of Death, who stands in judgment of us without any compassion or mercy. It is like going to the courthouse to appear before the judge. The judge is the fearless Lord of Death, and we are not even granted a lawyer. We must go all alone. Therefore, we have to prepare ourselves, now, to be without fear of this Lord of Death. If we wait until we are in the courtroom, with the judge staring down at us, it will be too late.

All of the past experiences that Rinpoche is singing about happened in Tibet, the Land of Snows. Who knows where the future events of one's life will take place? Rinpoche says, "Those places where I will get sick and where I will die are dependent upon the coming together of causes and conditions, and therefore I have no idea where these events will occur."

From the country of great snow mountains- a realm of Dharma
Having crossed many hills and valleys and now flying through the
sky
I purify illusory flesh and blood into empty-appearing deity
Paths and bhumis' realizations self liberated- in this I train

"From the country of great snow mountains- a realm of dharma"- this describes Tibet. It is called the Land of Snow Mountains, the Snowy Region, and the Land of Snows.

There are many different Tibetan phrases to describe Tibet. Those descriptions are accurate, but also it was a land of the practice of dharma, of sutra and mantra together. It was, in a sense, a realm of dharma. Nevertheless, if you must leave Tibet, what do you have to do? You must

cross the Himalayas, with all of their high mountains and their hills and valleys. Rinpoche remarks that after he left Tibet, he then went to India and stayed there for some years. Following that he went to Bhutan, where he also stayed for some years.

Rinpoche says, “So where am I now, when I’m singing this song? I’m flying in the sky. Who made these machines that fly in the sky? Was it scientists or somebody else? I’m not quite sure, but here I am, flying in the sky, in an airplane!” All of this describes Rinpoche's past experience.

After all of this, what is there to do now? Rinpoche says, “I purify illusory flesh and blood into empty-appearing deity.” We ordinarily think of our bodies as something that is made out of flesh and blood. We think that these substances are real and, thus, that our bodies truly exist.

In fact, our bodies, and the flesh and blood out of which they are formed, are just illusions because they are all of the nature of appearance-emptiness. Therefore, we purify our body and its elements into the empty-appearing body of the deity. This is a Vajrayana method of practice in which we visualize ourselves, as a deity that is of the nature of appearance-emptiness, like an illusion, like a dream. This practice purifies thoughts that think the body is the self, and think that the body is something real. Rinpoche says that this is the type of activity that needs to be done in the future.

The next line, “Paths and bhumis realizations’ self-liberated- in this I train,” refers to the Mahayana description of the Ten Bodhisattva Bhumis, or the ten levels or realizations, and the Five Paths, which correspond to those ten grounds.

The bhumis and paths also correspond to the progressive stages of the view and meditation, mentioned earlier. Here, Rinpoche is referring to training in the realization of these as self-liberated. There are two ways this can be explained. One way is to train in self-liberating attachment to any

realization that might arise as being real. We must train in the self-liberation of that attachment. Another way is to train in the self-liberation of whatever thoughts come up- the whole host of our thoughts is, by nature, self-liberated. To train in this is the practice of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

Now is the time to train in these things, since if one waits, it will be too late. Therefore, it is time to do it now.

Ha Ha! Dechen Rangdrol's conduct that's attachment-free
A Ho! It's time to fly in the expanse of sky of spacious Mother

In another context, the words "Ha Ha" could be described as the seed syllables of a deity but here, that is not what is being talked about. Instead, this is the sound of laughter, because the conduct of Dechen Rangdrol, which is Rinpoche's Secret Mantra name, is attachment free. It is free of any type of thought that anything is real. It is conduct that knows everything is just like a dream.

In the last line of the song, "A Ho! It's time to fly in the expanse of sky of spacious Mother," the term, "Mother," refers to Prajnaparamita, the great mother. When Dechen Rangdrol's conduct is completely free of any attachment to things as being real, then he can fly in the spacious expanse of sky of the great mother, the transcendent perfection of wisdom, and this is an occasion that is quite amazing and miraculous. Therefore, it is time to really laugh out loud.

This short song, which Rinpoche composed at the time he was "flying through the expansive sky" functions as Rinpoche's autobiography. However, it is not an autobiography in which he tells us, "I went here and there, and I did this and that," because those things are relatively unimportant.

Rinpoche says that it is much more important to convey what his past experiences were and what his vision of the future might be, that is to say, what he needs to do in the future. Accordingly, if somebody asks for Rinpoche's life story, then this is it; these are the experiences that are most important to share. In the future, if we find ourselves wondering about the story of his life, then we should sing this song.

* * *

This teaching on "The Sky Dragon's Profound Roar," by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche was generously given in response to a special request for teachings by the Nalandabodhi Sangha on October 10, 1999, on the campus of Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Ari Goldfield served as Rinpoche's translator. Edited by Cindy Shelton and Amita Gupta, with assistance by Meg Miller.

A constellation of teachings

{Sometimes, everywhere we look, we see the same teaching coming to us}

Six Words of Advice, by Tilopa

Don't recall

Let go of what has passed

Don't imagine

Let go of what may come

Don't think

Let go of what is happening now

Don't examine

Don't try to figure anything out

Don't control

Don't try to make anything happen

Rest

Relax, right now, and rest

* * *

Obsessive use of meditative disciplines or perennial study of scripture and philosophy will never bring forth this wonderful realization, this truth which is natural to awareness, because the mind that desperately desires to reach another realm or level of experience inadvertently ignores its basic nature that constitutes all experience.

The Mahamudra Upadesha

* * *

We awaken to enlightenment by recognizing and fully realizing the primordially pure essence already present as our nature. That's how to be an awakened buddha. Even though the enlightened state is actually already present, imagining or forming a thought construct of enlightenment doesn't make you enlightened.

It's the same as when you are really hungry and you look at a plate of food and try to imagine what it taste like. Does it work to then imagine, "Mmmmm, I'm eating the food, I'm no longer hungry." You can think this for a very long time – forever, in fact – but it still doesn't dispel your hunger. Once you actually put the food in your mouth, it tastes delicious, and your hunger is satiated.

It's the same with experience. Experience only occurs in a direct way, in practical reality, not through a theory about taste. If your meditation practice is merely an exercise in imagining and keeping something in mind, it is only a theory, and not direct experience.

- Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche

* * *

At all times we should be aware of the unborn nature of the mind. However, we must never cling to this unborn nature; we must remain completely free. The point is to remain in the absolute nature, where there is no such thing as a meditator, an object of meditation, or an act of meditating.

Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche - Zurchungpa's Testament – on Concentration – Collected Works Vol III p 221, Shambhala

On Meditation, by Ani Tenzin Palmo, from her commentary on Atisha's verses for training the mind

So, we are still going through the Paramitas, these qualities needed for full enlightenment.

So, we have dealt with Generosity, Ethics, and Patience, and now we're dealing with Effort.

So, Atisha says,

The Supreme Effort is letting go of activity.

I am taking this to refer to our meditation practice.

Many people, when they come to meditation, throw themselves into it with great enthusiasm, and certainly in the Tibetan Tradition, with Westerners especially, who go in for longer retreats, they usually end up getting what is called *lung*, which is like a pranic imbalance. Sometimes they become very sick. And it's because they're trying too hard.

And especially in our modern day and age, when our lives are already so stressful, our lives are already filled with more than enough activity, both physical, and especially *mental*, to make our spiritual practice into *another* form of stress, and tension, and 'got to achieve', is counter productive.

There's nothing to achieve.

There's nothing to gain.

It's what we lose that is important. Not what we gain.

So, we must be very careful not to plug in to that same old energy:

I've got to get somewhere.

What am I going to get out of this?

What experiences am I going to get?

How long does it take to get realized?

That kind of pressure, *which we put on ourselves*, is very counter productive. It's just the ego, wanting to be spiritual - a bigger, better, more spiritual *me...* We can then tell everybody of the fantastic results of our great spiritual endeavors.

This is exactly what we don't need.

And so, even back in the 10th, 11th century, Atisha understood that.

And so therefore he says that,

The Supreme Effort is letting go of activity.

So, meditation shouldn't be more effort. Definitely, in the Tibetan Tradition at least, the emphasis is on - *relax...*

Just relax.

Make the mind open, spacious...

Now, it's not like we make the mind relaxed like hanging out on the beach, and going to sleep (ughhh)

It's not exactly that kind of relax - it's not going to sleep - relax.

The mind is aware, is conscious, is very, very clear, totally present...

but within this open, spacious feeling in the mind...

It's sort of like a paraglider. You know these paragliders - they're out there - they're not making any effort. They're totally poised, but within this vast, open expanse...

So, we have to make our mind like a paraglider - very present - a paraglider is not going to fall asleep - that paraglider is wide awake...

Paraglider? Do you understand paraglider? In India they call them paragliders - we see them, over the sea...

They have those big, sort of parachute things, and they just sail along...

In India, it's called paragliding...

So that's how we have to have our mind, like that, you know, very aware, very present, but very effortlessly expansive...

We don't actually achieve through pushing ourselves, pressuring ourselves.

We achieve through relaxing the various levels of the mind, while being totally present at the same time.

And so this is why he says that, the Supreme Effort - the highest effort - is letting go of all mental activity, and just allowing the mind to just be as it is, but *knowing*.

So it's not actually... We're not trying to *do* anything. We're trying to deconstruct, and be present at the same time, aware, conscious... a *wakening up*...

Does that make sense?

So then, carrying on from that,

The Supreme Concentration is not altering the mind.

Again, we are not trying to constrict the mind into certain patterns. What we're trying to do, as I said, is to deconstruct the mind. We're trying to leave the mind as it is, *and just know it*.

Our whole problem is that, normally, while we are thinking, while we are feeling, we are totally *immersed* in that. Like being in the ocean, we're tossed up and down by the waves. We're totally *submerged* in our thoughts, and our thinking.

So, the whole point is not so much dealing with the waves, as dealing with how to *know* the waves. Then the waves will subside of their own. We don't have to force them to subside.

The more we are aware of the mind, and can witness the mind, without being submerged in the mind, the more the mind, *of itself*, will begin to quieten down, become more ordered, become more calm, and clear...

*We don't have to try *to make* the mind clear. We don't have to try *to make* the mind calm. It will do that of its own account, if we only learn how to develop the quality of being conscious, of being aware.

So this ability, to observe the mind, to know the mind, without being submerged in the mind, *of itself*, will help the mind to heal itself. We don't have to do anything, as far as that is concerned.

So it looks like we're not doing anything. This is why he says,

We have to let go of activities

We should not alter the mind

- the whole point is that, this conceptual mind of ours, all our thinking and feeling, and emotions, all of that, tumult... it will deal with itself, if only we could learn how to step back, and just be aware...

We don't have to *do anything*.

We just have to *know* the mind, at that moment, without judging it, without trying to change it... Then, of itself, it will heal. It will solve its own problems.

This is a very important point in meditation.

We're not trying to, you know, engineer the mind, into some kind of unreal posture. We are going with the flow of the mind, but *knowing* the mind... because we don't know our mind.

It's extraordinary, because we live within the mind. Everything that we know, from outside, we can only know because we are conscious. And the stimuli we receive from the external, the seeming external reality that we posit, through the sense doors, is programmed immediately by our sixth consciousness (and seventh), the mental consciousness.

So even our seeming outside reality depends on the mind.

And then, within the mind, all our thoughts, our memories, our ideas, our beliefs, our sense of identity, *it all depends on thought*.

Everything is thought. We're swimming in this ocean of thought, but like a fish, because we are so used to it, we don't know what is the nature of water.

So it's very important to begin to understand *what is a thought*, because we are so mastered by our thoughts, governed by our thoughts.

So what is a thought?

And, as Swami-ji said,

What is a thought?

Who is the thinker?

It's not enough just to read a book about it, or hear a lecture. We, each one of us, have to individually examine our own mind, question our own mind really look into our own mind...

What *is* a thought?

Where does it come from?

Where does it go to?

What does it feel like?

What is a thought?

Our whole life is governed by our thoughts.

What is a thought?, *And who's thinking?...*

Once we really begin to examine this, this is what changes our internal landscape.

And it comes from being more and more aware, more and more conscious, more and more mindful, looking at the mind itself.

We're always looking outside. Now, turn that attention inside.

(13:00)

Yes, so...

The Highest Wisdom is not to grasp onto anything as the self.

From a commentary on Atisha's verses for training the mind, by Ani Tenzin Palmo

It's very important that, in meditation, the mind is not only relaxed, but *extremely alert* - it's like *waking up* - it's not going to sleep.

And so the mind should be *more clear, more aware, more absolutely - bright* - while all the other functions of the mind rest, and stay quiet.

Song of Mahamudra, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso

Whenever I'm meditating on mahamudra
I rest without struggle in actual real being

I rest relaxed in a free-from-wandering space

I rest in a clarity-cradled-in-emptiness space

I rest in awareness and this is blissful space

I rest unruffled in non-conceptual space

In variety's space, I rest in equipoise

And resting like this is native mind itself
A wealth of certainty manifests endlessly

Without even trying, self-luminous mind is at work

Not stuck in expecting results, I'm doing OK
No dualism, no hopes and fears, Ho Hey!

Delusion as wisdom, now that's being cheerful and bright!
Delusion transformed into wisdom, now that's all right!

From the Shangpa Tradition

Four reasons a person doesn't recognize natural awareness:

It's so close you can't see it

It's so easy, you can't believe it

It's so profound, you can't fathom it

It's so excellent, you can't accept it

Tilopa's six words of advice to Naropa

Don't recall,
don't think,
don't imagine;

don't examine,
don't control,
rest

Are explained by Zasep Tulku as follows

Let go of what has passed,
let go of what may come,
let go of what is happening now;

don't try to figure anything out,
don't try to make anything happen,
relax right now and rest.

The instruction of Tilopa

Don't think about the past

Don't think about the future,

Don't think about the present;

{Don't comment, or elaborate on the present;

it is also said, 'don't fabricate' anything -

Don't analyze}

Don't concentrate

Don't meditate

Leave your mind in its natural state...

A found teaching, by Lama Lodro Rinpoche

Tilopa said,

Do not think about the past,
Do not think about the future,
Do not think about the present;
Do not analyze,
Do not meditate,
Leave your mind as it is...

The view is empty wisdom;

Meditation is clear light, fully aware, without clinging;

Conduct is spontaneous action, without an agenda, without contrivance,
with no expectations, without hope and fear; without being affected by
praise and blame;

always motivated by a good attitude, kind and loving, and engaged in
positive action;

and fruition is stainless, naked mind, without ego clinging, and without
afflictions.

Set your motivation every day, to benefit sentient beings. Do your best. You
have to start somewhere. Those you can't help at present, pray to be able to
help them in the future...

How to Do Mahamudra Meditation, By Ponlop Rinpoche

Buddhism is rich in methods for working with the mind. One of the most renowned and powerful is the ancient wisdom tradition known as Mahamudra. Originating in India, the view and practice of Mahamudra gradually spread across Asia and today has reached the West. As a philosophy, it aims to communicate clear knowledge of the true nature of the mind. As a meditation practice, it is designed to bring about that experience swiftly and unmistakably.

Mahamudra is a contemplative Buddhist tradition known for its simplicity. The practice is to be genuine, relaxed, and aware in every situation in life, to accept and appreciate who we are. To engage in its profound methods, we aren't required to change our lifestyle, and any message contrary to that is not a true Mahamudra teaching. The practice of Mahamudra is an experience of our mind that's completely free and joyful, no matter what our life brings us. It points us to mind's true nature.

The meaning of Mahamudra is found in its name. Maha means "great" and mudra means "symbol" or "seal." The Great Symbol referred to is the wisdom of emptiness, which is the very nature of our mind and of all phenomena - any object or idea the mind can observe or become aware of. Because it covers the totality of our experience, the Great Symbol is known as the all-encompassing reality from which there is no escape or exception.

So, how do we begin the practice of Mahamudra? First, we learn with an open and interested mind what Mahamudra is. Then we reflect on and personalize that knowledge so that it becomes our own experience, rather than a theory. Then, having digested the meaning, we simply sit, going beyond knowing about Mahamudra to becoming one with it.

Realizing the true nature of our mind doesn't happen just by accident, pure luck, or willpower alone. We need some help. We have to rely on key

instructions of the Mahamudra lineage imparted to us through a trusted and realized teacher. Mahamudra has a tradition of skillful methods for directly pointing out the nature of mind, which is a unique feature of this lineage. If we have the opportunity to receive these instructions and a sincere interest in working with them, we have a good chance of understanding and realizing Mahamudra wisdom.

Mahamudra is divided into three parts: ground Mahamudra, path Mahamudra, and fruition Mahamudra. Ground Mahamudra is where our discussion starts. It is fundamentally a view of the most basic reality of our mind and world. We will then look briefly at path Mahamudra, which is the actual meditation practice. Last, we have fruition Mahamudra, a description of what the path leads us to. That will give us a complete picture of the Mahamudra journey of awakening.

Mahamudra teaches us with a number of special techniques for looking at our mind to see its true nature. When we look inside with a clear, steady focus, the mind we see is transparent, spacious, and open. It feels like something's there, but when we look for it, there's no "thing" we can find. Our thoughts and emotions are vivid, yet we can't put our hands on them. They melt away as soon as we notice them. Even sights and sounds, which seem to be real, distinct entities, evade our grasp when we search for their true identity. When we recognize the flowing, open, and spacious quality of all our experiences, even for a moment, that's the emptiness side of the wisdom of emptiness.

When we look at our mind, however, we see that it's not just spacious. There's a luminous, clear, and creative energy that's the source of our compassion and joy. There is also a quality of wakefulness, of all-encompassing awareness. This is the wisdom side of the wisdom of emptiness.

When we recognize the union of this brilliance, this awareness, and the open, transparent space, that's what we call the recognition of the wisdom

of emptiness, or the true nature of mind. In such a moment, we don't experience just one side of our mind; we experience the wholeness of the mind. We see the union of space, compassion, and awareness, which is called Mahamudra.

This is a way of understanding the mind of enlightenment - buddha wisdom or buddhanature. This wisdom mind is rich in qualities that bring us boundless happiness, insight, and a corresponding desire to help our world. Right from the very beginning the minds of all beings have been free of any inherent faults or defects. We might ask, "What is this 'very beginning' that we are talking about? Twenty years ago? A billion years ago?"

Actually, it's this very moment, now, when we fail to recognize the true nature of mind. This is the very beginning. If we can relax in this moment, we are resting in the ground or fundamental state of Mahamudra. The way we rest is through the practice of meditation, which is path Mahamudra. When we can rest well, we are naturally in union with the goal, or fruition, of the path. There's no other Mahamudra to attain: we are buddha, awake and free, in this very moment.

But when we fail to recognize the basic nature of our mind, then we have a problem. The luminous, creative energy of original mind is misperceived as the dualistic world of self and other. Confusion arises, clinging begins, and then the whole world of suffering and bewilderment manifests. Instead of enjoying peace, illumination, and happiness, we experience our mind as afflicted with painful emotions. We're bombarded by thoughts that lead us this way and that. We endure anxiety and fear while we long for peace and contentment.

That is what we call the spinning of samsara, or cyclic existence, which is endless until we decide to stop it by realizing mind's true state. So the beginning of samsara is when we fail to recognize that ground, and the end of samsara is nothing more complicated than recognizing our own nature

of mind. When mind recognizes itself and can rest freely and relaxed in a state of openness, that is the end of our confusion and suffering.

Luminosity, the clarity nature of mind, manifests creatively as phenomena. Because we are habituated to solidifying our experience of this luminous display, it's easier for most of us to see the luminous aspect of mind than to recognize mind's empty nature. However, if we're missing the experience of emptiness, we might start to think of luminosity as something that's solid and real enough to hold onto. Then it becomes a source of suffering and confusion instead of freedom. It's important to first learn what emptiness actually means, at least intellectually, before we jump to the conclusion that the nature of mind possesses all the qualities of enlightenment. Once we have a good understanding of the emptiness nature of mind, then we can further that view by seeing mind's luminous nature.

So before undertaking Mahamudra meditation, we should first have a theoretical understanding of the true nature of mind - as empty, luminous, and aware. Second, we should understand how confusion develops when we don't recognize that nature. Third, we should understand that the essence of our confused thoughts and emotions is free of any innate negativity or fixation, that all expressions and experiences of mind are empty and luminous.

These three aspects of ground Mahamudra are important to understand through conceptual mind first, and then through the process of reflection to make it more experiential. Finally, we bring our understanding to complete realization through meditation.

In the beginning, Mahamudra meditation is a process of becoming familiar with our mind just as it is, and then learning how to relax within it. Our first glimpse is likely to show us that our mind often wanders aimlessly about, and there's little organization to our thinking. It's like a house with junk piled up everywhere. So, what do we need to do first? We need to

bring a sense of order and clarity to our mind. By being more mindful of our thought process, our awareness naturally becomes sharper, more precise, and more discriminating. Once we've created some mental space, we can begin to glimpse mind's nature and the play of its creative energy. Gradually, we can further let go of the thoughts, labels, and judgments that keep our mind moving, unsettled, and tense. We can begin to relax, expand, and inhabit a new dimension of presence and openness.

There are two main types of meditation in the Mahamudra tradition: Mahamudra shamatha, or resting in the nature of mind, and Mahamudra vipashyana, or clear seeing. The focus of our attention is the mind itself, as opposed to anything external. If you have a background of sitting meditation and are familiar with that practice, then learning to rest in the nature of mind can be very simple, easy, and straightforward.

What does it mean to rest in the nature of mind, and how do we do it? We may think that to meditate, we have to concentrate, we have to focus on something. The actual meditation of Mahamudra is not really about that. It's more about knowing how to rest our mind and let it relax in its own state. That can be tricky, because on one hand we need to be mindful and stay present, and on the other, we need to let go of any stress and just relax. So the best practice is the middle way, finding a balance between nondistractedness and relaxation.

In the beginning, that may feel artificial, but if we keep doing it, it becomes effortless. It's like when we start learning how to drive a car. It's very stressful when we first get behind the wheel. Our eyes are glued to the road. We're holding onto the steering wheel so tightly we can feel the tension in our shoulders. At first it's an intense, scary experience, but the more we learn about driving, the more we relax.

In the same way, Mahamudra meditation can feel unnatural and stressful at first. We may be worried that we have too many thoughts and are not relaxed enough, or that our focus is not in the right place. But relaxation

will come naturally if we keep doing it. That's the key thing - to keep doing it. Then the experience of space, awareness, and relaxation will come naturally.

Meditation: Mahamudra

First, take your seat on a cushion or chair in an upright and relaxed position. Take a moment to feel the cushion, the posture of your body, the attitude of the mind, and the movement of the breath. Sit quietly for several minutes, gently letting go of your thoughts until you feel a sense of calmness.

Next, bring awareness to the eyes and look directly into the space in front. Then simply relax at ease and rest in the present moment, in *nowness*. On one hand, there's a sense of focusing on the space, but on the other, there's no particular spot to focus on. The gaze is like space itself, wide and spacious.

Whatever comes up in the present, whether it's a thought, emotion, or perception, try to meet it without judgment or comment. Rest the mind in that very experience, whether you regard it as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant. There's no need to change or improve it or look for a better place to rest. Rest the mind where it is and just as it is.

In Mahamudra meditation, it isn't sufficient just to recognize the presence of thoughts and emotions; we need to recognize their true nature and rest within that experience. So from time to time in meditation, reflect on the three basic characteristics of mind: emptiness, clarity, and awareness.

The emptiness of the mind is something we can "see," so to speak. When we look at the mind, it's like infinite space. It has no limit. It has no material form, color, or shape. There is nothing we can touch. That space, that openness, is the empty nature of our mind. When contemplating mind's emptiness, experience the spacious, insubstantial, nonmaterial quality of

mind, of thoughts and emotions, and leave the mind in a state of ease and total openness.

This mind is not just empty, however. It also has a vivid clarity, an infinite and vast luminosity, which is the radiance of emptiness itself. It's like a wide, clear sky filled with light. This experience of space with light is the experience of great compassion and lovingkindness, or unbiased great love beyond concept. It manifests in the vibrant energy of our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. We can see it in every experience of mind, especially in the powerful display of our emotions.

Once again, sit quietly until you feel a sense of calmness. Then contemplate the clarity aspect of mind. Look directly at whatever forms, thoughts, or emotions arise: all are the natural expression of this luminous nature. Look beyond the object and experience the radiance of emptiness, resting relaxed within that basic presence of clarity.

The clarity aspect of mind has the power of knowing, seeing, and experiencing the world. When a room is full of light, we can see all the objects surrounding us. In the same way, the light of our mind makes appearances clear and distinct. When we think about an object, our mind naturally produces an image for it. Whether we're thinking about Bart Simpson or His Holiness the Karmapa, the image we see is an expression of mind's clear, playful, creative energy.

Mind is not only empty and clear; it has the quality of panoramic and discriminating awareness. While clarity is the compassion aspect of mind, awareness is the wakeful aspect. It is the sharp, penetrating intelligence (prajna) that sees through any confusion and perfectly understands the world it sees. With clarity and awareness coming together, we experience the full power and benefit of compassion and wisdom in our lives.

As before, now rest the mind for a few moments. Let go of any thoughts of hope or fear, and calm the mind. Rest the gaze in the open space in front.

Bring our mind into the present moment and relax, simply experiencing the quality of awareness. Then let go of even that and relax without any thought. Again, we bring ourselves back into the present moment of awareness. Relax at ease and experience the mind as empty and luminous.

With awareness, we experience the three aspects of mind in union and the wholeness of mind's nature. When we hear instructions to meditate on the mind or to rest in mind's true nature, it is this union of emptiness, clarity, and awareness. When we are able to rest in this nature without too much stress from trying too hard to focus or concentrate, we can begin to experience genuine relaxation.

Relaxing in this space is one of the most powerful meditations leading to a direct experience of buddha mind. With this experience, we can bring a new level of understanding and skill into our everyday life. The wisdom and compassion we manifest will transform the once disturbing energies of our thoughts and emotions into something very useful and powerful that can bring about the experience of enlightenment.

Embracing Imperfection

When we sit in meditation, it's likely that we will experience dullness and distraction, restlessness, various desires and irritations, and doubt about our ability to practice.

We also may bring to our experience a certain idealism, or perfection-ism. Maybe we have had good experiences in the past and want to repeat them, or we have read or heard about wonderful possibilities, and want to pursue them. We may even feel annoyance that we're not immediately completely calm and blissful.

What they call the hindrances are defined as

that which obstructs awareness and weakens wisdom

- and it's true - we can see this for ourselves. It's so obvious, but *the way* we see these in our practice can make a big difference as far as resolving them, and experiencing a measure of peace and well being.

Look: when we meet dullness or distraction, craving attachment, anger or doubt - is it with a mind that is pushing these away? Is there an undercurrent of annoyance?

Oh, how I wish this wasn't there - then my meditation would be perfect!

This is just another form of aversion, and restlessness.

There is another way, that is getting to know mind and ourselves more deeply, and that is to practice embracing these imperfections, the hindrances, in practice.

There is something of light and peace, something innately perfect in the midst of all of our common, restless, and reactive states. There is something onward leading, and that is our natural intelligence.

For a long time I have had this working definition of *faith* as *the knowledge of things not yet proven*, and this has been useful for me up to now. Recently though I have begun to think of faith in a more practical way, as *the capacity to be led by our intuition*, and this is something different than using only our rational mind. It has more of a feeling quality, and is a thoroughgoing, immediate, clear and incisive intelligence.

Faith fluctuates in me, I notice. Sometimes it's less present, and sometimes more. Things always feel easier when I am trusting myself. The real problem with doubt is that it can stop our progress, or even attempting what may help our situation. It has already made up its mind, we could say. Another term for doubt then could be 'active disbelief'.

When we have the kind of faith I am describing though, in ourselves and in our practice, and when we continue with clear seeing, problems and confusion naturally resolve. It's just like the way a flowing stream becomes clear all by itself.

Rather than reject our experience, we can open to *whatever* is here. We can warmly welcome it, and in fact tenderly embrace it, and see it *as ourselves* and *as our path of practice*.

Our resistance comes from not accepting on some level, or from wanting things to be different, which may be something fundamental in us, but the way forward is through a thorough understanding of our actual lives here.

We can let go of whatever antagonism we may have towards whatever thoughts, emotions, memories, or plans that arise, and know them all kindly, with patience, and ease, and grace.

This is an orientation of mind that is fruitful. As long as it takes, we are compassionately welcoming our experience. It is really embracing these our imperfections also as the path to wholeness.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo has rightly said that the whole reason we need to practice is because we are not yet Buddhas, or Arhats, liberated, saintly people, so the hindrances are actually our path. They are what we have to work with and to learn from.

It's not our Buddha Nature that needs clarification, and release, she explained, it's those very factors we struggle with that need to be understood and tended to in ourselves.

We are not giving loving kindness and compassion to the nature of the mind, to our buddha nature. That doesn't need it - that's already loving kindness and compassion. That's it's nature. We are giving loving kindness to our ego. In other words, we are making friends with ourselves, because we have to walk the path. The ego is walking the path to its own dissolution⁶...

These experiences of ours hold so much potential.

We suffer and naturally want to find our way to freedom. That this takes time, and understanding to know and actualize however needs much gentleness with what is occurring. We can bring patience, and humility, faith, and care from this kind heart of ours.

They say in the Theravada that

the natural result of a concentrated and settled mind is to see things clearly

⁶ See *A Healthy Sense of Self*, from The Supreme Siddhi of Mahamudra Retreat, by Ani Tenzin Palmo, 2018

and in the Nature of Mind and Buddha Nature teachings that

*When the obscurations are removed
realization dawns effortlessly*

With kindness and compassion, and our innate intelligence guiding us, with time and much loving patience and continuing practice, the hindrances simply fall away on their own. Then all they refer to in the texts becomes apparent.

The Concise Mind Instructions Called Naturally Liberating Whatever You Meet

By Khenpo Ganshar

If you do virtuous actions, happiness will result, and if you do unvirtuous actions, suffering will result. This is an unfailing fact, so we must identify what we call virtue and misdeed. In order to do that, we first need to point out what body, speech and mind are. After recognizing what those are, we need to know which is most important in virtues and misdeeds: body, speech, or mind.

If you ask which is most important, mind is most important. As it is said:

*The body is a servant for all good or evil deeds;
The mind rules over everything like a king.*

The mind is like the king, and the body and speech are like servants. Thus if the mind does not think of something, the body cannot possibly do anything either good or nasty, or can the speech possibly say anything kind or mean. Thus we must recognize that the root comes down to the mind.

Next we must analyze whether the mind is something or nothing. It is not unilaterally something, because it has no color- white, yellow, red, or green- and no shape- triangular or square- to be seen. It is not unilaterally nothing, because this all-knowing, all-aware king that does all your thinking and remembering is unceasing. Thus as the glorious Rangjung Dorje said,

*It's not something- even the victors cannot see it.
It's not nothing- it is the ground of all samsara and nirvana*

This completes the discussion of the preliminaries.

For the main practice, let the mind and body be comfortable, soft, and relaxed. Do not think of anything, let yourself settle naturally, and look up with your eyes into space. Open your mouth slightly and let the breath flow naturally.

At that point, without any concern about what you are thinking, what you remember what is nice or what is painful, this mind-essence is clear and expansive, vivid and naked.

This is the nature of the minds of all sentient beings of the three realms. This is the heart of the glorious master the supreme guide. This is what the buddhas of the three times intend. It is also called the dharmakaya mahamudra. It is also called the luminous great perfection. It is also called the path and result. It is also called emptiness and compassion. It can be given many names, but they all point a finger at just this.

Thus it is as the glorious Rangjung Dorje said,

*Everything not true, nor false,
Like moons in water, say the wise.
This ordinary mind itself
Is dharma expanse, the victors' essence.*

Directly, whatever arises, do not change it- rest naturally. This fulfills the essence of all creation stages, completion stages, mantra recitations, and meditations.

Here you must differentiate between being distracted and not being distracted. If you are undistracted and natural, there can be neither help nor harm. That is awareness. If you get slightly distracted, it is possible that likes or dislikes might arise in your mind. On top of that, you accumulate white or black karma. Because of that, you wander in samsara. For this reason you must distinguish mind and awareness. Mind and thought are like cloud banks and must be purified. You must rely on inner awareness.

You must take sickness as the path, afflictions as the path, the bardo as the path, and delusion as the path. The heart of all these applications is to rest naturally in the essence.

There no need to bore you now.

This was kindly given by Gangshar Wangpo, who is both learned and accomplished, to the assembled students of Thrangu Tashi Choling's school Shedrup Dargye Ling, on the seventh day of the sixth month of the Fire-Bird year (August 3rd, 1957). Mangalam.

Translated by David Karma Choephel in Boudhanath, Nepal, March, 2007

Three Songs of Milarapa

The womb of the buddhas

Behold and search your unborn mind;
 Seek not for satisfaction in samsara.
 I attain all my knowledge through observing the mind within.

Thus all my thoughts become the teachings of dharma,
 And apparent phenomena are all the books one needs.
 Seeing the innate face of the self-mind is supreme,
 How can common meditation match it?

He who realizes the nature of his own mind knows
 That the mind itself is wisdom-awareness,
 And no longer makes the mistake of searching for Buddha from other
 sources.
 In fact, Buddha cannot be found by searching,
 So contemplate your own mind.
 This is the highest teaching one can practice;
 This very mind is the tathagatagarbha, buddha nature, the womb of the
 buddhas.

Mind itself

Those who realize the nature of their mind knows
 That the mind itself is wisdom-awareness,
 And no longer make the mistake of searching for enlightenment from other
 sources.
 In fact, enlightenment cannot be found by searching.
 So contemplate your own mind.
 This is the highest meditation one can practice;
 This very mind is the perfect awakened nature,
 the birth place of all the enlightened ones.

A Song of Instruction to Gampopa

Son, when simplicity dawns in the mind,
 Do not follow after conventional terms.
 There's a danger you'll get trapped in the eight Dharma's circle.
 Rest in a state free of pride.
 Do you understand this, Teacher from Central Tibet?
 Do you understand this, Takpo Lhajey?

When self-liberation dawns from within,
 Do not engage in the reasonings of logic.
 There's a danger you'll just waste your energy.
 Son, rest free of thoughts...

When you realize your own mind is emptiness,
 Do not engage in the reasoning "beyond one or many".
 There is a danger that you'll fall into a nihilistic emptiness...

When immersed in Mahamudra meditaion,
 Do not exert yourself in virtuous acts of body and speech.
 There's a danger the wisdom of nonthought will disappear.
 Son, rest uncontrived and loose...

When the signs foretold by the scriptures arise,
 Do not boast with joy or cling to them.
 There's a danger you'll get the prophecy of maras instead.
 Rest free of clinging...

When you gain resolution regarding your mind,
 Do not yearn for the higher cognitive powers.
 There's a danger you'll be carried away by the mara of pretentiousness.
 Son, rest free of fear and hope.
 Do you understand this, Teacher from Central Tibet?
 Do you understand this, Takpo Lhajey?

The Vajra Song of the First Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

The illustrious one, Vajradhara,
 who is said to possess the eight good qualities,
 is seen in human form by ordinary men like us.

You are the refuge called Padma, endowed with blessings.
 From the eight-petaled lotus dome of my heart,
 I supplicated you not to be separate even for an instant.

Though I did not have the good fortune of realization and
 liberation at once,
 I was blessed with just recognizing my own nature.

Therefore, concern for the eight worldly dharmas diminished,
 and I clearly saw the famous luminous dharmakaya.
 By mixing my mind with the guru's.
 I discovered nonthought in the midst of discursive thought,
 and within nonconcept, wisdom dawned.

Now, with the joyous appreciation of a lineage son
 of the Takpo buddha,
 I am inspired to speak out.

In the west, in Uddiyana,
 the secret treasure ground of the dakinis,
 the great siddha Tilo
 opened the treasure of the three gems.

In the north, in the hermitage of Ravishing Beautiful Flowers,
 the learned Mahapandita Naro
 showed the mark of a siddha,
 indivisible prana and mind.

In the south, in the land of herbs, the valley of Trowo,
the translator, emanated from Hevajra,
established the source of the river of all siddhas.

In the west, in the Lachi snow range,
the supreme being, Shepa Dorje,
attained the state of unity in one lifetime.

In the east, in heavenly Taklha Gampo,
the honorable physician, the second victorious one,
realized the samadhi of the tenth bhumi.

In the chakras of body, speech, and mind,
the host of siddhas of the four great and eight lesser lineages
obtained the life-force of mahamudra
and could not help but attain enlightenment.

Skilled in magnetizing through bodhichitta,
they could not help but benefit beings.

Having obtained the profound wealth,
the perfection of the two accumulations,
they could not help but become prosperous.

Fully understanding that knowing one liberates all,
they could not help but fulfill the great prophecy.

Lineage sons of these wealthy fathers
possess the great self-existing riches of this previous karma.

They are the children of snow lionesses and great garudas.
By the power of their family bloodline,
they are completely mature at once.

As followers of the lineage of Kagyu siddhas,
 their meditation is naturally born through the power of these blessings.

Bragging of their pain in many years of practice,
 proud of dwelling in indolence,
 boasting of having endured such pain,
 undermining others and haughty,
 keeping score with discursive thoughts of self and others
 in counting up the realizations of the bhumis and the paths,
 these are the qualities of the ignorant meditators in this dark age.

We do not possess these, and though I do not have the title of a siddha,
 nevertheless, through the excellent oral instructions of the example lineage,
 I have seen the wisdom of ultimate mahamudra.

Ground mahamudra is the view, understanding things as they are.
 Path mahamudra is the experience of meditation.
 Fruition mahamudra is the realization of one's mind as buddha.

I am unworthy, but my guru is good.
 Though born in the dark age, I am very fortunate.
 Though I have little perseverance, the oral instructions are profound.

As for ground mahamudra:
 There are both things as they are and the way of confusion.
 It does not incline toward either samsara or nirvana,
 And is free from the extremes of exaggeration and denigration.

Not produced by causes, not changed by conditions,
 it is not spoiled by confusion
 nor exalted by realization.
 It does not know either confusion or liberation.

Since no essence exists anywhere,

its expression is completely unobstructed and manifests everything.

Pervading all of samsara and nirvana like space,
it is the ground of all confusion and liberation,
with its self-luminous consciousness
and its alaya-vijnana.

As for the cognitive aspect of this neutral state,
its essence is empty and its nature is luminous.
These two are inseparable and are the quintessence of insight.

It is space, ungraspable as a thing.
It is spotless as a precious clear crystal.

It is the glow of the lamp of self-luminous mind.
It is inexpressible, the experience of a mute.

It is unobscured, transparent wisdom,
The luminous dharmakaya, sugatagarbha,
primordially pure and spontaneous.

It cannot be shown through analogy by anyone,
and it cannot be expressed in words.
It is the dharmadhatu, which overwhelms mind's inspection.

Established in this to begin with,
one should cut all doubts.
When one practices meditation with the view,
it is like a garuda fathoming space.
There is no fear and no doubt.

The one who meditates without the view

There is no reference point for where the true path is.
 The one who does not meditate, but merely holds the view
 is like a rich man tethered by stinginess.
 He is unable to bring appropriate fruition to himself and others.
 Joining the view and meditation is the holy tradition.

As for the ignorant aspect of this neutral state,
 One does not know one's nature because of the five causes.

In the ocean of coemergent ignorance,
 the waves of ego-fixation's confusion roll.
 Cognition becomes a self, and projections become objects,
 and so the habitual patterns of grasping and fixation solidify.
 Thus, karma accumulates and then fully ripens.

The rim of the waterwheel of samsara turns,
 but even while it turns, its essence is unstained.
 Even while it appears, it is empty of reality.

Mere appearance is the vividness of the trikaya.
 Unborn is the nature of birth;
 that unborn is unceasing.
 On the threshold of nonduality,
 there is nowhere to dwell.

From this mind, difficult to express,
 various magical displays of samsara and nirvana arise.
 Recognizing these as self-liberated is the supreme view.
 When this is realized,
 everything is suchness.

When there are no obstructions or attainments,
 this is the innate nature.

When conceptual mind is transcended,
this is the ultimate.

As for path mahamudra:
mind and the phenomenal world are mahamudra.
Coemergent mind is dharmakaya.
Coemergent appearance is the light of dharmakaya.

When the blessings of the glorious guru
and one's karma come together,
one realizes one's nature like meeting an old friend.

There is no point in much talk,
but the beginner needs various things.

One should abandon either welcoming or sending off
thoughts of past and future.

The instantaneous mind of nowness
is the unfabricated innate nature.

In meditation, there should be no trace of deliberateness.

One should not stray for an instant in confusion.

Nonwandering,
nonmeditation,
and nonfabrication are the point.

With freshness, looseness, and clarity,
in the space of the three gates of liberation,
one is mindful, establishing proper watchfulness.

one pacifies the accumulation of subtle, tangible, and gross thoughts.

Rest in the state of natural, unfabricated mind.

The four levels of experiences arise in succession,
and the sun of luminosity continually dawns.
The root of mahamudra meditation is established.
Without it, one's talk of higher realization
is like building a house without a foundation.

However, excessive desire for this is the work of Mara.

Those who persevere but have little learning
are deceived by superficial virtues
and lead themselves and others along the way to the lower realms.

Even the good experiences of bliss, luminosity, and nonthought
are the cause of samsara if one fixates on them.

When you intensify devotion in your heart,
rock meets bone in insight,
and the ultimate lineage blessing is received.

Not straying into the four strayings,
not falling into the three misunderstandings,
transcending the four joys,
free from the three conditions,
realizing through the three stages of birth,
untouched by the mind of the three great ones -
this is the self-existing nature, undefiled by experience.

Like the center of a cloudless sky,
the self-luminous mind is impossible to express.

It is the wisdom of nonthought,
beyond analogy,
just naked ordinary mind.

Not keeping to dogmatism or arrogance,
it is clearly seen as dharmakaya.

The appearance of the six sense objects,
like the moon in water,
shines in the state of wisdom.

Whatever arises is the unfabricated, innate state.
Whatever appears is the nature of mahamudra.
The phenomenal world is dharmakaya great bliss.

Both shamatha meditation of natural resting
and vipashyana, which sees the unseeable,
should not be separated but unified
in stillness, occurrence, and awareness.

Beyond abandoning discursive confusion,
beyond applying antidotes,
there will be a time when you spontaneously reach this.

When you have achieved realization,
there is nothing other than the meditative state.

At the threshold of freedom from loss and gain,
even meditation does not exist.
But for those beginners who are unable to dissolve the hairline of
conceptualization,
meditation is important.

When one practices meditation, there is experience.

This experience arises as the adornment of insight.

This path is divided into the four yogas:

One-pointedness means recognizing the nature of mind;
divided into the lesser, medium, and greater stages:
one sees the alternation of bliss and luminosity,
one masters resting in samadhi,
and experience continuously appears as luminosity.

Simplicity means realizing the mind is without root;
divided into the lesser, medium, and greater stages:
one realizes that the arising, ceasing, and dwelling are empty,
one is free from the ground and root of fixating on appearance or
emptiness,
and one resolves the complexity of all dharmas.

One taste means dissolving appearance and mind into each other;
divided into the lesser, medium, and greater stages:
all dharmas of samsara and nirvana are dissolved into equal taste,
appearance and mind become like water poured into water,
and from one taste, the various wisdoms arise.

Nonmeditation means the utter exhaustion of conceptual mind;
divided into the lesser, medium, and greater stages:
one is free from meditation and meditator,
the habitual patterns of primitive beliefs about reality
are gradually cleared away,
and the mother and son luminosity dissolve together.
The wisdom of dharmadhatu extends throughout space.

In short, in meditation:

one-pointedness means that mind is still as long as one wishes,
seeing the very nature of ordinary mind.

Simplicity means the realization of groundlessness.
 One taste means liberating
 all possible dualistic fixations through insight.
 Nonmeditation means transcending all sophistries of meditation and
 nonmeditation,
 the exhaustion of habitual patterns.

In this way, from the great lords of yogins,
 Naropa and Maitripa,
 down to the lord guru Padma Wangchen,
 the golden garland of the Kagyus,
 reached the dharmakaya kingdom of nonmeditation,
 spontaneously cleared away the darkness of the two obscurations,
 expanded the great power of the two knowledges,
 opened the treasury of benefit for the sake of others pervading space,
 and remained in the refuge of mind free from doubt.

The Kagyu lineage is known to be passed from one to another.
 It is known not by words alone, but by their meaning.
 Please guide even such a lowborn savage as myself,
 who possesses the merest mark of your noble lineage,
 quickly to the kingdom of nonmeditation.
 Kind one, please utterly exhaust my conceptual mind.

The fruition mahamudra is spoken of like this:
 The ground is receiving the transmission of the innate trikaya;
 The path is applying the key points of the view and meditation;
 and the fruition is the actualization of the stainless trikaya.

Therefore, its essence is emptiness, simplicity, dharmakaya.
 Its manifestation is the luminous nature of sambhogakaya.
 Its strength, manifold and unceasing, is nirmanakaya.

This is the sovereign of all reality.
 The nature of mahamudra is unity,
 The realm of dharmas free from accepting or rejecting.

Possessing the beauty of unconditioned bliss,
 it is the great and vast wealth of wisdom.
 It is the natural form of kindness transcending thought.

Through prajna, it does not dwell in samsara.
 Through karuna, it does not dwell in nirvana.

Through effortlessness,
 buddha activity is spontaneously accomplished.

The luminosity of ground and path,
 mother and son,
 dissolve together.
 The ground and fruition embrace one another.
 Buddha is discovered in one's mind.
 The wish-fulfilling treasure overflows within.

E ma! How wonderful and marvelous!

Since in the view of mahamudra
 Analysis does not apply,
 Cast mind-made knowledge far away.

Since in the meditation of mahamudra
 there is no way of fixating on a thought,
 abandon deliberate meditation.

Since in the action of mahamudra
 there is no reference point for any action,
 be free from the intention to act or not.

Since in the fruition of mahamudra
 there is no attainment to newly acquire,
 cast hopes, fears, and desires far away.

This is the depth of the mind of all Kagyus.
 It is the only path on which the victorious ones and their sons Journey.

Theirs is the upaya that reverses the vicious circle of existence,
 and the dharma that brings enlightenment in one life.

Here is the essence of all the teachings, sutras, and tantras.

May I and all sentient beings pervading space
 together attain the simultaneity of realization and liberation,
 and attain supreme mahamudra.

In order not to transgress the command seal of emptiness endowed with all
 the supreme aspects, the one whose knowledge is transcendent and who
 manifested in the form of the vajraholder, I, the subject of Padma, the
 Yonten Gyatso Lodro Thaye, composed this at Kunzang Dechen Osal Ling
 on the left slope of the third Devikoti, Tsari-like Jewel Rock. Shubham.

From Meditation Instructions by Garchen Rinpoche

The purpose of meditation is to realize the nature of mind.

You should begin your meditation by taking refuge and cultivating boundless love because when you meditate on the basis of love, your mind becomes all-pervasive, and only in such a boundless state will you realize the nature of mind as it truly is. Love is also your actual refuge, your actual protection...

Once you have given rise to boundless love, rest in a natural state while sustaining clear awareness...

A Song by His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje

Feeling great sorrow over the monstrous views and actions of the people of this dark age, and a link with the mind of my only father guru having arisen, I wrote this song calling on him to dispel the torment of my thoughts.

*

AH HO! Embodiment of all refuges, dharmakaya Vajradhara,
Glorious body of the guru, inseparable from truth,
To you, with overpowering yearning, I sing this song.

Awesome devotion pervades my mind,
and the natural state is brilliantly clear,
but unable to remain in this penetrating state,
how confused I am in discursive and analytical thoughts!

Contemplating this, I am mindful of the Karma Kagyu,
and focus on the self-existing ground of knowledge and emptiness.

This ordinary mind of nowness
is untouched by fixations on birth and liberation;
its unceasing manifestation unshaken by projections.

The realms of samsara and nirvana appear simultaneously
This effortless path is the marvelous mahamudra.

Seeing the self-existing ground of insight,
the gaits of samsara and nirvana fall into step,
and the apparent confusion of the three worlds collapse into space.

The trikaya is arrived at while in the natural state,
so why look forward to future results?

This is the special teaching of the Kagyupas.
Thinking on that, I emulate my forefathers.

My followers who depend on me,
without desire for this life, think on the hereafter.

Though outwardly adorned with monks' robes,
saffron, like the clouds of evening,
men's inward discipline of the three yantras is like horns on a hare;
I am sad that the two stages of the path are not meditated upon.

Tomorrow at the time of death,
the regretful mind may be overcome by darkness;
Because of that, vigorously study, contemplate, meditate.

May I raise the victory banner of the practicing lineage to the
summit of the world!
May I attain well-being for myself and others on this very seat!
Gurus, mamos and gonpos with their brothers and sisters,
so that fortunate circumstances may bring this about
May my wishes forthwith be fulfilled!

*

In general, real conviction in the view and meditation of the Kagyupas is
scarcely to be found. Those who show the outward form of Dharma but do
not practice the actions of Dharma cause me to feel sad.

For a long time my secretary and my retreat master Dechen had been
requesting me to write a song such as this. Though they asked me

repeatedly, it did not come about. But this time, on the appropriate occasion of the preparation of a new edition of the woodblock of The Oceans of Songs of the Kagyu Fathers, as I was again pressed by my head of Discipline, Drupgyu Tendar, in order not to reject his request, I, the glorious Sixteenth Karmapa spoke this spontaneously from whatever arose in my mind.

Mangalam

On Transmission, by Thich Nhat Hanh

When I look into the person of a disciple, whether she is a monastic or a lay person, I would like to see that my teaching has only one aim – to transmit my insight, my freedom and my joy to my disciples. If I look at her and I see these elements in her eyes, I am very glad. I feel that I have done well in transmitting the best that is in me. Looking at a disciple's way of walking, of smiling, of greeting and of being, I can see whether my teaching has been fruitful or not. That is what is called "transmission".

Transmission isn't organised by a ceremony with a lot of incense and chanting. Transmission happens every day in a very simple way. If the teacher/student relationship is good, then that transmission is realised in every moment of our daily life.

On Guru Yoga

To blend your mind with the teacher's mind, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

Homage to my Spiritual Teacher

The way to cultivate devotion

Sustaining the View, by Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana

The Real Meaning of Guru, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

A quote from Garchen Rinpoche

A quote from Lama Yeshe

To blend your mind with the teacher's mind is the most profound of all practices, and the shortest path of realization.

- Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

* * *

Homage to my Spiritual Teacher, the Holy Exemplar,
in whom all Enlightened Qualities are found

* * *

The way to cultivate devotion, by Ericc Solomon

The way to cultivate devotion is to remind ourselves again and again about the great kindness of our teacher.

We can consider that our guru is the embodiment of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, manifesting as a spiritual friend to guide us.

When we begin any practice, we can imagine our teacher in the sky before us...

Then from their heart, rays of rainbow light stream out to touch our heart and then they dissolve into us.

Our mind and their mind merge as one.

* * *

Guru Yoga - Sustaining the View, by Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

It is said in the teachings that during the day you can visualise the Guru above the crown of your head, and at night in your heart. During the day, visualise your Guru seated in a lotus above the crown of your head. At night time when going to sleep, you can visualise that the Guru above your crown dissolves into you and remains in a sphere of light within your heart. This is a practice one may apply at the time of going to sleep, and then sleep with the Guru in your heart.

Through this practice, you will receive blessings, and your practice of sustaining the View (tawa kyongwa; Ita ba skyong ba) will improve. Through relying on the blessing lineage (jinlab gyu; byin rlabs brgyud) you will be led to the practice of sustaining the View.

The key point is to dissolve the Guru into our heart, and then truly merge our mind with the mind of the Guru, remaining in the View of the nature of mind that the Guru has introduced. Throughout the day and night, every time the Guru has dissolved into our heart, we rest in that and recognise the empty nature of this experience. Within that state of blessing, we are able to experience emptiness.

We must allow ourselves to continue in this experience of emptiness that has come about through the Guru's blessing. At some point, clear luminosity (osal) and self-knowing awareness (rang gi rigpa) will arise within that experience of emptiness; we have only to recognise it.

If we practice this as much as possible, the practice will purify many sins and obscurations (dig drib), and we will definitely gain a lot of blessings from doing so. The key point is that as the mind rests in emptiness, the Guru's blessings are received more effectively. It is the experience of emptiness that allows us to properly receive the Guru's blessings and for them to remain within us. Through receiving blessings, we gather the

accumulation of merit (sonam kyi tsog). Through resting in emptiness, we gather the accumulation of wisdom (yeshe kyi tsog).

In Guru Yoga practice, we visualise the Guru in front of us in the appearance of our master. He symbolises the Guru. However, the ultimate Guru (don gyi lama) is one's own awareness wisdom (rang rigpa'i yeshe), the primordial wisdom (yeshe) of self knowing awareness (rang gi rigpa).

- From Oral Instructions on the Practice of Guru Yoga

* * *

The True Mind of each sentient being leads and guides every sentient being.

- From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana

* * *

The Real Meaning of Guru

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

In guru yoga, the essential point to understand is that all the buddhas are of one taste in the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the absolute guru, and this is all the buddhas. This is the very heart of guru yoga practice.

* * *

In the expanse of primordial wisdom, all the Buddhas are one.

- Garchen Rinpoche

* * *

The essence of the guru is wisdom: the perfectly clear and radiant state of mind in which bliss and the realization of emptiness are inseparably unified.

- Lama Yeshe

Essays by J Espada

Where there is respect for meditation

From Selections on Emptiness and the Nature of Mind

The Single All-Sufficient Method

A Necessary Balance

Intrinsic Intelligence and Buddha Nature

Abiding in the Ground, and Arising from the Ground

Faith, Devotion, and Blessings on the Path of Liberation

Why the Non-Conceptual Method Works for Some But Not for Others

For A Teaching to be Effective, It Needs to Be Timely

The Nature of Mind

The Non-Conceptual Method

From Essential Bardo Teachings

When there is respect for meditation

{This essay is from *A Resource for the Practice of Meditation*}

When there is a deep appreciation, respect and reverence for meditation, the Doctrine will flourish; but when the appreciation, respect and reverence for meditation decreases, the Doctrine will decline

– The Buddha

In Buddhism, understanding and cherishing what the practice of meditation can accomplish for us is essential. Without it, there will be no interest in its practice, and no study, or engagement in meditation, and without practice, of course, there is no result.

Buddhism at its best is a functioning contemplative tradition, with individual practitioners linked to each other and to a rich heritage of teachers and realized beings, past and present. *The key to every benefit and virtue we might develop is our right practice of meditation.* Without this one essential practice, the mind wanders endlessly, staying on the surface of things. We start projects, and they don't get finished; we begin a line of thought, and end up somewhere else entirely, and what's worse, the mind is subject to all of the negative emotions that confuse and veil the mind. Such is the usual untrained mind.

When we are talking about the flourishing of a tradition, we are referring to people understanding what its effective practices consist of, and then taking up those practices diligently and enthusiastically over time, and gaining the result, which is increasing degrees of freedom from suffering, more and more joy and peace, kindness, sensitivity, and availability and resourcefulness to help others.

All this, we can see, relates to each generation and each person taking up the practice of meditation for him or herself. Without this, at best what we get are borrowed ideas, or what's worse, concepts that are misunderstood. When the ideas are not based on practice, they may sound fine, especially to other people who aren't practicing, but they lead nowhere. When the doctrine declines in this way, of course then there is no useful result, and people are completely right to say of such a path that it is of little value.

Now, what is meant by meditation? The word is common but the meaning in this context is both simple and profound.

Ringu Tulku points out that there are two words from the Sanskrit that are being translated as meditation. One is *bhavana*, or cultivation, as in the cultivation of loving kindness, or patience, or gratitude; The other is *dhyana*, which is developing the continuity and strength of our attention, with ease and clarity. Sometimes this is translated as collectedness, or concentration.

We can say that whenever there is effective bhavana, the quality of dhyana is present in it.

Meditation in this sense simply means the method we use to calm, quiet, sharpen and clarify the mind. This makes it flexible, able to be put to any good use. By having the qualities brought out by specifically this kind of meditation, we can find every other method is made more effective.

In describing this fundamental practice, Ajahn Chah said,

Strengthening the mind is not done by making it move around, as is done to strengthen the body, but by bringing it to a halt, bringing it to rest...

In *Straight From the Heart*, Ajahn Maha Boowa says:

When we're resting so as to give rise to stillness, the stillness is the strength of mind that can reinforce discernment and make it agile... Practice these things at separate times...

And Ringu Tulku adds:

Samatha is a way to work on our mind, a very important way to make our mind calm, you can say, to make our mind flexible. I would like to say, flexible.

When you talk about tamed, it's about being flexible - your mind does what you want it to do. You know? If you want to think, you can make it think. If you want to rest, you can make it rest. If you want to focus, you can make it focus. If we can have that kind of control, or flexibility in our mind, then we have got a tamed mind, a trained mind. So the objective for shamatha meditation, basically, is for that; and,

If you can do this kind of practice, then every other kind of meditation becomes easy.

I have found this to be true.

Meditation can have such power because the mind itself is powerful. If we know how to use it, we can accomplish meaningful goals, and have something of lasting value to share with others.

When I go to centers, listen to modern teachers, or look at the average books on psychology or religion, I find very little on this basic practice of meditation, which leads me to think that in many places the doctrine is in decline. There doesn't seem to be much understanding or interest in the fundamental practice of being still and quieting and clarifying attention and strengthening the mind over time. The result is then naturally a lack of depth and effectiveness of practice, no matter how noble sounding or exalted the language used.

We may want to do ten thousand things, and indeed the needs around us are extensive, but our own skill and effectiveness depends on just how much of our innate resources we are able to access. This in turn depends on something so simple that it's easy to overlook.

I turn again to this teaching of the Buddha's because it is where I find myself these days, in need of being reminded vividly that all the results we seek for ourselves and all our relations depend on that basic practice of quiet attentiveness we call meditation, done devotedly and compassionately, at once with a great aim, and with each particular event, and breath, and posture in mind.

* * *

A note on the word *concentration*: I've noticed that many teachers avoid the term concentration when talking about this kind meditation. Their reasons are that our common connotations for this word feel somewhat tense, and that is not the kind of effort that can be sustained for long.

These days however, I'm thinking that those who know what this practice is referring to will understand and use the word rightly.

The advantage on the other hand, of becoming comfortable with calling this practice, of collectedness, and the gathering of attention *concentration*, is that we are all already familiar with degrees of concentration in our daily lives, and at times when a special, focussed attention has been needed. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu calls this *natural concentration*. Our experience is then a resource we can draw from in self cultivation.

If we think of our practice at times as samadhi, and at times as concentration, cultivating of the continuity of attention and the strength of

awareness, jhana, shinay, calm abiding, and meditation, the nature of this essential practice will become clear.

From Selections on Emptiness and the Nature of Mind

From Negation and Affirmation

In Buddhist wisdom teachings, the truth is expressed in two different ways. The first is with the language of negation - the insight into annata, or shunyata, the non self nature of all that is. The other is affirmative, referring in the Mahamudra, Great Perfection and Zen teachings to the Nature of Mind, or to Buddha Nature. These are not contradictory. When understood, in fact, they compliment each other.

Here are two verses from different eras that show the relationship between negation and the truth that is affirmed.

In the Pali Canon, we find:

*He regards as empty what is not there.
and whatever remains, he discerns as present
This accords with actuality,
is undistorted in meaning, and pure.*

And in the 3rd century, in the text titled, In Praise of the Dharmadhatu, Nagarjuna wrote,

*When a metal garment,
which has become stained with contaminations
and is to be cleansed by fire,
is put in fire,
its stains are burned but it is not,*

*So, with regard to the mind of clear light
which has the stains of desire and so forth,
its stains are burned by the fire of wisdom
but its nature, clear light, is not...*

From Uncommon Emptiness - The Emptiness of No-self

There are different ways to realize wisdom in the Buddhist sense, and in every approach we hear about we can ask, *'Is this liberating?'* If it is, then we can be sure we've arrived at Right View. If not, we can ask why not, and increase our understanding by that much.

One of the ways of going about freeing the mind as the Buddha taught is via analysis. This way is more gradual, and certain, as long as a person is able to make the transition from conceptual understanding to the direct perception of the truth revealed through inquiry.

The other method for going beyond delusion and suffering is to see the nature of mind. This awakened state by itself can remove misperception and its traces.

As Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche said

By residing in the free, brilliant awareness of our authentic nature, we chop down every habitual pattern and every bit of grasping instantly within its own natural state.

Experiencing the Nature of Mind

In his book *Opening to Our Primordial Nature*, Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche says that:

As your practice (of recognizing the nature of mind) develops power, it will spontaneously remove the obscurations since they are not part of the primordial nature. This practice will reveal more and more of the basic ground of primordial wisdom.

It is like the heat of the sun in springtime penetrating the cold ground so that green plants naturally begin to grow. When meditation practice causes primordial wisdom to shine, the enlightened qualities manifest according to one's level of meditative stabilization.

The two obscurations in Buddhism are the qualitative obscurations, and the obscurations of conceptual thought.

That one kind of meditation can dispel these two types of obscuration is a wonder and a blessing. For those who can develop the power of this kind of meditation, no other practices are necessary. For those fortunate ones, they call this 'the single all sufficient method.'

The Single All-Sufficient Method

Ultimately, all of the Buddhist teachings are aimed at liberation. There are instructions that go directly to this point, of teaching freedom through insight, and those practices, such as calming the mind, and ethical ways of living, that support our freedom from suffering, and having the ability to benefit others in lasting ways.

The Wisdom teachings themselves can be further divided into those that cultivate insight by a gradual approach, using analysis first to get free from grasping at our concepts, and meditating on the result, and those that encourage us to directly experience the inherent freedom of the mind, which is our true nature. For those who can take this as the path to understanding and liberation, this way is quickest, the most direct.

While most Buddhist Wisdom teachings identify the cause of suffering as *self grasping ignorance*, the Great Perfection and Mahamudra lineages take it a step further and recognize *unawareness* (ma-rigpa, a-vidya) as the ground from which such self grasping emerges. It is the necessary basis they say, exactly like being asleep is the basis for dreaming.

When someone is awake to our fundamental nature, that is open, boundless and clear, peaceful and joyful, by contrast, then *all of* the delusions that derive from any lesser view of ourselves are not created, and the remainder of those that have been produced are gradually and *completely* dissipated. Hearing this, who would not be intrigued?

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche said:

By residing in the free, brilliant awareness of our authentic nature, we chop down every habitual pattern and every bit of grasping instantly within its own natural state.

Tulku Urgyen said:

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.

And Khen Rinpoche again:

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.

In some ways, this is a distinct approach to developing our wisdom and manifesting our positive qualities. It is a path and practice, certainly, for those with interest and keen intelligence, and who have some amount of faith right from the beginning, and are willing to let the mind clarify and reveal itself, naturally, and effortlessly.

Ani Tenzin Palmo said

What all these meditations, Mahamudra and Dzogchen in particular are designed for, is to help us to recognize the nature of the mind. 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 what we are trying to get first, is a direct recognition of the nature of the mind. My lama, Khamtrul Rinpoche, 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 relative practices, we should know, come from this, and they also lead to the experience of more fully knowing our true nature.

In *The Beauty of Awakened Mind*, Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche says

Shamatha, bodhicitta, joy, and devotion are not separate from Dzogchen - they bring out the beautiful qualities that are inherent within our own enlightened minds. These practices soften our hearts, raise our energy, and increase our confidence and strength. When this happens we naturally open to the view of emptiness.

Of course, this is a challenge to talk about, since it's beyond anything we could say or think about it, without turning it into a static mental object. The key teaching in the Mahamudra and Great Perfection teaching therefore is to be aware of our experience, but without grasping or clinging to anything *at all*.

This experience is beyond conceptual thought. It is beyond ego, and delusion. It's like glimpsing the clear blue sky where before our usual experience was one of weather, clouds and storms, and grey overcast conditions.

For those who can take up this approach to wisdom practice, it's said that it is *the single all accomplishing method*, meaning that whatever kind of obscured mind or difficult emotions we have, such as anger, fear, sadness, craving, jealousy, or pride - this one practice can dispel them all. These are likened to different kinds of clouds, and the practice of resting in the bright and clear nature of mind is like the one sun that dispels them all.

In *Rainbow Painting*, Tulku Urgyen says:

Sometimes the term 'universally freed' is mentioned. In other words, it does not matter which emotion or thought takes place, all are freed by recognizing rigpa. 'Universally freed' means that everything is freed; it is not that only one type of

emotion is liberated upon arising while the others are not. All the 84,000 types of disturbing emotions are liberated immediately in a single moment without the slightest remainder.

Seeing our fundamental nature, unchanging, and beyond birth and death, is seeing nirvana itself, the peace, purity and perfection that we and all others have with us at all times.

Garab Dorje's Three Words That Strike the Essential Point say:

*Recognize your true nature
Become decisive about its significance,
and,
Gain Confidence in Liberation...*

One name for this approach to resolving difficulties and attaining freedom is Dzogchen, or the Great Perfection. It is also called Maha-Ati, and is thought of in the Nyingma Lineage as the Pinnacle, containing all the other Buddhist vehicles and realizations in it. Refuge, and Guru Yoga, the Four Immeasurables, calm and insight, bodhicitta and the Six Perfections - *all these are included* in this one experience of knowing our own Buddha nature.

*May we all receive and practice the teachings
that bring us to the complete realization of our own true nature
and lead all others to that very same state!*

A Necessary Balance

I've had the good fortune this year of finding the teachings of Ringu Tulku. He has a number of fine books, and his students have assembled and made available a wonderful collection of his recorded talks.

One of the sets of talks is on the Stages of Calm Abiding Meditation, and this was interesting to me for a couple of reasons. First, these teachings are usually presented from the Gelugpa lineage, and so I enjoyed hearing his presentation from a Kagyud approach to meditation.

The other reason I have enjoyed these talks, and benefit from them is that their emphasis matches a need that I have, personally, when engaging the Calm Abiding teachings. I do tend to over-think a subject sometimes, and so I find Ringu Tulku's approach very helpful. As long as I'm subject to what they call conceptual proliferation, then this is a necessary balance for me, to hold these teachings lightly.

His emphasis is on *spaciousness, lightness, simplicity, and relaxation*.

It's interesting to note how when we learn a lineage's approach to a basic practice of meditation, right from the outset, we are orienting ourselves in a way that naturally leads to their deeper teachings. For example, following the Gelugpa presentation of these teachings, a person develops an incisive intelligence that leads to liberating insight meditation. In the case of the Kagyud lineages, the wisdom teachings are called Mahamudra, the non-conceptual, direct knowing of the Nature of Mind.

In one of their prayers, there is the aspiration that

May meditation be free from intellectualization...

and Longchenpa said,

*In the unborn nature of mind,
the pure state, like the sky,
events within the mind are not solidified,
but left to fade and vanish,
like a heap of clouds...*

*Meditate on what is, and eternally has been so -
the undistracted awareness of simplicity...*

Ringu Tulku starts by talking about the qualities of mind that we use in meditation, as *awareness*, and *mindfulness*.

With mindfulness, Lama Yeshe said, you know what you are doing, and why you are doing it.

You are aware of what is happening, and you know what to do, says Ringu Tulku.

He also mentions what is sometimes translated as *conscientiousness*.

The then goes on to say that:

Sometimes I think there are too many methods in Tibetan Buddhism.

You need to have one solid practice, and then just do that.

The Stages of Meditation are about what you practice.

and that, when it comes to a practice of meditation,

The simpler the better.

He continues, saying:

We are always, running, running away from something, or towards something. The only way not to run is to relax, but with awareness, and to practice lightly...

Meditation in this way can be very restful. We are resting the mind peacefully.

and,

There is a need for mindfulness, but also a spacious mindfulness.

When your mind becomes too concentrated, too focussed, (the mind too withdrawn) then you can either become dull, and go to sleep, or you can become tense.

If you can make your mind more relaxed and spacious, practicing lightly, then it's more comfortable, like a holiday.

If our minds are spacious, he says, then thoughts can be happening, and we're not disturbed by them...

This kind of meditation is very subtle. It's not about *trying* so much as understanding how to settle the mind.

He says,

Calm and clarity have to be together... here, we are not creating additional concepts...

Sometimes too much thinking and analysis is not very useful

and he recommends becoming friendly with meditation, and enjoying being in our natural state.

In his conclusion on the subject, his view is that

It's good to understand the stages of meditation, but it's not good to think about them too much... Am I on the first stage? or the second? or in between?

Don't try to be too perfect...

We should just practice, without judging it too much.

I especially enjoyed hearing him then talk about the yanas, or 'vehicles' of practice, and saying that 'each person their own yana', and saying, 'There are as many yanas as there are people'. This has been my feeling as well. It's up to each of us to see what is most helpful to us in our practice, and in our lives.

Intrinsic Intelligence and Buddha Nature

*Don't be surprised, don't be startled;
all things will arrange themselves.*

*Don't cause a disturbance, don't exert pressure;
all things will clarify themselves...*

- From the Huainanzi

*Sitting quietly, doing nothing,
Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself*

- Basho

Depending on the person, it may be enough to just sit quietly in meditation, letting the mind become clear, for wisdom-insight to manifest. It should be known that *it can* happen this way sometimes, and that this is only possible because we have a wonderful, innate intelligence that can guide us.

In this paradigm, Buddha Nature is the potential we all have to find freedom and ease, and awakening, and revealing this potential is the purpose of all Buddhist study and practice.

It can also happen that our innate intelligence remains covered over, and, lacking good instruction and encouragement, a person can waste a great deal of time and effort in sitting, standing, and walking meditation, and not get any meaningful result. They may even end up worse for it.

The reason some people do not gain a good result is they are not suited for this kind of meditation, and, they have not been given useful guidance to realize their nature. Their teachers are partly to blame here as well.

It should be said though that *there is* a basis for the idea that just sitting is enough to free the mind from wrong views and the afflictive emotions.

Every yogic tradition, from those of the solitary forest meditators, to the Great Perfection, Mahamudra, Taoism, Chan and Zen base their practice and realization of our indestructible, innate intelligence, and its natural unfolding.

For many through the generations the efficacy of this approach has proven its validity. For the right person at the right time, they will tell you, it works just as they say.

When the Chinese sages said that *all things will arrange themselves*, they were speaking a profound truth about this inherent intelligence we all share, and its marvelous functioning.

There's an ease, or an effortlessness to this approach, allied with a deep trust in our inherent nature. When the conditions are right, and we do not interfere, *all things clarify themselves*, and *Spring comes, and the grass grows by itself*.

What could be more amazing than that?

Contemporary teachers emphasize that we need to look honestly at our own capacity for what may be a very simple practice, after all, realizing the nature of mind. They then add that there are other practices we can do, if needed, so that this method is most effective.

They tell us, look carefully: If through sitting and walking, our mind becomes more clear, dispelling ignorance, then we are on the right track.

See for yourself what you need, and what is sufficient for you. Is this not a vital matter?

Abiding in the Ground, and Arising from the Ground

I had an interesting experience lately, of what they call, 'the ground' in Tibetan Buddhism.

I was feeling unwell, dull, fatigued and scattered, and when I looked at my mind, it seemed so ordinary, and lacking anything positive that an image came to mind, of a tan, windswept, rocky ground. I looked at it a while, with the feeling that this was exactly how I was feeling - it was barren, with very little sense of possibility - 'nothing much can grow here' is how I would have put it into words.

But then I somehow remembered the deeper meaning of 'the ground' in Buddhism - as *the source of all possibilities*.

Seeing the nature of mind is the basis of meditation practice in the Mahamudra, Great Perfection, and Vajrayana teachings. It is of a completely different order of seeing than the usual.

In the Buddha Nature teachings, they say we have all the qualities of the Noble Ones within us, the freedom, joy, peace and strength we see so clearly in our teachers. We don't recognize this in ourselves or in others because of our obscurations, but it is there, immutable, not effected by change, it is

*Not improved by seeing it,
and also not diminished in the least when it is not known*

Intuiting this even for a moment changes everything for a person.

On that day, I meditated on the sense of this intrinsic nature. Still looking at what seemed to be ordinary ground, or, a consciousness without any positive potentials, I asked, *Is this really true? Is it really this way?*

I kept looking, and asking... something else was there, I could tell...

Feeling out of sorts, tired and dull, the mind was mixed together with those feelings, but I saw then that something miraculous can also happen. Gradually, a clarity separated itself from conditions, and a feeling of freshness and peace in the midst of it all arose. This was greatly healing at that time, much to my astonishment.

When they say that we *abide in the ground*, the image that comes to mind can be of a ground, an ordinary mind, with nothing above the surface. We can easily underestimate, and then denigrate ourselves or others if we don't know what is held within. This is what is called in Tibetan Buddhism 'ordinary perception' the root of samsara. Our intuition *can* wake up to what is within, but it is a challenge.

When we see what *arises from the ground*, in the case of a realized person, then what was within the whole time becomes clear.

They have a way of showing this in the art from the Tibetan Tradition. A painting will show a lake, with a lotus rising from it, that is translucent, made of the same substance, and then on that will be a moon seat and a bodhisattva-divinity, such as Avalokiteshvara, Tara, the Healing Buddha, or Manjushri. These represent enlightened qualities we all have. They abide in the ground, and they can arise from the ground.

Our patience, loving kindness, compassion, strength, and peace are all capacities we all have inherently. Sometimes we have to wait, or go through trials to know this, but they are there. I call this *the holy amen hallelujah* of Buddhism.

They say the Buddha Nature teachings at once keep us from putting ourselves down in the least, and from feeling superior *to anyone*. It's impossible when we see - this is the nature of mind for everyone.

Seeing this also leads naturally to compassionate activity, for as long as there is even one being who does not know this freedom, joy and ease.

As it says in the Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra

*While the nature of all beings has always been complete,
not knowing this, they wander so very long in samsara,
undergoing every kind of hardship
For the boundless suffering of sentient beings,
may compassion effortlessly arise...*

Meditation, in the sense of familiarizing ourselves with our true nature, clears away obscurations, and causes manifold positive qualities to come to fruition.

Em Ah Ho! How wondrous!

In times such as these, our challenge in many places is to gain insight, and then to maintain it through all conditions. This is the best gift we can offer our families, communities and world.

*May all beings realize their true nature,
find freedom and ease, and fulfillment*

Faith, Devotion, and Blessings on the Path of Liberation

When studying different Buddhist Wisdom teachings, we can notice how the insight they are pointing to is the same, and, we can also honor the unique qualities of each approach.

There are different ways to come to self knowledge, and to freedom from suffering. Some traditions rely on analysis to see through illusion. Study and debate, logic and the use of reasoning are the methods that lead to insight, revelation, and freedom from wrong views.

We can also have an experience of greater understanding and freedom through connecting deeply with an accomplished teacher. This is something that is not mentioned in most traditions.

*Faith comes in a few different ways. First, there is the *intimation* of a greater truth, something in us that says, 'Yes, this is the way to go'.

This becomes *verified faith*, as we follow our intuition. Our trust in a teacher or a tradition proves itself. We become healthier, more at peace, open to others and responsive.

After this, and higher than these two is *unshakable faith*. Having this kind of trust calms and steadies the mind. It becomes more clear, and experiencing the nature of mind happens quite naturally.

This kind of faith and trust is a little more of a challenge to talk about, because we're reaching now to some of the deepest connections a person can make with another in their lifetime.

When we speak of devotion to a teacher, this is something that is well known in Indian spirituality, but less so here in the West.

When we meet a teacher, and there is a deep karmic connection, something can happen that is inexplicable to the rational mind. At this point in our history here in the West, there are already a good number of stories of highly intelligent, educated and independent people being overwhelmed by such a meeting; they spontaneously cry, their heart opens, and right away there is a love and a trust they could not have imagined only moments before.

When there is this kind of a connection between a holy being and a student, it is unmistakable, rare and precious. As Ringu Tulku said, in meeting the spiritual teacher, half the journey is already complete. We can have an experience of awakening and insight in a moment, directly.

This is not easy to talk about, and it's certainly not the path for everyone. In fact, the progressive path is still often recommended in the Mahamudra tradition, even for those who have had such a profound connection and experience. It is considered safer, with less possibility of steps being left out.

The upside of faith and devotion as a path should be spoken as well, however, and praised as it should be, for those who can take this path.

It's possible that connecting with the enlightened mind of a realized teacher communicates more in a brief time than through years of study. I can say, I have some small experience of this happening. It is mysterious, and tangible.

They say in some lineages that it's possible to meet the mind of a teacher through his writings, or by seeing a blessed statue- and Indian spirituality would add- through dream or vision in meditation - and although this sounds like it's speaking metaphorically, the truth of it is, *this can actually happen.*

This is something that can't be manipulated, or bought, or else I'm sure everyone would take this easier path. Step by step learning by comparison at times can feel laborious, fragmentary, and very very slow. This is more a path of learning by intuition, and through love.

Connecting with an enlightened teacher communicates blessings. The energy is purifying, healing, illuminating, enriching, and vivifying. It brings with it a feeling of safety, and a keen, heightened awareness.

Faith and devotion we can notice here are related. Faith is *an openness*, or we can say, *a trusting receptivity*. Sometimes this comes after careful reflection, and sometimes it is just there - immediately, and beyond any amount of reason. It's amazing when this happens, and it is so unusual that it calls for our full attention. This is a kind of awakening in itself, with some part of ourselves knowing in a new way, and deeply trusting another.

Devotion comes soon after this, sensing the exceptional qualities of our teacher, as a realized being. These exceptional ones teach more by who they are than what they say. I have had the thought that *these are people I can learn from my entire life...* they are like looking up at the great Himalaya mountains, and seeing more and more...

Ringu Tulku describes devotion as *inspiration*, and, *an opening of the heart*.

As I mentioned, this is not at all the usual way of talking about learning, or about liberating realization, especially here in the West. Each approach has its own special strengths, and can be taken on their own terms, whatever works best for us.

*When it comes to liberation, it's in the Mahamudra and Great Perfection traditions that we hear of the great qualities of devotion.

Here are a few teachers speaking about this profound quality:

Simply by receiving the blessing of the lineage, we can automatically develop a meditative state even if we have had no meditation practice previously.

- Thangu Rinpoche

When we think with devotion of a past great teacher who has great wisdom and compassion, his or her qualities will be transmitted to our minds through the power of the unbroken lineage.

- Garchen Rinpoche

If one just focuses on devotion one does not need to spend years studying debate, philosophy, grammar, art and so forth. In the past, thousands of practitioners attained accomplishment through the path of devotion combined with the paths of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

- Tulku Urgyen

and,

Mahamudra meditation develops strongly in a state of devotion.

- Ringu Tulku

Devotion is such a unique and precious human quality. With devotion, the mind is vividly awake, enthusiastic, and present. This is a kind of love, one that acts like a magnet for the blessings we receive from our teacher and the lineage, of inspiration, light and strength, and joy.

The closest we can come to describe devotion to a spiritual teacher, for someone who has not yet had such an experience is to say that it's something like being in love. The object of our affection is in our heart continually, shining there, bringing us joy. We cherish this connection.

It can be like this with a Noble Spiritual Friend, believe it or not, and it's possible that the connection goes even deeper. They open us to depths we didn't know we had.

A realized being, a Buddha, shows us something no ordinary relationship can ever give, and that is the way to liberation from the entirety of samsara. They themselves embody this inner freedom, peace and joy, and that is precious beyond measure. It's greater than anything else in the world. When we have doubts about the teachings, or about our own capacities, we need only think of them. They show us directly what is possible as human beings.

Since it's good for us to know and respect all valid spiritual paths, I've written these few celebratory words.

*May we all realize complete freedom,
and lead all others, without a single exception
to that very same state!*

Why the Non-Conceptual Method Works for Some But Not for Others

It may be that the reason non-conceptual meditation is effective for some but not for others is on account of the different latent dispositions people have. These tendencies go by different names in the teachings. Sometimes they are called 'seeds', other times, wholesome roots. What they refer to is the result of past experience, or learning, that can be activated through different spiritual practice.

I know this is a different understanding of the mind we usually go by. In most cases, without saying it specifically, the general idea is that our minds are more or less the same, and that if we introduce something like quiet sitting and walking meditation, the mind we bring to it is more or less a tabula rasa - a blank slate, waiting to have something written on it.

This is very different than the idea of mind in Buddhism, where even if we don't account for past lives, the verifiable basis we can get to know is this consciousness that retains past experiences, and that can draw from what we've learned.

For someone who has studied and practiced in any of the approaches to liberation that employ rational thought, analysis, debate and inquiry, those experiences form a basis that is then very useful when taking up non-conceptual meditation. We are able to find freedom on a deeper, more subtle level.

On the other hand, if the strength of discernment is not yet developed in a person's mind, and they are introduced to Zen or Ch'an, Dzogchen or Mahamudra, the result may be peace, or relaxation, but they may go no further with it. For some, these are not liberating teachings.

If we widen our consideration of our mind, and view our experience in the way Buddhism traditionally understands it, as unfolding over many

lifetimes, then we can also have a broader understanding of karmic affinities.

The only way to know if we connect with a certain practice is to try it out and see what results we get. For some, it is immediate and undeniable, that this is a path that can be fruitful. For others, it may take some time to know whether this practice is for us. Perhaps a different path would bring a better result.

According to Buddhist psychology, our mind contains all we have experienced, the knowledge transmitted to us by our ancestors and culture, as well as the values and struggles yet to be resolved. All this factors into how we respond when we meet a spiritual path, and practice according to the guidelines offered.

*May we all find the ways that work best for us,
to bring us lasting peace,
well being, and joy*

Here follows two selections that relate to this theme, of why non-conceptual practice may or may not work for an individual. They are on the quality of mind that we bring to practice. While practice itself may improve the mind, often it is the what is present when we begin that determines the result.

The first is on the discerning quality of the mind, and the second on what we generally refer to as the heart as it relates to non-conceptual practice.

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 letter- on wisdom and compassion

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 obscuration 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.

For A Teaching to be Effective, It Needs to Be Timely

The Buddha and the sages that have followed him have all shown their wisdom and compassion by meeting people right where they are, and giving them teachings that are appropriate. Words may be true, but they have to be timely as well.

Nowhere is this more apparent than when we come to wisdom teachings, such as the clear, direct instructions of Mahamudra. They sound so simple, but as one of my teachers here in San Francisco, Lama Lodro said after introducing the basic meditation of resting in the natural state - see if you can keep it. In other words, see if you are able to practice this way, if not, there are other practices we can do to make the mind clear and calm, and able to take up this kind of meditation.

Perhaps we need to see for ourselves how this works, rather than take another person's advice about it, but it does help at times to know what are traditionally considered requisites in Mahamudra practice, and why.

For those who need more clarification, or the cultivation of certain qualities for Mahamudra or Dzogchen to be effective, there are other related teachings and practices. These include devotion, purification, cultivating calm and clarity, discernment and the awakened qualities of the heart.

Devotion and having a heart connection with an accomplished teacher is emphasized in both the Great Perfection and the Mahamudra lineages of instruction. We can experience our own true nature directly through such a precious meeting, and this relationship can deepen, as it is appreciated more and more fully. Especially for those of a devotional temperament, we trust in this guidance and inspiration, and this is of great benefit, for our whole lives.

Purification

For the mind to settle, we need to be free from remorse, and the agitating, obscuring effects of our past wrong thoughts, speech and actions. This isn't set forth as a moralistic standard, but as a practical means to greater comfort and ease, all the way to liberation.

Samatha

If our mind is not yet stable and clear, just resting will lead to dullness, and sleep.

There's the famous story of Milarepa, when he first set off in search of a teacher. He met someone who offered him direct instructions, saying, with this kind of teaching, if you practice in the morning, you'll be realized by the afternoon, and if you practice at night, you'll understand it all by the morning. Milarepa thought, great, I must be someone special to have this good fortune. Then the teacher went away. When he returned the next day, he asked Milarepa how it went, and Milarepa said, oh, I just went to sleep. The teacher said, ah, I must have been mistaken. This isn't for you then. You should go down the road to Marpa.

This story is usually told to encourage students' humility, and self honesty. As Lama Yeshe would say, Check up! See for yourself how your practice goes.

Ani Tenzin Palmo said:

To know when one is really on the right track, the mind should be extremely relaxed, extremely spacious but absolutely poised, absolutely awake and vivid, the awareness should be very clear as if for the first time you have woken up.

Discernment

There are ways even then that we may not be ready for direct instructions. For example, if we haven't done enough analysis before taking up these practices of resting in the nature of mind, may be a certain subtle dullness. Analytical meditations, the use of reason and logic can clarify and sharpen the mind, so that when we rest, there is brightness, a certain acuity of perception, and knowing throughout.

Analysis can also lead to what they call 'the exhaustion of concepts'. This is where we have done enough investigation and questioning about the nature of the self and phenomena, and we're quite satisfied that their nature goes well beyond conceptual thought. We're content at that point that concepts have gone as far as they can, and we can more easily set them aside⁷.

Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way begins:

*Everything that arises interdependently
Is unceasing and unborn,
Neither non-existent nor everlasting,
Neither coming nor going,
Neither several in meaning nor with a single meaning;
All concepts and duality are pacified.*

*To this teaching, the words of the fully enlightened Buddha,
We pay homage!*

Before we've explored thoroughly, over time, of course we may still have doubts, and distraction, but it is this way.

⁷ See [*The First Order of Business in the Middle Way Teachings - Clearing Away Wrong Views*](#), and, [*From Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*](#)

One version of the Song of Tilopa says,

The meaning that transcends rational mind will not be perceived through the dualistic mind.

It's also said that

'concentration - effort' has a tendency to hinder that spontaneity and freedom of spirit, without which it is difficult to unfold the vast and liberating Mind.

Knowing this much, even provisionally, and having some confidence in the teachings allow us to settle in natural awareness, directly knowing, and at ease.

In most books on Mahamudra, including the traditional texts, by far most of the teaching is on what are generally considered preliminaries. It's more accurate to think of them then as necessary conditions, that are an integral part of realizing Mahamudra.

Great Loving Kindness and Compassion

As with the Great Perfection teachings, these are Mahayana, based on great loving kindness and compassion, and the dedication to helping others in the fullest way. Garchen Rinpoche and other teachers have said, *if you practice great love and compassion, it will be easy to experience the nature of mind.*

We can look at what happens when we leave any of these steps or qualities out. If we don't have enough stability or clarity, or incisive quality, we don't get a full result through this kind of practice. Also, if there are not enough of the heart qualities awakened in us, the experience will be dimmed, lacking in energy and joy.

It's traditionally said in Mahamudra that it's difficult to realize for four reasons.

They say:

It's too easy

- especially if we're used to complexity, and enjoy playing with concepts, this can make it difficult to settle, we may think, Is that it?;

It's too close

If we're used to searching high and low for insight, we can miss what is right here;

It's too good

We may find it hard to accept when we find light and joy within. If it goes against our self-concept, or what we in the West call our low self esteem, these simple and direct practices can be a challenge for that reason; and,

It's too profound

Staying on the surface of things, and always going on to the next thing are habits for most people. The good news is we can learn to be present comfortably, and to see more fully. We may not accept right away that the freedom we seek can be known here and now. For some, it can take time to accommodate this truth.

Surely, part of the reason that nature of mind teachings are given in general ways is that there may be some people who are ready to hear them, to practice and to realize them. We can see for ourselves if a teaching is timely for us. There's an ease to the practice when it is, and results come naturally.

The Nature of Mind

In the Kagyud lineage, liberation is accomplished by meditation on the nature of mind. This is an interesting phrase to think about.

When we talk about the nature of something, it is referring to its universal characteristics - water is wet, fire brings light and warmth - everywhere, in all cultures and at all times.

So when we are talking about *the nature of mind*, it's referring to what is true about our mind, and the mind of all others, regardless of race of class, nationality, gender, income, abilities, and so on.

Sometimes this Nature of Mind is talked about at the ultimate level, as something profound, and seldom known about, except by those who realize it through meditation. This mind of ours though, of course, includes the relative mind that we all know about - with its thoughts, and emotions, memories and plans - otherwise it wouldn't be complete expression, understanding and teaching.

We can start anywhere with this study - with the mind that is confused, or clear, the mind that understands its own nature, and is at peace, or one that is mistaken, and suffering. Both are included in this nature.

What are some of the universal characteristics of this mind, that are verifiable?

When left to itself, the mind settles and become clear.

As Tilopa said:

Don't think about the past,

or the future;

Don't comment on the present

*Don't analyze,
Don't meditate,*

Leave your mind in its natural state...

This means, first off, let the mind settle. Then,

When the mind becomes clear, knowledge can arise.

We can see that the nature of conceptual thought is fixation, and it is fragmentary. Thought can be useful as far as it goes, but it has its limitations, and we can be deceived or mistaken as to its nature. Although thoughts continue, when we know their nature, we can avoid being caught, taking our thoughts to be what is actually *here*.

And,

All the qualities we see in our Noble Teachers, and that are praised in religious traditions can be found in this very mind.

This much is true for everyone, and at all times.

Knowing just this much is onward leading.

The Non-Conceptual Method

Whatever gets us to liberating wisdom is to be honored fully, for all it means for us personally, and in terms of what we are then able to offer to our loved ones. I resist saying there is only one way, and am uneasy with the dogmas that have come down to us in traditions. This includes both the methods that use analysis to arrive at insight, and those that rely on our fundamental nature, and create the conditions allow insight to blossom.

People are different, and even within one person's life, different methods will be more or less effective. We've encouraged to see for ourselves what works to resolve confusion and our difficult emotions, and lead us to nibbana, which is freedom.

Strictly speaking, some teachers and traditions oppose calling their meditation 'a method' when it implies going from one state to another. What's called *apranihita*, translated as aimlessness, or wishlessness is more in line with what they intend though. As Thich Nhat Hanh explained this term, *we don't put something in front of us and run after it*, even our ideas about liberation or enlightenment. Then we can take up these teachings and practices.

There's a natural kinship between the different traditions of non-conceptual meditation. In fact, I've had this image for years of Padmasambhava and Bodhidharma as Dharma brothers, traveling the road together until they parted with one of them going to Tibet, and the other into China. They are that familiar.

In *Our Pristine Mind*, Orgyen Chowang wrote:

*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.

When we come across teachings like this, we can see the need for ethics, and loving kindness, and a basic practice of meditation that quiets the mind and makes it clear. Without these, the natural state is hidden. Although wisdom is there, it needs the right conditions to manifest. Then we can experience the results of this kind of approach.

The 12th century Japanese Zen Master Dogen taught in the Fukan-zazengi, The Way of Zazen Recommended to Everyone:

*Cease studying words and following letters
Learn to withdraw, turning the light inwards,
illuminating the Self*

*Doing so, your body and mind will drop off naturally,
and your Original Self Nature will manifest*

*If you wish to attain suchness,
practice suchness immediately...*

*Stop considering things with your memory
and imagination...
this is a practice that is prior to the discriminating mind...*

and in the 20th century Deshimaru Roshi, expressed the way Zen works, saying:

In zazen, images, thoughts and mental structures which surface from the unconscious pass like clouds in the sky and fade away naturally. When we stop entertaining our personal thoughts, hishiryo-consciousness--beyond thought and non-thought- appears. It is the return to the normal condition of the mind.

and the Nyingma Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche said

If you meditate by simply maintaining the natural state, everything unnatural will be removed.

The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua adds:

When you sit in Chan, your stupidity disappears, and your mad mind and wild nature vanish. Wouldn't you say these are tremendous advantages?

For someone who relies on their intellect, the challenge is to set it aside, at least for a time when practicing. We can always bring it back to further our understanding and realization.

One place where the different lineages of non conceptual meditation differ is in fact in their use of the intellect before and after meditation. The Kaguyud Mahamudra tradition in particular brings together both the analytical approach, and the method that reveals innate wisdom. Ideally, these compliment each other.

The appeal of Ch'an or Zen, or the other non conceptual ways of practicing meditation can be because we have relied too much on this one part of our mind, this one skill and ability, and we have found that by itself it is not enough to free us.

Zen sometimes seems to me to be proud that it is only remotely connected to Buddhist Traditions, which is surely a great loss. Many great teachers have left us a precious heritage, and it's there for us to claim and make use of in our life and practice.

In the introductions to this entire set of writings, I've returned again and again to the questions: *Is a liberating teaching?*, and *Is this in line with what the Buddha taught?*

These questions cut off a lot of the nonsense that is put out there as 'zen' or high sounding practice. It brings it back to earth. It's also there so we can measure even our positive experiences, of peace, or light, against a true standard. Some experiences are good as far as they go, but if we're aiming for freedom from suffering and being able to offer that, it is important to be exacting.

Non-conceptual insight is arrived in some schools at after analysis, or *directly*, quietly countering intellectualism, and as a practice that can uncover a deeper truth about ourselves and others than we've previously known. Whether this deeper truth frees us from suffering depends on whether it uproots wrong view, ego grasping, and so the further teachings in these lineages tell us not to identify with or take hold of *any* experience. This allows our understanding to continue to grow.

The focus in meditation itself here 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.

- Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

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.

- Tulku Urgyen

When it comes to meditating on the nature of the mind, abide in the state beyond conceptions, beyond grasping and clinging, and beyond duality, open and free. Afterwards, dedicate the merit.

- Venerable Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

From Essential Bardo Teachings

Introduction

*When we are pared back,
what remains is prayer*

Each time I return to what are called the bardo teachings in Buddhism, I'm impressed by the fact that the instructions for all of the different states we can find ourselves in is essentially the same: to pray to our true sources of refuge for guidance, and to recognize the nature of mind. Who or what we pray to is surely such a personal matter that it can hardly be spoken of to others, even to those we are closest with, let alone in public. Suffice it to say that whatever source of strength and succor we have found in this world will be what we naturally, spontaneously appeal to in times of uncertainty, and transition, including what we call death.

For those new to what follows, a 'bardo' is an intermediate state, and generally they are thought of as four: that of this life, the process of dying, the state after death, and the state of seeking rebirth. Sometimes two more are added that happen within the first one, the intermediate state of this life - that of dream and of meditation, making six bardos.

My main sources for what follows are, Journey of Mind, by Thrangu Rinpoche, and the bardo teachings of Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche. These are highly recommended.

Essential Bardo Teachings

The instructions for all six bardos is essentially the same: Generate faith and supplicate the Lama and the Three Jewels, and recognize the nature of mind. Whatever aspirations we have now will continue, therefore, make aspiration prayers.

The instructions on the bardos are meant for our liberation and enlightenment, and so any presentation that clarifies the process of our living, dream, meditation, process of dying, state after death, and that of seeking rebirth can surely be a great help to us.

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche said,

‘All phenomena, all perceptions and all experiences encountered in any realm or bardo are of the same nature. The experience we are having in this moment is essentially no different from any form of experience anywhere.’

Since circumstances differ, it helps to understand these states, and how we can apply ourselves in each case.

During our life, before the onset of the process of dying and the other bardos, the best thing we can do is to practice the Dharma, which means to weaken unwholesome states and to increase wholesome states. This makes every place we are increasingly free of confusion and the afflictive emotions, and more pleasant and enjoyable, more peaceful and clear, and helpful to both ourselves and others.

Thrangu Rinpoche urges us to cultivate well in this life:

‘Now, whether or not you will be able to withstand the kleshas (negative emotions) (in the in-between state) depends upon your habits from this life. One of the best ways to prevent these kleshas from taking you over in the bardo is through cultivating moral discipline in this lifetime.’

If we are not yet liberated from confusion and the afflictive emotions when going through any of the bardos:

The instructions again, as before, are to remember our teacher and the Three Jewels, and to make aspiration prayers. If we have generated in this lifetime enough faith in these sources of guidance, and want primarily our

own safety and well being, then naturally, out of force of habit, we will pray to them for guidance, especially when going through a transition, or time of uncertainty. Now that we have some degree of control, *now is the time* to make strong aspirations, and to develop the habit of turning to our sources of greatest benefit;

If we have determined that liberation is possible, then it is natural, both now and when we find ourselves or another in times of transition, spontaneously and with effort, to pray sincerely for guidance and protection so we can accomplish the freedom from samsara that we seek;

As Shantideva and other great masters have said, all the divisions of the Dharma are for the sake of wisdom. The historical Buddha identified ignorance that grasps at a self where there is none to be the cause of all our uncontrolled wandering in samsara, where we experience cycles of endless suffering, dissatisfaction, confusion and despair. Trying to 'fix' samsara doesn't work. As long as there is ignorance, samsara will continue, and so we are all urged to cultivate wisdom, and to put an end to uncontrolled rebirth in the six realms. At that point, the way will open to greater freedom and helpfulness.

And if we have determined that the best use of our life, lifetime after lifetime, is to dedicate ourselves to the benefit of all others, through attaining enlightenment, the state of fully developed freedom, understanding and love, then naturally we would pray for help to accomplish that aim. Again, now is the time to develop this powerful determination and reliance, with faith and devotion, and great enthusiasm.

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche has taught that:

Among the six bardos, the first bardo of birth and living is the most important one we have to learn about. This is where we can really develop, grow strong, realize what is precious, and fully awaken to our Buddha nature so that we can easily handle the remaining bardos. Through practice

and meditation we can learn to recognize what is and move through all the changes of birth and death with great confidence and joy.

He also taught

Connect Firmly with Your Former Good Karma

- which is a phrase I like a lot, and find very useful in this context. This is something we can all do, both in our daily practice, and in times of transition. We remember with an image, or a word, or a phrase; by recollecting a teacher, or a song, or a mantra, or a place and time, or experience we have had.

Throughout our lives and practice, we may have had this experience, of connecting with our former good karma. When we find in ourselves a sense of familiarity with virtue, or with a teaching, this is due to a prior cause, or we can say a karmic affinity. When we uncover this within ourselves, it feels like a great treasure has been revealed. It can be like finding a fresh underground stream, a source of strength and direction. All we would do is then enhanced, nourished and supported by this stream of pure, clean clear positive, creative energy.

This experience again enhances our determination now to practice well, as much as we can. We can see that it is just as our noble teachers have said:

We can cultivate ways now which will reap untold benefits not only during this life, but also in endless future lives.

Prayers for others in their times of transition are also essentially this - to remind them of their connections to Blessings, to Grace, the Divine, their Noble Teachers, and Saviors. This gift of love brings assurance to us, and to those traveling on.