

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

Jason Espada, editor

The Great Perfection Teachings

Introduction

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

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

As far as the method here goes, it is suitable for someone with a keen intuition, able to trust the natural unfolding of experience. Being a Buddhist Wisdom teaching, the Great Perfection should bring *special insight*, or *vipassana*, equal to any gained by other methods, such those found in the Theravada, or through analysis and single pointed meditation on the result of investigation.

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

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

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

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

In the Great Perfection system, what is called the *alaya* - the mind not knowing its nature - is the basis of the six realms, whereas original wakefulness, knowing the nature of mind is the basis of liberation. As the

Samantabhadra Prayers says, *There is one ground, and two paths.* So it is essential to fully understand this mind of ours, that can be either the ground of samsara, the world of misapprehending what appears to our mind and what is, and afflictive emotions, or that of nirvana, of peace.

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

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

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

Note: Almost all of the teachings here have been selected for their brevity, to accompany meditation. I've made an exception with the one titled *Essential Advice for Solitary Meditation Practice*, by Dudjom Rinpoche, ably translated by Ron Garry, because I feel it expresses so well the totality of this path, from the preliminaries, to meditation, and conduct in our daily lives.

May this collection facilitate the understanding, practice, and realization of these teachings.

Jason Espada
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From Meditation on Buddha Nature, by Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche

Today we are all here to learn and practice meditation. When we talk about meditation, the meaning is to transform the mind. Usually in our lives we don't rest in a spacious, clear mental state for even one minute. We are constantly caught up in thinking. There may be some mental clarity when we are in a deep sleep, without any dreams or mental activity; but besides that, there is almost no thought-free rest in our waking life at all. This excess of distorted thinking, this confusion, is what we need to transform with meditation.

Meditation transforms and heals the deluded mind. It is like medicine for fear, anxiety and unhappiness in the mind. Sometimes unhappiness sits in a very deep place in the consciousness. Meditation is the essential antidote for that.

We just have to remember that in its original state, the mind is clear and spacious like the sky, while concepts and deluded thoughts are like clouds – they are not the original nature of mind. We need to see through the clouds to the pure nature of mind. The clear sky-like nature of mind is Buddha nature, and this can be realised, awakened. The mind is not the nature of negative emotions. It is not of the nature of anxiety and confusion. Do we all know this?

We must know that if something is pure by nature, it can be purified. If we didn't understand that it could be purified, we wouldn't bother. We wouldn't try, but the mind by nature is pure, and it can be realised. Obscurations can be cleared. The confusion and the obscurations are merely temporary. We must always remember that Buddha nature is the essential reason for meditation.

If somebody comes up to you and asks, 'What is meditation? Why do you meditate?' What would you answer? We have to know the answer to this. If we meditate merely to attain calmness, without understanding the essential

intent, it is only a neutral practice and cannot accomplish the Buddha Dharma.

As it is, the mind is primordially pure and obscurations are merely temporary. They are not the actual nature of the mind and we are practicing to clear them. Again the very nature, the very essence of the mind – is pure. It is just distorted by projections. It is the deluded grasping at dualistic projections that is the problem. Meditation is about overcoming that deluded grasping.

It's exactly the same meaning when we talk about enlightenment, or when we talk about going to a Pure Land. It comes down to exactly the same understanding. It is in the nature of the mind that these will happen. People might be meditating and doing prayers to go to the Dewachen Pure Land, thinking that they can ascend there or go to some other place, but that is not the way it works. Happiness and joy occur within the mind. The Pure Land exists within the mind...

When we meditate, we shouldn't think that we are trying to experience something different in the mind, or trying to stop something in the mind. Meditation is not a mind-made activity.

When meditating just leave the mind as it is, uncontrived. Let your body be relaxed. Don't manipulate your mind in meditation. When we meditate, particularly in the Nyingma tradition, we are taught to keep the eyes gently opened, even in basic *shamatha* meditation, because with closed eyes the mind may become dull or darkened. This doesn't mean that the eyes should be wide open and staring, but relaxed and slightly open. When we meditate a lot of thoughts occur, but if we have noticed this it means we are aware, and that is good. There is no problem with thoughts. Please do not try to stop thoughts. When thoughts come and go in the mind, let them come and go. Simply be aware...

(Meditation)

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 within us to manifest.

- His Holiness the Seventeenth Karmapa

The instruction of Tilopa

Don't think about the past

*Don't think about what's going to happen in the future,
even a few minutes from now;*

Don't ruminate about the present;

Don't analyze,

Don't meditate

Leave your mind in its natural state...

From *As It Is*, Volume II, by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche

Once I went to see the great master Dzongsar Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö in Gangtok, and asked some questions about the *Dzogchen Desum*, the *Three Sections of the Great Perfection*. Though not a long text, it is incredibly profound. It is only one book, the size from your hand to your elbow. I asked, “Excuse me, Rinpoche, but was the whole terma discovered? Isn’t there anything missing?”

Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö smiled and said, “When I look at it, I don’t see anything missing at all. What do you think is missing? Do you know exactly what is missing?” I said, “No, I am merely a stubborn intellectual, I don’t know anything.” Dzongsar Khyentse continued, “I don’t see that it is incomplete in any way whatsoever. Just because it is short and concise doesn’t mean that anything is missing or left out.”

Some of the instruction manuals in these three sections of the Great Perfection are only a couple of pages. Yet, they are all-inclusive and deeply profound. So, it’s not that we need many words to discover the essential meaning. Everything stands and falls with the moment of recognizing mind essence. At that moment, you instantaneously meet the three kayas.

Nature of Mind Teachings, by Yangthang Rinpoche

If you can isolate the mind from its distractions- which are, essentially, the concepts of the three times: the recollections of the past, the anticipations about the future, and the distractions of the present moment- you will be able to directly perceive the inherent primordial wisdom nature. This is pristine awareness, rigpa.

When the mind is mingled with the concepts of the three times one cannot perceive one's pristine awareness nature, rigpa. To become aware of it, it is necessary to be introduced to it.

If you focus on external objects, objective appearances, you will be distracted. You must turn inside and allow the mind to look at itself. It is a matter of taking that which usually looks outside and turning it around and going in, going inside, and then not doing anything once you get inside.

This means not anticipating the future, not reviewing the events of the past, and not chasing after and reacting to the experience of the six sense fields in the present.

Without concepts of good or bad, pleasing or displeasing, just allow the mind to relax so that there is no apprehension by an apprehender. In this state of relaxation wherein you no longer experience the thoughts of the three times, you have gone beyond the experience of the conceptualizing intellect and you are in the awareness of rigpa, the nature of which is totally open and empty, luminously clear, and unobstructedly compassionate.

This experience is inexpressible; it is a luminous experience. When you recognize that, and you remain with it, this is rigpa - pristine awareness....

Prayer Flags

Rest your mind in the natural state...

the clear light nature of mind...

without grasping or clinging...

* * *

relaxed, open, and spacious...

without fabricating anything...

vivid and clear...

* * *

without ego, and without afflictions...

bright and shining...

non-distracted non-meditation...

From The Illuminating Jewel Mirror, by Shechen Gyaltzap Pema Namgyal

At the outset, we must distinguish conceptual mind from awareness.

First, *recognize* the nature of mind directly.

This means to realize that your present awareness itself -
free of thought, and concept, and unspoiled -
is naturally present wakefulness.

Then, *sustain* the continuity of your present fresh awareness,
in which thoughts of the past and future are absent.

Finally, *gain confidence* in liberation,
in which thoughts are naturally
and tracelessly freed as soon as they arise...

From Advice for Mountain Retreat, by Khamtrul Rinpoche

{Although this is from the Mahamudra Tradition, it goes well here. The approaches overlap and at times compliment each other. As this selection shows, in some cases, when it comes to the method of meditation, it is the same instruction. Mangalam!}

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 Ground, Path, and Fruition, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

How can we be introduced to the nature of mind?

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

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

From Rest in Natural Great Peace, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

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

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

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

Remain in the nature of mind,
the Great Perfection.

From The Song of Encouragement, by Patrul Rinpoche

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meditation is sometimes called non- meditation.

It is really a process of (effortless) non-dual Awareness.

We have dual meditation, and we have non-dual meditation.

It depends on your philosophy / method.

- Kalden Yungdrung

Selections from Our Pristine Mind I, by Orgyen Chowang

The essential instructions

Here are the essential instructions for experiencing Pristine Mind:

Don't follow the past.

Don't anticipate the future.

Remain in the present moment.

Leave your mind alone.

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

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

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

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

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

Bring your mind fully into this present moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step four is to *leave your mind alone*.

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

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

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

The spacious blue sky of our mind has always been present, but it has not been visible because there are so many clouds of mental events obscuring it. As mental events dissolve, our Pristine Mind naturally emerges. This is our fundamental nature. This is the ultimate reality. This is the true nature of our mind. (46-48)

From hazy mind to pristine mind

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

Pristine Mind meditation will even benefit a person with a mind full of thunder, lightning, and stormy weather. With diligent practice, the mental

weather can calm down, going from stormy to overcast, from overcast to slightly cloudy, and ultimately, from hazy to flawlessly pristine.

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

On Meditation, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

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

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

Moving Beyond Meditation, by Mingyur Rinpoche

For the next few months I continued to visit my father every day, and he taught me more about the Great Perfection. Often times we wouldn't talk at all as we sat together. My father would simply sit in front of the large window and gaze off into the sky as I sat quietly by his side and tried to meditate. I desperately wanted his approval, so I always did my best imitation of what I thought a good meditator should do. I sat bolt upright and tried to make it look like I was absorbed in some deep experience, while in actuality I was just repeating a mantra in my mind and trying not to get lost in thought. Occasionally, I would open my eyes and peek up at my father, hoping that he had noticed my good meditation posture and ability to sit still for so long.

One day, as we sat together in silence, I glanced up at him in the middle of my meditation and was surprised to find him gazing down at me. "Are you meditating, son?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I said proudly, filled with joy that he had finally noticed. My answer seemed to amuse him greatly. He paused for a few moments and then said gently, "Don't meditate."

My pride vanished. For months, I'd been doing my best to copy all the other meditators who came to be with my father. I learned some short prayers, sat in the right posture, and tried hard to still my turbulent mind. "I thought I was supposed to meditate," I said with a shaky voice.

"Meditation is a lie," he said. "When we try to control the mind or hold on to an experience, we don't see the innate perfection of the present moment." Pointing out through the window, he continued, "Look out into the blue sky. Pure awareness is like space, boundless and open. It's always here. You don't have to make it up. All you have to do is rest in that."

For a moment, all of my hopes and expectations about meditation dropped away and I experienced a glimpse of timeless awareness.

A few minutes later he continued, "Once you've recognized awareness, there's nothing to do. You don't have to meditate or try to change your mind in any way."

"If there's nothing to do," I asked, "Does that mean that we don't have to practice?"

"Although there's nothing to do, you do need to familiarise yourself with this recognition. You also need to cultivate bodhichitta and devotion, and always seal your practice by dedicating the merit so that all beings may recognise their own true nature too. The reason we still need to practice is that at first we only have an understanding of the mind's true nature. By familiarising ourselves with this understanding again and again, however, it eventually transforms into direct experience. Yet even then we still need to practice. Experience is unstable, so if we don't continue to familiarise ourselves with pure awareness we can lose sight of it and get caught up in our thoughts and emotions again. On the other hand, if we are diligent in practice, this experience will transform into a realisation that can never be lost. This is the path of the Great Perfection." With these words, he stopped talking and we both continued to rest in pure awareness, gazing off into the deep blue sky above the Kathmandu Valley.

Immediate Realization Instruction in Dzogchen, The Great Perfection

by Namkhai Norbu

Let's begin by acquiring an understanding of the most basic concepts discussed in the Great Perfection teachings. Most important is the understanding regarding the nature of mind and consciousness. It is taught that we have within our consciousness two essential components. One is our thinking, conceptualizing and imagining mind and the other is the awareness that is (itself) conscious of all mental and perceptual events.

The central pillar of all Great Perfection teachings is this witnessing or knowing awareness within all experience. It is this knowing awareness that the teacher is attempting to point-out to the student conclusively and beyond any doubt. The student actually recognizes him or herself to *be* the knowing awareness. This knowing awareness is a very naked witnessing or perceiving awareness. By naked I mean it has no sense of personal identity nor a personal story regarding its history.

It is very much like our five senses. Our eyes just see without any sense of being some defined "seer". Hearing is the same in that we just hear sounds without the capacity to hear being defined as a specific "listener".

Likewise our naked awareness is just noticing or observing the interior mental events as well as the "external" perceptual events of experience without there being any sense of identity assigned to this quality of pure observation.

Immediately after an experiential event, the mind may begin labeling, judging and otherwise categorizing the input as received by awareness. This is the same for all five senses. The sensory input is immediately, and nakedly seen or heard as-is. However, a split second later the mind kicks-in

and begins to process the sensory input. So in this way our awareness is just like our five senses.

Also, just like the five senses are there by default, regardless of the mind's activities, so too our awareness is a default presence. It turns out we are always aware, awareness is always switched on. It is even present when we dream, as it is the awareness that notices the dream and its content.

Now, in contrast to this unchanging awareness, we also have the activities of the mind that are always changing. It is this unchanging awareness that notices or observes all the mind's activities. It is the mind that creates or conceptualizes a sense of personal identity.

It is again this awareness that notices these thoughts about personal identity. The naked awareness (itself) has no concept of identity, hence it has no ego to remove or reduce. At this point the Great Perfection teacher may utilize the example of a mirror and its reflections.

The mirror would be pointed out to be like the unchanging perceiving awareness, and all the thoughts and mental activities would be like the reflections. At no time do the reflections condition the glass of the mirror. Reflections would be pointed out to include thoughts, identity, emotions, feelings, sensations and sensory perceptions.

It is possible that based on this explanation alone, the student may have a sudden insight recognizing his true nature to be the unchanging awareness within the mind as opposed to its contents. If this insight hasn't arisen spontaneously upon the student's mind-stream, the teacher would continue with various examples and explanations until the student's intrinsic awareness-wisdom arises suddenly in a moment of total realization.

Once the initial, authentic realization of one's true nature as being this unchanging awareness occurs, the student is instructed to just continue in

that enlightened self-recognition that arises from moment to moment but is ignored and not actualized.

The enlightened insight is actually arising in every moment of our experience from the beginning. However our attention goes to the mind's content and activities instead. So we are taught to relax, vividly and alertly, without any mental agenda or topic whatsoever, which then allows the always-arising enlightened wisdom-insight to be recognized from moment to moment. We then simply continue in this profound condition of Knowing-Being.

The mind will kick-in from time to time with all its stories about "me" and my issues, but those appearances will just dissolve upon their arising as we continue in our actual condition.

Eventually the mind's dualistic thought processes will become more and more transparent as our natural condition of Being outshines all other of the mind's activities.

How to transform your mind - From a talk by Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche

From Your Own Inner Refuge

June 13th, 2015

The way to transform your mind is through meditation.

Right now, our mind is very busy, chaotic, confused sometimes; and sometimes sometimes very emotional, sometimes very moody. It's all over the place - it's very difficult, you know...

Most people have depression, anxiety, and loneliness, and sadness, you know, unhappiness...

If you have these things going on, how do you transform this chaotic mind, or these experiences?

The number one technique is meditation. Meditation can transform your mind, from an unhealthy mind, to a healthy mind, from an unenlightened mind, to an enlightened mind.

How do we reduce negative thoughts and emotions?

The Buddha mainly said that beings are suffering because their minds are polluted, or distorted. That's the reason we are unhappy. That's the reason we are wandering in samsara.

So, how to transform our mind?

The Dzogchen teachings say, first of all, that your mind is innately pristine.

*Like the sky is blue,
innately pristine,*

*Water is fresh,
unpolluted*

*Similarly,
your mind is innately pristine*

Secondly, thoughts and emotions are just events in the mind.
They are not who you are.

If you can experience these two things, they can transform your mind, and transform your life.

The first is sometimes called Buddha Nature, sometimes called Natural Mind. It doesn't matter what it's called, just that for all beings, for every one, our mind is innately pristine.

If you don't meditate, you don't know that.

As long as there are clouds covering the blue sky, you cannot see the blue sky.

Similarly, as long as your mind is distorted, with so many thoughts and emotions going on, you don't know your mind is pristine.

The Dzogchen teachings are talking about how you experience that, how you can be introduced to knowing your mind as innately pristine.

How can you know this? You need to meditate. When you meditate, thoughts and emotions slow down. When the frequency of thoughts and emotions slow down, then you experience the natural condition of the mind.

As long as there are clouds, you only see the clouds, you cannot see the blue sky. When the clouds slowly dissipate, what's left is the blue sky.

Similarly, through meditation, your mental and emotional events slowly vanish, and when they vanish, what's left is the pristine mind.

Once your mind is (recognized as) pristine, every area of your life changes.

Dzogchen is talking about how we can experience pristine mind, and that mental events are not who you are.

This is the fundamental message.

This is the key to happiness, and the key to enlightenment.

Everyone can experience that.

*If you don't follow the past,
and don't anticipate the future,
just stay in the present moment,
then you will experience your natural state of mind*

There are these two different minds - there is pristine mind, and there is ordinary mind. Ordinary mind is when our mind is distorted, complicated, needy, egocentric, emotional mind. Everybody has had these experiences.

Through meditation, once we experience pristine mind, we live with pristine mind, we walk with pristine mind, we eat with pristine mind, and we die with pristine mind. Everything is transformed.

That's really the goal of the Dzogchen teachings.

* * *

If at the time of death your mind is pristine, then you journey into a pristine state, called a Pure Land.

If your mind is polluted, that's called samsara.

When the mind is pristine, consciousness goes to a beautiful place.

The View and Meditation of the Great Perfection, by Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

Homage to the Guru, the Teacher.

The View and Meditation of Dzogchen can be explained in many, many ways, but simply sustaining the essence of present awareness includes them all.

Your mind won't be found elsewhere.
It is the very nature of this moment-to-moment thinking.
Regard nakedly the essence of this thinking and you find present awareness, right where you are.

Why chase after thoughts, which are superficial ripples of present awareness?
Rather look directly into the naked, empty nature of thoughts; then there is no duality, no observer, and nothing observed.

Simply rest in this transparent, nondual present awareness.

Make yourself at home in the natural state of pure presence, just being, not doing anything in particular.

Present awareness is empty, open, and luminous; not a concrete substance, yet not nothing.

Empty, yet it is perfectly cognizant, lucid, aware.

As if magically, not by causing it to be aware, but innately aware, awareness continuously functions.

These two sides of present awareness or Rigpa – its emptiness and its cognizance (or lucidity) – are inseparable.

Emptiness and luminosity (in the sense of knowing) are inseparable.

They are formless, as if nothing whatsoever, ungraspable, unborn, undying; and yet spacious, vivid, and buoyant.

Nothing whatsoever, yet Emaho!, everything is magically experienced.

Simply recognize this.

Look into the magical mirror of mind,
and appreciate this infinite magical display.

With constant, vigilant mindfulness,
sustain this recognition of empty, open, brilliant awareness.

Cultivate nothing else.

There is nothing else to do, or to undo.

Let it remain naturally.

Don't spoil it by manipulating, by controlling,
by tampering with it,
and worrying about whether you are right or wrong,
or having a good meditation or a bad meditation.
Leave it as it is, and rest your weary heart and mind.

The ultimate luminosity of Dharmakaya, absolute truth,
is nothing other than the very nature of this uncontrived, ordinary mind.

Don't look elsewhere for the Buddha.

It is nothing other than the nature of this present awareness.

This is the Buddha within.

There are innumerable Dharma teachings.

There are many antidotes to many different kinds of spiritual diseases.
There are many words in the Mahamudra
and Dzogchen nondual teachings.
But the root, the heart of all practices is included here,
in simply sustaining the luminous nature of this present awareness.

If you search elsewhere for something better,
a Buddha superior to this present awareness,
you are deluding yourself.

You are chained, entangled in the barbed wire of hope and fear.

So give it up!
Simply sustain present wakefulness,
moment after moment.

Devotion, compassion, and perfecting virtue and wisdom
are the most important supportive methods
for completely fulfilling this naked, nondual teaching
about present awareness, the innate Dharmakaya.

So always devote yourself to spiritual practice for the benefit of others
and apply yourself in body, speech, and mind
to what is wholesome and virtuous.

Sarva mangalam.

May all beings be happy!

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

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

My answer was this song:

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

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

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

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

Preserving this view continuously
With awareness undistracted,
In a continuity unbroken like a flowing stream,

Is what is called “nonmeditation samadhi, continuous like a stream.”

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

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

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

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

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.

- Longchenpa

The Single All-Sufficient Method

*How can I fathom the depths of the goodness
of this jewel of the mind -
the panacea that relieves the world of all its suffering,
and is the cause of all its joy..*

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!*

Attention

A steady hand on the till doesn't need to do much, but we do need to stay awake.

These worlds appear and disappear depending on the absence or presence of wakefulness, or lucidity. This applies to our so called waking state as well. Dreams, projections, relative or completely false discriminations, rise and set like mist coming up, and then vanishing with the presence of the sun.

A Viable Basis

In order for the meditation instructions in zen, the Great Perfection and Mahamudra to work for a person, certain factors need to be in place. This is the inherited wisdom that's come down to us, and it's good to know what previous generations, our kind teachers have found to be true, and told us.

Sometimes we don't find these things spelled out in zen and the Great Perfection. Usually there's more context provided in the Mahamudra lineages, but not always.

A couple of points of interest: In most every book on Mahamudra, the actual distinguishing instruction is usually only a few pages at most. The rest of a traditional text or commentary is on the foundations, which are the necessary conditions for a very simple and direct approach. These include refuge and the cultivation of bodhicitta, based on universal love and compassion, knowing the necessity of liberating wisdom; humility, faith and devotion, and a calm mind.

Where these methods differ from other, more gradual approaches is that *the non conceptual methods of meditation have as their basis a great faith in our original nature, also called our Buddha Nature, our intrinsic intelligence.* Without this, no amount of sitting or walking simply, and doing nothing else would have a good result.

There are paths that can be called causal, as in, we develop certain factors, to get certain results. Other paths and practices, such as the methods taught in Mahamudra and Dzogchen, and indeed in the Tantras, are resultant path practices. From the beginning there is the acceptance and reliance upon something profound and beautiful that is with us at all times. We can have an intuition of this truth, and follow that. This is seldom if ever referred to on the causal path.

If we have enough discernment, and awakened heart qualities, this fundamental nature of ours is then a viable basis. The Mahamudra teachings tell us to look carefully to see if we are qualified to do this kind of practice.

If we fall into dullness or distraction when meditating, they tell us, we need to cultivate shamatha, the clarity and stability of mind; if our experience is lacking joy and direction, we can develop our faith and devotion by connecting more deeply with an accomplished teacher. The strength and centrality of our love and compassion is essential here as well. Without these, any amount of quiet sitting or walking we would do will only yield a partial result, and certainly not anything that could be called The Great Seal (Mahamudra) or The Great Perfection.

The known and accepted presence of Buddha Nature, the source of all the Buddhas, is what distinguishes these paths, and this is what is relied upon directly in meditation, in zen, Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

When we sit quietly now, does the mind become clear? And is that ease and clarity the very nature of wisdom, the knowledge of the way things are? We can see this for ourselves if this is so. For some, it's true that the mind may sink, or go down into even more dullness than usual, while for others, wisdom can open up. It's an individual matter, and if we're not sure if we're qualified, we should seek out good teachers and ask them.

There's a phrase I like that comes from Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal's translation of The Prayer of Samathabhadra. It says that we can *restore self refreshing awareness*. It's an interesting phrase because it says so much about what is contained in this very mind of ours in every moment. Left to itself, without following thoughts of the past or future, or generating thoughts about the present, all by itself, this mind can become clear and bright, renewed and strong again.

We can see why lineages that emphasize discursive thought and analysis might resist and fiercely oppose this kind of teaching. It sounds (and is) so much easier than extensive study and debate, using logic and reasoning to come to the same conclusions, and ideally, result. It's not a path for everyone, and this balanced understanding is the best outcome that we can hope for from the generations of respectful dialogue between traditions. Being without dogma, and not excluding any viable path of practice, in an open minded way, we can learn from different approaches to liberating wisdom, and find what meets our needs.

I have this analogy that came to mind recently after communicating again with a friend of mine who practices Traditional Chinese Medicine. Finding a suitable practice for ourselves is like hitting just the right acupuncture point. The energy flows and our innate wisdom and healing powers are activated, and encouraged. If we miss the right point, with TCM or with the various meditation methods we can try, nothing much happens, and we're left pretty much where we were. So we should be attentive to the results of any practices we do. As the Buddha taught, we should test the teachings, and see for ourselves.

To extend the analogy a bit more, with Traditional Chinese Medicine, whether it is massage, or acupuncture or herbal remedies, we only apply the remedy as long as it takes to activate our body's healing response. Traditional methods have this understanding built into them. They too are based on faith in our innate, natural potential.

It becomes easier to practice the methods of zen, Mahamudra and Dzogchen when we know about and feel we can rely on their basis. Some things become easier over time, and this is surely one of them. At the same time, I do feel that it's only to our advantage to recognize that different people have different needs, and that we ourselves at times may need different practices to clarify the mind, and bring forth a good result.

*May we all find a practices that work for us,
that we feel inspired to take up and bring to completion
and may all beings benefit from our freedom and joy*

The Esoteric Aspect of Connecting With a Tradition

From the outside, when we see a person connecting with a Tradition, it looks fairly straightforward, and self evident. We may see them going to church, or to a temple; on a retreat, or pilgrimage; we may find them joining a candle light procession, reading scriptures or sutras or inspired poetry in time set apart, or having a daily meditation practice. This much can be seen.

Within the experience itself however, there is a richness that is subtle, and tangible. This is less often talked about, and so I'd like to say something about it here.

If we are connected to a Tradition, there are blessings that can be known directly, and that are not visible to the outside world. We can feel an immediacy, of protection, of guidance, and encouragement; healing energy, and the presence of our spiritual ancestors and allies. We can feel a strength that is related to our Tradition, with its clarity and vision.

When we connect with a tradition, its unique power can be felt, as subtle nourishment, and as light. This is what attracts a person in the first place, and the memory of it is what brings them back, even if they have wandered far. Even if we do not understand it well, or fully, its power works in our lives.

A tradition can also be felt to be a great source of power that has gathered over time. It has been created by the devotion and love of generations, our spiritual family, and its sacred energy is ever available to us. Connecting with this is like opening a tap for pure water to flow.

There is a karmic element to such a connection, surely - there is an external aspect, the Venerable Tradition, and then there is our inner makeup, and when these two meet, if we have a personal affinity, experience easily opens

up. Owing to our different natures, this is not the same for everyone, but just thinking about this has got to bring respect for every individual's choice of a path, and celebration.

May we all connect deeply with one or more traditions and their teachers in this lifetime, and receive their blessings into our lives in full.

If we relate personally to only one teaching, or one teacher, or tradition, we may identify its wondrous benefit simply as the quality of warmth, and aliveness, and peace, and purity that we know. If we have had the experience however of moving between religions, and traditions, and lineages, and also connecting with them deeply, the unique qualities of each tradition becomes more readily apparent. This is a delight to know, and to think about, and to even try to speak of.

It is actually this living quality that we find in our tradition that can be felt in our practice, and throughout our lives. It is the energy of the realization that is within each word of its teaching, in its every insight, and gentle, compassionate encouragement. It is a blessing to us, and this is what we draw from to give, through the generations.

When we know the esoteric aspect of a tradition, we smile. We feel the immediacy of our great good fortune here, and naturally find ways to share this with all we meet, and with all the world.

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

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

Guru Padmasambhava is not speaking of someone else's nature somewhere else. This is his direct teaching on the nature of your own mind, and our own mind. Therefore, when you meditate and practice you should not look outside, thinking something else. Remind yourself of this nature and relax your mind in that state. When you relax your mind within this teaching, then everything - all dualities, fabrications, worries, sadness, loneliness - merge or dissolve into the original state of great emptiness, the original state of the mind. Then you continue to relax.

As you relax more, great joy and happiness arise in the quality of richness and radiate, shining from space without blockage or hindrance. That is how the Dzogchen yogi and yogini should do it.

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

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

meditate on the infinitely vast state, on the inexpressible state, and on the state beyond samsara and nirvana.

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

That is the method of the Dzogchen meditator.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are going to abide with joyful effort in the natural state. You will notice that over time your conceptualizations, whether they are rough or smooth,

big or small, will gradually wear away. In order to facilitate this more powerfully, while you are abiding in the natural state you should occasionally reactivate your feelings of closeness to the buddhas and the great masters. You should also reactivate love and compassion for all sentient beings, as well as appreciation for yourself. Invoke these beautiful thoughts, then continue abiding in the natural state. (87)

Lama Lodro Rinpoche taught that if we practice great loving kindness and compassion for all beings, it will lead us right up to the view.

Garchen Rinpoche said we should practice loving kindness towards all beings, and that this would gradually dissolve the ego - the false sense of separation between ourselves and others, *just like an ice cube dissolving in the great ocean.*

Dealing with the two obstacles, from *The Seven Nails*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

When the obstacles (of dullness or excitement) happen, don't follow them. Don't let yourself be taken away. Instead, restrengthen your awareness of rigpa with your devotion, joy, appreciation, courage, and commitment. Think to yourself, 'This is a beautiful moment. Why should I waste my time with this meaninglessness?' In this way, you're giving some kind of confirmation to yourself, reactivating your courage and commitment. At the same time, bring the clarity and strength of rigpa vividly into your heart and mind, and re-relax into the natural state.

We should not question those scattered or dull thoughts, wondering why this or why that. We also shouldn't feel depressed, bad, or sorry. That kind of analysis and following after emotions during meditation is also an obstacle. Instead, restrengthen your meditation with your awareness, courage, and commitment. Reconnect to your inspiration and devotion, and invoke the power and blessings of all the lineage masters. Feel their presence with great joy and happiness. Bring the vast power of their blessings to your awareness, and then look inwardly to the true nature of your mind. When you don't find anything, relax in the state of not-finding. Just be in that state.

The Role of the Heart, by Jason Espada

Wisdom is not just an intellectual study, but a study of perception, of right and wrong perceptions. For this reason, what we call 'the heart' has to be considered.

We can see for ourselves, there are certain types of emotions that veil the mind, and other kinds of feelings that make the mind wonderfully clear.

I have heard that in Asian languages there is just one word used for both 'heart' and 'mind'. And when we know that when we are concerned, when we are appreciative, then everything appears to us differently. And we see things very differently when we love. The whole world becomes luminous.

I believe there is an important difference between having this developed, and when this quality is not brought out as much. This is something we all need, not only to survive and to find fulfillment as living beings, it is also necessary to see things as they are.

Sitting very still, no movement, everything very still, a person can be like a smoky mirror. When we love, this is like being a clear mirror.

What I am referring to is not the emotional love that many think of when they hear the word, rather it is a feeling and an outlook that is based on an appreciative knowing of the life we are graced to be here with; our family, our world.

Our true nature is not recognized only by correcting one's view conceptually. This is because of we have certain 'mental veils' that prevent us from knowing. This means that a certain level of mind is obscured, and these 'veils' are made of our conditioning.

We act, and have acted in the past without knowledge, uncompassionately, with anger, or with impatience, pride, selfishness, and so on. All this is with us.

So it is that positive actions counter these tendencies that have a false basis. When it is said that one needs a great stock of merit to meditate on wisdom teachings, and get a true result, this is what is meant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then, I've found the following teaching very useful to explain what is happening in any case. In the Tibetan tradition, they speak of 'the two obscurations' that keep us from seeing the truth of what is here. The first

type is what they call the 'conceptual obscurations', or the 'obscurations of conceptual thought' (wrong views). These are corrected, or cleared away by samatha and vipassana- the quieting of the mind and cultivation of the strength of discernment- discriminating between the true and the false.

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

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

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

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

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

Dodrupchen said

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

Longchenpa:

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

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

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

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

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

The Place of Analytical Meditation

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

(pages 178 - 191, lightly edited)

...

J.E. :

Here I would like to relate a story that connects with this last point. Back in the early 1990's I had the good fortune to receive teachings from the great

scholar and accomplished teacher Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche. I remember that people were meeting with him privately with him at that time, to discuss their practice, and that during the break one day I met and spoke to one fellow student. This woman related to me how Kirti Tsenshab had recommended that she study the Middle-Way Buddhist wisdom teachings. The sense that I had of it at the time was that her mind was soft, diffuse, and 'wooly', and that he was recommending this to her to sharpen her critical faculties. Then whatever practice she would do would go deeper.

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

From Bodhisattva Activity and Conduct

By Venerable Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Venerable Khenpo
Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche

During the practice of Dzogchen, we should continually reaffirm our bodhisattva activities and conduct, since practitioners of the Great Perfection are always motivated by the resolve to liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of cyclic existence. All sentient beings deserve to discover their beautiful, innate nature, and become happy and joyful. Actually, Dzogchen is the practice of bodhisattvas, the practice of great love and compassion. For this reason, we must keep the bodhisattvas' vast view and conduct at the center of all our Dharma activities.

An incomparable spark of divinity is to be found in the heart of each human being, waiting to radiate love and wisdom everywhere, because that is its nature. Amazing!

- Eknath Easwaran

Dwelling deep within our hearts, and the hearts of all beings without exception is an inexhaustible source of love and wisdom. And the ultimate purpose of all spiritual practices, whether they are called Buddhist or not, is to make contact with this essentially pure nature.

- Lama Thubten Yeshe

This self-arisen wisdom, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

This self-arisen wisdom, which is also called bodhichitta, is not something that has been fabricated, a new product created by the conjunction of causes and conditions. It never has changed, never changes, and never will change.

The absolute nature remains what it is, perfectly pure, at all times. Even if it appears obscured for impure beings at the start of the path, it has never actually been obscured. If it seems to be a mixture of pure and impure during the course of the path, it in fact always remains pure; And at the time of the result, perfect enlightenment, it is simply the same ground nature made evident and not something new that was not there before.

Through all conditions, the kinglike bodhichitta that is the doer-of-everything will never be stained or dampened.

On the relative level, bodhicitta is the strong, sustained motivation to awaken; to liberate oneself; in order to live a life of freedom, joy, and the greatest possible helpful action. It is also our true nature, of clarity, love, and compassion. Practiced together, it is aligning ourselves with the motivation to be of universal benefit.

Two Quotes on Bodhicitta, from the perspective of the Great Perfection Teachings

From *The Buddhist Path*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Bodhichitta is the root or the seed from which enlightenment develops. Bodhichitta is not found externally, but it is within your own mind. Although all of us have experienced love and compassion, these qualities need to be developed further. One way to increase them is to do the Dzogchen meditation of resting the mind in its own nature. This is because bodhichitta and emptiness have the same nature, the true nature of the mind.

And,

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

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

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

It is summoning forth or evoking mind as wisdom.

From Uprooting Clinging, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Compassion and wisdom don't come from the outside; they can't be gathered up and collected. They are the innate, enlightened qualities of mind- our most precious buddha-nature.

By applying the teachings of the Buddha, it becomes possible to reveal the innate wisdom and compassion of our true nature.

* * *

By overcoming karmic obscurations and ego-clinging, all good qualities spontaneously arise without effort. Previously hidden qualities of pure love and compassion will radiate in every directions for all sentient beings.

As your understanding and realization of the ultimate nature of mind is developed, compassion and loving-kindness will naturally manifest without attachment or clinging.

From Meditation Instructions by Garchen Rinpoche

Meditation means to first recognize and then habituate to the nature of mind. First, you must understand the basic nature of mind. This mind is a single ground within which we are one. Once you have recognized the nature of mind, you must always sustain it, uphold it, without falling into distraction. To habituate this present awareness is meditation...

What is most important is to cultivate bodhicitta, love and compassion, in all your activities.. If you give rise to compassion, then you will understand the nature of mind very easily.

* * *

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 Verse from The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra, by
The Third Karmapa

The basis of purification is this very mind itself- when recognized as the
inseparable unity of clarity and emptiness;

That which purifies is the Great Vajra Yoga of Mahamudra;

That which is to be purified are the transient stains of delusion;

May the result of purification, the stainless Dharmakaya, be manifest.

From The Avatamsaka Sutra

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing
May they all enjoy an abundance of positive conditions,
well being, and peace.

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

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

Be Present, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Salute to self-existing presence.

See here, friends of the unchanging!

I am Unchanging Presence.

Be present when you see me.

Let unmoved mind look into itself.

I am the mirror of presence

clearly showing you right attention.

Be present, it's the essence of Dharma.

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

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

Be present, it furthers natural, wakeful knowing.

Absentminded, one strays into laziness.

Absentminded, every fault flows forth.

Absentmindedness doesn't fulfill any purpose.

Absentmindedness is like a heap of crap.

Absentmindedness is to float on lakes of urine.

Absentmindedness is like a heartless corpse.

So please, my friends, be present!

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

On meditation, by Dudjom Rinpoche

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

From Pointing Out the Great Perfection, by Dudjom Rinpoche

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

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

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

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

The great omniscient master, Longchenpa, said:

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

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

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

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

The great master, Padmakara, said:

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

A quote from Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, from his commentary on Mipham Rinpoche's 'Lamp That Dispels Darkness'

...This dull state is the source of delusion. How, then, is the true nature of mind to be discovered? By letting the mind look at itself, letting it rest in a state of simplicity, and watching its nature.

The mind is not something that can be looked at with the eyes or grasped with the hands. The mind has to look at itself.

What we need to do is not to analyze this mental darkness discursively; rather we have to first let the mind rest in a state of complete naturalness or simplicity, just as it is, without falling into distraction.

A state will be soon attained that is free from obvious movements of the mind such as aversion for enemies, unpleasant feelings, or attraction toward pleasant things.

This state is also free from the opaque dullness that one experienced before. It is a state that is lucid, clear, and spacious, like the experience of looking into the vast sky.

From *A Light in the Dark*, by Lama Mipham Rinpoche

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

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

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

The Essence of Mind, by Mipham Rinpoche

Namo Guru Mañjuśrīye!

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

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

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

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

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

When this is explained in negative terms:

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

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

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

To illustrate this using examples: without limit or centre, it is like space; in its unlimited clarity, it is like sunlight flooding the sky; without clear inside and outside, it is like a crystal ball; in its freedom from clinging and attachment, it is like the traces of a bird in flight; and neither arising nor ceasing, it is like the sky.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By Mipham.

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

From Calling the Lama from Afar, by Dudjom Rinpoche

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

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

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

Here's what I remember: We all have something that we can call our original awareness. We recognize this simply by turning to it and seeing how it is - just so.

We don't need to try to prolong it, or recall how it was and then try to reproduce it. Those would be conceptualizing, fabricating, like putting something in front of us and running after it. Instead, we can just see how it is in this moment.

After a short while, our conceptual activity may start up again, and if we are carried away by our thinking, the practice is simply to recognize the fundamental nature of our mind again, that is open, spacious, free and clear, luminous, not conditioned, and spontaneously present.

Our fundamental nature is naturally free of the afflictive emotions, free of concepts of the three times, by nature free of I and mine, gender, history, hope and fear. All that. It is also inherently rich with all good qualities, such as wisdom and compassion, peacefulness, kindness, gentleness, and generosity. This is what we should realize as our own true nature.

From Rainbow Painting, by Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

What is most important concerning the view is to recognize buddha nature.

Buddha nature should first be recognized, then sustained continuously without any distraction. When watchfulness is distracted from buddha nature, the practitioner is no different from an ordinary person.

* * *

Each vehicle has its own view, meditation and conduct. Each has the same aim, to understand emptiness; and each employs practices called shamatha and vipashyana.

On the Ati level, the innate stability of rigpa, the nondual state of awareness, is the shamatha aspect, while the awake or cognizant quality is the vipashyana aspect.

Our basic nature, also called awareness wisdom or cognizant wakefulness, is resolved or recognized through shamatha and vipashyana.

To cite a famous statement, 'Awakened mind is the unity of shamatha and vipashyana.'

Shamatha and vipashyana are ultimately indivisible.

* * *

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

* * *

Garab Dorje condensed all the Dzogchen Tantras into three sentences, called the Three Words That Strike the Vital Point - recognize your own nature, decide on one point, and gain confidence in liberation.

* * *

It is said that meditation is not the most important thing; liberation is. Mere meditation, such as the state of stillness in shamatha meditation, is not necessarily a liberated state.

It is very important to know how to liberate your deluded thinking. That is the vital point. (8,10)

* * *

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.

* * *

You do not have to imagine basic wakefulness, it is naturally present. (11)

* * *

If you do not know your essence, then what arises from yourself does not dissolve within yourself. Rather than being liberated, it goes astray into the six realms of samsara.

This is really the key point here. The thinking of dualistic mind arises or takes place as the expression of [unrecognized] awareness. Once you recognize this basic awareness, the display of thoughts loses all power and simply dissolves into the expanse of buddha nature. This is the basic reason to recognize mind essence. (11,12)

* * *

This original wakefulness is often described in these words:

'Free from thought, yet everything is vividly known'. (13)

* * *

(This) Rigpa is like sunlit space.

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

* * *

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

We need to become used to this natural dissolving of thought through training. (16)

* * *

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

All you have to do is leave it as it is. In fact, there is nothing whatsoever to do, so we cannot even call this an act of meditating. There is an initial recognition, and from then on we do not have to be clever about it or try to improve it in any way whatsoever. Just let it be as it naturally is- that is what is called meditation, or even more accurately 'nonmeditation'.

What is crucial is not to be distracted for even a single instant. Once recognition has taken place, undistracted nonmeditation is the key point of practice. (17)

* * *

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

* * *

Realization is achieved through repeating the short moment of recognition many times. (18)

* * *

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

We need to know when we are distracted. Discursive thought is distraction, but once we recognize the essence of thought, we have arrived at non-thought. (25)

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

After a while our attention begins to wander. Having noticed the distraction, apply mindfulness and remain naturally. The natural state is effortless mindfulness. (26)

* * *

Thought activity in a yogi's mind is like writing on the surface of water. The thought arises, the essence is recognized, the thought dissolves.

Do not focus your attention on the expression. Rather, recognize the essence, then the expression has no power to remain anywhere. At this point the expression simply collapses or folds back into the essence.

* * *

In the face of directly seeing emptiness, the thought cannot remain, just as no object can remain in mid-air. When we do not recognize emptiness, we are continually carried away by thoughts. This is how the mind of sentient beings works, day and night.

As we become more stable in recognizing the essence free from conceptual thinking, its expression as conceptual thinking becomes increasingly baseless or unfounded.

* * *

Repeatedly you hear, 'Recognize mind essence, attain stability in that'. What this means is that we should repeatedly look into what thinks. We should recognize the absence or emptiness of this thinker over and over again, until finally the power of deluded thinking weakens, until it is totally gone without a trace.

The very moment you look, it is immediately seen that there is no 'thing' to see. It is seen in the moment of looking. In the moment of seeing, it is free from thought.

This is also called prajnaparamita, transcendent knowledge, because it is beyond or on the 'other side' of a conceptual frame of mind. (28,29)

* * *

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

In the moment of seeing, allow for a continuity free from thought. Simply rest freely in that. (28, 29)

* * *

Because we have been carried away from this state by conceptual thinking since beginningless lifetimes, we will again be swept away by the strength of habit. When this happens, you must notice, 'I am distracted'. Then look into 'Who is being carried away'. That immediately brings about the meeting with buddha nature. At that moment, leave it as it is. (29)

* * *

How can we practice this diligently, without being carried away by distraction? We must notice when we are carried away. Make a very clear distinction between being and not being distracted. Then look into what is being carried away. (31)

* * *

Self-existing wakefulness does not have to be thought of to be so. I expect you are all very intelligent, so pay careful attention to this: We all have something called self existing wakefulness that we do not need to create or manufacture. (32)

* * *

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

In the beginning the master will say, 'Look into your mind!' This watchfulness is necessary until you are used to it. Once that has happened you don't need to look here or there. You have caught the 'scent' of the nature of mind. At that point, you do not need to struggle. The nature of mind is naturally awake. (34)

* * *

Just remain in naturalness; whether it (knowing the nature of mind) lasts or not is okay either way. When this moment of recognition is artificially extended it turns into a dualistic state of mind. (35)

* * *

A famous quote sums up the whole reason for these (purification and meditation practices:

'When obscurations are removed, realization occurs spontaneously'.

The only thing that prevents realization is our obscurations and negative karma, and the preliminary practices remove them. When the mind is totally stripped of obscurations, realization is like a wide-open, clear sky with nothing to obscure it in any way whatsoever. (40)

* * *

Very often meditation practice is an exercise in keeping up a conceptual state. People often experience a certain tiredness after this such conceptual meditation. This fatigue is in exact proportion to how much effort was applied to maintain the state.

This is not the state of true samadhi that is totally free of homemade constructs or fabrications.

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

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

The most important aspect of the view is to be free of holding any notions about it. Especially be free from the subtle notions of 'sustainer' and 'that which is sustained'. (42,43)

* * *

In Dzogchen practice, one of the key points is 'short moments, repeated many times'. Not practicing short moments, by trying to sustain a continuous state is a form of attachment. It is not the same as mundane attachment that we leave behind during our meditation, instead, there is attachment to the 'taste' of the view, the feel of it. We fear it will slip through our fingers, fall apart, or disappear because of our distraction. To counteract that, we hold the notion of the view and try to maintain that state continuously. That is still attachment and attachment is what makes samsara survive.

I am not directing any blame towards you. This is merely how samsara is. It is a perpetuation of the five aggregates. We need to be free of all five aggregates by means of genuine meditation training. Therefore, it does not help to sit while continuing the aggregate of formation.

The five aggregates are sustained in the most subtle way by the momentary forming of thoughts. Unless you can step out of that, you cannot step out of samsara. This is an essential point.

It is most important to be free from the fascination, the subtle clinging to the feeling of meditation. First we totally relax. We get so relaxed and enjoy such a smooth, free feeling that sometimes we do not notice our physical body anymore. We experience, 'This is so much nicer than the normal state. I like it! I should feel like this all the time! I don't want to lose it. I'll see if I can just keep it going.'

This frame of mind is nothing other than attachment. Isn't it attachment we should try to step out of? The best way to do that is to practice short moments repeated many times. (44)

* * *

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

What he meant was, don't sit and think about what has happened in the past, and don't speculate on what will appear in the future, or even a few moments from now. Leave your present wakefulness, which is the buddha nature of self existing wakefulness, totally unmodified. Do not try to correct or alter anything. Leave it free, as it naturally is, free and wide open like space. There is nothing more to do besides that. (55)

* * *

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. (59)

From Meditation Pith Instructions, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche

“Taming the mind does not mean eliminating outer objects or suppressing inner thoughts. It means revealing and maintaining the natural state of the mind. Taming the mind has nothing to do with cultivating certain thoughts; it is simply keeping the mind in its fundamental state, where its clarity and wisdom are revealed. The true nature of the mind is calm and clear and full of compassion, love, and wisdom.

We do not always experience the mind in this way because ignorance obscures our awareness of the mind’s true nature. However, the wisdom nature is always there, and it can shine through and guide us in our lives.

Even foolish people have wisdom and can exhibit beautiful qualities because this basic goodness is found equally in all beings. Not only human beings, but all sentient beings have the same nature and potential for enlightenment. The problem is that temporary obscurations cover and distort the essential nature of the mind. When we completely remove the ignorance and reveal the mind’s true nature, we are enlightened.

It is important to remember that our true nature is only temporarily hidden. When we know that, we can work with courage and joy to remove the ignorance and let the essence of the mind shine forth. It is important for our diligence to be based on a joyful attitude, because without joyful effort we cannot reveal this true nature.

We need to exert ourselves now because this opportunity will not last forever. We must remember impermanence and the changing stages of life and death. Thinking about death and impermanence is often unpleasant - we usually do not like to acknowledge that everything, including ourselves, is subject to the law of incessant change. But change has good aspects as well, because without change there is no growth or improvement. With the right techniques, skills, and effort, we can learn and make positive changes.

By understanding impermanence and causality we can work toward enlightenment and make the most of this human life.”

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches, *The Buddhist Path* (pgs 2-3)

The purpose of Shamatha practice is to regulate the mind in order to make it stable and transparent to itself. Focus your mind for a short time, and then look directly at it. Once you behold your empty, open mind, simply rest in it. At this point there’s no need to regulate anything, and you should release the regulator too. Relax and let your mind do whatever it wants to do. This is one way to discover and experience the empty nature of mind.”

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches, *The Beauty of Awakened Mind*, pg 78

This present thought is sometimes called “ordinary thought,” or “ordinary mind.” The moment you look for the source of this present thought, it immediately becomes something extraordinary—pristine awareness.

Realization is your nature, and your nature never leaves you. It is ever-present and available. You can transform duality into nonduality at any time, even this very instant if you wish. Patrul Rinpoche says that this is due to the unimpeded nature of the mind.

This is your original mind. From this pristine true nature of rigpa, conceptions emanate. Chains or strings of thoughts keep coming. Yet this original mind is free from thoughts, even while it is their source, abiding place, and destination. It is the same teaching again and again: look within your own mind, understand its nature clearly, then maintain this realization. This is how to practice on the nature of the mind.”

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches: *Pointing Out the Nature of Mind*, pg 114

Whenever you need to increase your mental stability, use different Shamatha concentration techniques. These will definitely make your mind more peaceful. When you practice, different experiences will come up, but do not let these experiences distract you. Remember to not be too forceful - that will make you bored and tired. Be relaxed and comfortable. Bring joyful effort, courage, and commitment to your practice. Re-strengthen positive thoughts and be mindful. Again, 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 Rinpoches, *Pointing Out the Nature of Mind*, pgs 92-93

Question: The suffering of others makes me so sad that it becomes difficult for me to help them. What should I do?

Answer: It's beautiful to have such a compassionate heart, but it's true what you say - when the suffering of others makes you very sad, it will compromise your ability to help them. The next time you feel such strong compassion, look into the nature of your mind and reveal the empty dharmakaya state. This will help you to be free from emotions such as sadness. The union of compassion and emptiness is the perfect foundation for beneficial activity. Remember that whatever you do to help should be based on your own abilities, as well as the needs and readiness of others. Compassion must be applied and balanced with wisdom. This is important for you, and it's important for those you are helping.

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches, *The Beauty of Awakened Mind*, pg 94

Question: What is the relationship between Dzogchen and bodhichitta?

Khenpo Rinpoches: “The Dzogchen teachings are the highest teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni. From the Dzogchen point of view, everything is totally equal in one profound state, without duality and distinctions. *Dzogchen is the ultimate view of the true nature of mind, which includes love and compassion.* When we practice Dzogchen we develop compassion and loving-kindness; Dzogchen practice cannot be separated from bodhichitta practice. We cannot ignore relative bodhichitta and accept absolute bodhichitta; both are part of our true nature and both are part of Dzogchen.

For this reason, before we meditate, we take refuge and develop the thought of bodhichitta. After we meditate we dedicate the merit to all sentient beings.

Whenever we practice or do any kind of beneficial activity, we should not cling to it. At the absolute level, everything is totally pure and perfect in great emptiness. From that point of view, we are completely free from all dualistic concepts and clinging.

Until we come to realize the emptiness nature, we continue to follow our thoughts, judging things to be good or bad, better or worse, dirty or clean. Even while we are following our thoughts, the ultimate reality does not change. It is similar to the weather. When you see a cloudy, gray sky, you cannot see the sun, but that does not mean that the sun and the blue sky are not there. They are still there; the moving clouds do not affect them.

... Every person has the enlightened nature, but to actualize that nature it is necessary to practice bodhichitta, the love and compassion for all beings. Bodhichitta is universally precious; everybody appreciates it and everybody has the potential to develop it. Enlightenment is completely dependent upon developing compassion for all beings. The wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others is the essence of both the Mahayana and Vajrayana paths. When we develop inner wisdom, we can take care of

all sentient beings, and radiate compassion and kindness throughout the universe. We can discover the true nature of the mind and of the entire world. In order to be able to do this, meditation practice is very important.

Bodhichitta is the root or the seed from which enlightenment develops. Bodhichitta is not found externally, but it is within your own mind. Although all of us have experienced love and compassion, these qualities need to be developed further. *One way to increase them is to do the Dzogchen meditation of resting the mind in its own nature. This is because bodhichitta and emptiness have the same nature, the true nature of the mind.* Practicing bodhichitta openly and freely will increase your understanding of emptiness because compassion and emptiness are inseparable aspects of the primordial state of being.”

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches, *The Buddhist Path*

“One sign that your practice is really going well is that your mind is happy and joyful, never becoming bored by practice. Actually, you will be excited to practice, because practice brings you closer to the innate nature you are now discovering. You will be very enthusiastic!”

Venerable Khenpo Rinpoches, *Opening the Wisdom Door of the Outer Tantras*, pg 179

The Abiding Truth

{Being a Buddhist commentary on chapter 44 of Tanya, a text of mystical Judaism}

...the emergence from the latency and concealment of the heart into a state of revelation comes through knowledge

through a powerful fixation of the mind and an intense concentration

touching the depth of the heart, {upon that which is there} preeminently and continuously...

The Greater Love that is taught at this stage in Tanya is eternal, undiminished, unconditional, the Light of the World.

In Buddhism we refer to this Light as Buddha Nature, our Original Nature

Here are a few passages from an essay:

All beings are equally endowed with this Nature. It is not something that saints and sages have in a greater measure, and ordinary people have less. In all places and times, in all cultures, for all people, this essential, perfect, true nature is exactly the same...

This is our birthright, every one of us.

This is indestructible. No matter what sentient beings go through, it remains the same, and to be realized.

This is the holy amen hallelujah of Buddhism.

It is the source of all qualities -

All divine qualities are *right here*

freedom, and ease,

and,

All of the spiritual practice that we do is to reveal and to express this universal, timeless true nature...

The commentary on this section by Adin Steinsaltz reads in part:

The Great Love is indeed vast and superior in every way... Its greatness is such that it is beyond description; all one may venture to say is that it exceeds all other love.

It is so totally superior that it is not dependent on anything external - as all our earthy loves are - and can only be known by the act of inwardness, of meditative action...

This level of love opens one up to a growing awareness of some degree of inner identity with Divinity...

These are passages in reference to Buddha Nature, or original nature, sometimes called the ground of our being; it is our light, our sustenance, our inner identity and it reveals our connection to others, across borders, and times, and cultures; class and status.

If we touch this, even briefly in ourselves, or in reading a text, or through contact with an authentic teacher, it changes in that very moment the way we see ourselves and each other, our traditions, our social roles, and relationships.

Without this fundamental insight, that all traditions at heart would have us know, there is only separation, and conflict, of course, but the medicine is here, and beckons.

I thought a few days ago when reading the text and commentaries that this section is talking about unconditional love, and love as it is expressed in the world, dependent on conditions, with wisdom, and care, an intimation of the whole of it.

What is the relationship between unconditional love and the love we express in the world, towards our parents, teachers, brothers and sisters, friends and all others?

I'd say we draw from this source that transcends conditions, and, that we learn to be more true to this Great Love. It is in the limitations we meet and the struggle and disharmony we can learn from, our own dissatisfaction, if we can learn from it, that we arrive at a fuller love, one that is more attuned to Truth.

We can call the path self-lessness, as it is setting aside the ego, as a separate identity asserting itself where it is not needed, or not helpful, or we can call it fulfillment - seeing and knowing at last that the happiness and success of others is not different than our own.

From there, it's just a matter of work, with joy, having known the secret, in the words of Tanya, that

is close, that we may do it...

More can and should be said, of course, about the difference between divine, unconditional love, and our love as it is expressed in the world.

Articles and books, courses and degree programs, whole lives in fact can and should be dedicated to seeing and understanding the differences

between these two kinds of love, and how we can make our way to expressing love more purely.

Our limitations are met especially when someone goes against our wishes - for whatever reason - maybe they are a lunatic, or immature, acting on base impulses, or dishonest; maybe they don't meet our expectations, or our hopes. How do we respond then? We can remind ourselves that this is exactly where we meet our level, as it is, and can descend, or remain there, or we can transcend.

There is an interesting relationship I mentioned earlier between traditions that name ultimate truth and those who have a prohibition against it, with some very good reasons.

Whenever we take a part to be the whole, spiritually, we have erred, fallen into a form of idolatry. We may not think of it as such, but we have somehow managed, in our own mind, to reduce what is in fact limitless, boundless potential, unconditioned, and able to take on any form to speak to us, and to meet our needs.

If we see the object of our devotion as such, there is the feeling that a door opens. We can see immediately the meaning of other metaphors, other symbols of truth, as all expressing this.

We are filled with wonder and amazement.

We can still have our preferences, of course, our own unique karma and what works for us, but we will not denigrate other faiths, other beliefs, or non-beliefs. There is an equality at work in us and in the world.

Namo!

Homage!

Why do we elevate some objects, or people, as if they were inherently superior, if not because we have fallen away from this ultimate perspective?

History is rife with examples, and decaying legacies that haunt us still, that we sleep through. Where will we find resolution to all the harms that are an undeniable part of our histories?

We make our way gradually, or all at once. The slow paths are easier, more accessible, but there is no limit to the ways truth can reveal herself, and be known in this world.

For some, the transcendent is all, and the one remaining step is hardly a step at all, but is seeing this world as it is, and responding as needed, with care, and celebration.

For others, we need traditions, and sacred stories, art and music and architecture to lift us up.

As Rumi said,

*Saints are theatres,
where the qualities of God can be seen...*

From them, we learn to love completely, and if it is only for a time, we are drawn on, irresistibly, towards loves fulfillment.

This then is the meeting of unconditional love, and love as it is expressed in our lives in the world; it is the meeting of the transcendent and time, of the universal and the particular here.

Two quotes

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

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

From An Old Man Basking in the Sun, by Longchenpa

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From The Prayer Kuntuzangpo

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

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

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

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

May all beings engulfed by desire and attachment
 Neither reject desire's pleasure,

Nor accept its sorrow,
But relax mind into its own state,
Restore self-refreshing awareness
And realize discriminating wisdom.

May all sentient beings of the six realms
No longer cling to enemies when anger arises,
But relax their own mind,
Restore self-refreshing awareness
And realize mirror-like wisdom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abide in the silence of its natural simplicity

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

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

Rest in this natural state
of rigpa self-awareness:

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

Don't follow rising thoughts;
leave them be.

Let whatever appears unfold
and naturally liberate itself.

On Devotion and Receiving Blessings - by Various Teachers

Ringu Tulku

Thrangu Rinpoche

Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

Garchen Rinpoche

Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

Dudjom Rinpoche

Kelsang Gyatso

Bokar Rinpoche

Chamtrul Rinpoche

Mingyur Rinpoche

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

The Qualities of the Guru

Homage to my teacher

Lama Yeshe

In Praise of Big Love

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Dilgo Khyentse

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Pabonkha Rinpoche

Devotion, by Ringu Tulku

As you become calmer, you become clearer. The fewer concepts you have, the more clear you become. In a way, the only thing we can do to make realization dawn is to relax in meditation and do nothing. This is how we will come to know the nature of mind.

Realizing the nature of mind has nothing to do with how clever you are. Sometimes, having a great deal of theoretical understanding is not the best thing. The only quality that is always stressed is devotion. *Meditative experience can arise through devotion.*

Devotion has three special qualities: inspiration, aspiration and certainty. When you are certain that something is true, it sparks your devotion to act accordingly. Devotion is not the same as belief; it arises when something rings true to you. Devotion is based on understanding the dharma, and inspiration motivates one to practice.

The more you are able to let be and free yourself from concepts, the more you are able to open your heart. And the more you open your heart, the more you can relax in the nature of mind.

Using Devotion as a Medium for Meditation

From the teachings of Ringu Tulku

Devotion is a kind of feeling, a feeling of inspiration... It is an opening of the heart. When you feel devotion, when you feel inspiration, your heart opens. It's a kind of emotion...

There's a lot of similarity between devotion and compassion. They are both an opening of the heart.

Generally, compassion is an opening of the heart to other beings, and devotion is an opening of the heart to higher beings.

Therefore, for meditation, and especially meditations like Mahamudra, it's a very suitable mode, a medium for meditation.

That's why, maybe it's said that you actually can understand and realize Mahamudra *only* through devotion. Sometimes it is said like that.

And of course it relates to the three kinds of faith (faith as an intuition, verified faith, and unshakable faith), but it also refers to when our heart opens...

If we pray, and meditate, then devotion is a *clear* emotion. It's a very inspired emotion, but there is no attachment or aversion. There is no negativity in that. It's a very positive and clear emotion, an opening of heart...

When you are in a devotional state, and you allow your mind to be in that state, then it's not analytical - it's a non-conceptual state, but a *very aware*, a very clear, non-conceptual state...

So therefore, it's very often said that it's very easy to experience the true nature of your mind, your ordinary mind- the awareness, clarity, and emptiness nature of your mind...

When you're in a devotional state, and you look at your mind, your consciousness- then, 'look' does not really mean 'look' in a dualistic way, but *you feel* that state...

So, many times people get that experience of the true nature of our mind, the Mahamudra state, or the Dzogchen state when receiving an empowerment, or when doing guru yoga. Guru yoga is a practice of devotion...

On Devotion and On Receiving Blessings - by various teachers

Genuine devotion based upon trust and understanding is a very important medium in meditation. In a devotional state of mind we are free from negative emotions; there is no jealousy or anger, and not much attachment either. At the same time, devotion is very strong. It is an extremely intense, clean, and pure emotion. It is very distinct and has an almost nonconceptual quality.

When real devotion arises, we feel so uplifted that the hair on our body may stand on end and tears may well up in our eyes. In this state negative feelings do not have an opportunity to surface, so there is no delusion and no dullness either. It is an undiluted experience, very clear and precise. Devotion is not conceptual and does not involve any judgment. It is therefore the ideal state of mind in which to meditate. This is especially true of *Mahamudra meditation, which develops strongly in a state of devotion.*

- Ringu Tulku

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

- Thrangu Rinpoche

Three things are most important - devotion, diligence, and wisdom, or intelligence, or clarity.

We need to have a little bit of intelligence, or wisdom, or capacity. Without that, we can't understand, but even if we have that, we need to have diligence. Even if we have some understanding, or some little experience, we need to practice again, and again, and again.

Like we talked about with shamatha meditation - it's very simple. There's almost nothing that you can't understand, but then, just understanding doesn't make any difference to you. So, you need to do it.

It's the same with mahamudra, or vipashana - we can have some kind of experience or understanding, but then we need to continually practice that diligently.

But then, with all these things, it's not just your efforts, or your intelligence, you know... you are clever, and intelligent, and you work very hard, it's not that... it's a lot to do with, sometimes we call it blessings...

Something has to open up, and these things are not something we can do with effort. Your heart has to open. And there, devotion is very important.

That's why sometimes they say that experiences like mahamudra, and dzogchen, can only be through devotion. Sometimes they say like that. That's why guru yoga is always said to be an important path, an important medium with these meditations.

The more you have devotion, the more your heart is open, the more likely you are to have the experience of this.

That's why they talk about these three things.

- Ringu Tulku

When we use the very profound methods of mahamudra, when the guru points directly to the mind, then by meditating one or two days, perhaps one of us will realize the fruition. This is exceedingly fortunate. This is very important and is a very profound method. When we realize this quickly, we think, "I have realized just this one thing; the experience of mind." Some may scorn this, but we should never scorn this. It is truly the profound means to enlightenment. This is very important.

- Thrangu 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

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. That is because although the bodies of the old masters have died, their minds have never died. Their minds continue to remain pervasive as space. Thus whoever thinks of their great qualities with devotion will access their minds. Thus, our lineage is called the "practice lineage of blessings." This is something that scientists have not discovered. It is the meaning of 'Secret Mantra,' or 'Vajrayana Buddhism,' which teaches that depending on devotion one can receive the blessings and qualities of the guru. (65)

- Garchen Rinpoche

On Devotion, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

According to Dzogchen, and the special approach of the great Dzogchen master Shri Singha, there is a way of recognizing the nature of mind solely through devotion.

There are cases of practitioners who simply through their heartfelt devotion attained realization, even though their teacher had already passed away or was nowhere near them physically.

Because of their prayers and devotion, the nature of mind was introduced. The classic example is that of Jigme Lingpa and his consuming devotion for Longchen Rabjam.

In the prayer of Dorje Chang it is said that devotion is the head of meditation. This refers to the devotion which should be developed in the Vajrayana- a kind of devotion which completely and naturally awakens in oneself without imagination or fooling oneself. When it appears in one's mind, *common thoughts subside through the blessing of the lama and the experience of meditation arises naturally*, without putting any effort into meditation. Then the inspiration of the body, speech, and mind of the lama can be effective in oneself.

- From The Lama - The Source of Blessings, by Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

The best method for eliminating obstacles during meditation is that of devotion to the Lama. Thanks to this, our mind becomes one with the mind of the Lama...

This is really the secret of meditation.

- Dudjom Rinpoche

On receiving blessings, by Ringu Tulku

From Meeting Challenges

Sometimes we pray and I think we can get blessings through that. Most probably we can get blessings- I am sure we can get blessings!, but how much blessing I get does not depend on how much blessing somebody else is giving. How much blessing I get is how much blessing I am able to receive.

From a Buddhist point of view, the Buddhas are trying to give blessing all the time. It is never the case that a Buddha withholds blessings, otherwise he or she is not a Buddha.

So, how much blessing I receive does not depend on how much blessing a Buddha is giving me, 'because he is pleased with me'. It depends on how much I can receive because I open myself to those blessings.

If I practice, if I really work on opening my heart, then I receive blessing, whether the Buddhas like it or not. They cannot help themselves but to give blessing.

So therefore, blessing is also not dependent on somebody else. It is dependent on me. This is how to understand it. This is the practice.

On the unwavering cushion of the union of method and wisdom,
Sits the kind Lama who is the nature of all Protectors.
There is a Buddha in the state of the culmination of cessations and
realizations.

Beseech him in the light of admiration, by casting away cynical thoughts.
Don't let your mind go astray, but place it within admiration and reverence.
Through not losing mindfulness, hold it within admiration and reverence.

- Kelsang Gyatso, the VII Dalai Lama

Your spiritual master is like the sun in space -
When your doubts or wrong views do not cloud him,
His compassionate light shines continuously:
In yearning faith and devotion, pray.

- Bokar Rinpoche

Glorious and precious Root Guru who sits on a lotus-moon seat on the
crown of my head, through your great kindness, having taken me as your
disciple, grant me the accomplishments of the Body, Speech and Mind (of
the Buddhas).

- From a Vajrasattva Sadhana

Never underestimate the power of blessings.

Just how the sun shines on to this world without ever discriminating, the compassionate wisdom energy of all of the buddhas pervades everything. No matter where you are, no matter what you do, this energy is always there, it is always with you.

But just as you need to open your eyes to experience the light of the sun, you have to open your mind with unshakable devotion to experience the blessings of the energy of the buddhas. The more that your mind opens, the greater the blessings that will energize your mind and power your practice all of the way to your enlightenment.

You do not have to run around searching for blessings, as the compassionate wisdom energy of all of the buddhas pervades everything, everywhere. No matter who you are, or where you are, their energy is always with you.

All that you have to do is fill your mind with devotion, and your mind will just open up to their energy, and then the blessings will just naturally arise. The greater your devotion, the greater the blessings.

Never underestimate the importance of blessings. They uplift, clarify, and brighten your mind's energy, resulting in your mind becoming more powerful, and your practice becoming more fruitful.

~ Chamtrul Rinpoche

The living teacher embodies the wisdom of the practice lineage and functions like a lit lamp that has the energetic power to ignite the mind of the student. If you make a connection, you will get lit, too. This is what we call transmission.

Transmission or blessing does not just come through formal rituals and ceremonies, or through words. If a teacher rests his or her mind in realization and teaches from that place, that quality of mind can be expressed and communicated, and can be transmitted to a student ready to receive it. Through the teacher's hand gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and so forth, the student can receive and begin to embody the view that the guru is transmitting.

The living lineage comes through the teacher, not the historical Buddha. For the student, the teacher is kinder than the Buddha because he or she is the root cause of our spiritual maturation. Blessings come not only from the guru, but also through the guru, who is perceived not only as a living buddha but also as the prime vehicle for the dharma teachings and the noble sangha.

Our ability to recognize and use the benefits of the guru's blessings depends on our devotion. Devotion makes us receptive to all the guru offers.

- Mingyur Rinpoche

During an empowerment, if you have faith, you can receive blessings and recognize the true nature of mind. Even if the master is an ordinary person, if you receive the empowerment with faith, the blessings of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and lineage masters will reach you, and you will be able to gain an experience of the nature of mind.

The experience of the nature of mind that comes through blessings is called the descent of primordial wisdom. It is something that may also be repeated continually throughout one's own practice of receiving the empowerments during the practice of Guru Yoga.

- Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

The Qualities of the Guru , by Lama Yeshe

There is the need for an organic, living kind of force to come in touch with our heart.

The main reason that religion in both the East and the West has degenerated so much nowadays is the rarity of meeting good spiritual examples. If people never meet highly realized beings they have no way of knowing the limitless possibilities of their own human consciousness. It is not enough that there are texts recording the deeds and accomplishments of past masters. By themselves, such stories cannot inspire us very much. In fact, they may only increase our feeling of remoteness: "Buddha and Jesus lived such a long time ago," we may think, "and their purity belongs to another age. It is impossible for someone like myself living in this degenerate twenty-first century to attain anything resembling their level of purity."

The only way we can lay to rest these feelings of doubt, incapability and cynicism is by coming face to face with someone who has activated their highest potential. Only then do we have an example of purity and spiritual evolution we can actually see and relate to ourselves. Thus the outer guru is of utmost importance. We need the example of someone who, while human like ourselves, has developed beyond the bounds of what we presently think possible.

When we see someone who has reached beyond selfishness, who has transcended the petty concerns of this world while still living in the world, who speaks and acts from intuitive wisdom and who is truly dedicated to the welfare of others, then we can have faith and conviction that these attainments are possible for ourselves as well.

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

On Guru Yoga

From *An Introduction to Tantra*, by Lama Yeshe

Either in front of us or above the crown of our head we visualize the main divine form we are practicing surrounded by the various gurus of the lineage. These lineage gurus are the successive masters who have passed on the teachings and realizations of that particular practice and include everyone from the first master of the lineage through to our own spiritual guide, the guru from whom we received the empowerment.

We then request the members of this assembly to bestow their inspiration and blessings upon us and, in response to this request, they merge with one another, enter us through the crown of our head in the form of light, descend our central channel, and dissolve into our heart center. As this happens, all ordinary dualistic appearances and conceptions dissolve into the clear space of emptiness. We then meditate upon the feeling that our guru, who in essence is identical with the bodhisattva-divinity, and our own subtle consciousness have become indistinguishably one.

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. Therefore, when we visualize the guru absorbing into our heart we should feel that an indestructible impression of that wisdom is being made upon our fundamental mind. From this time onwards we should try to recall this inner experience of great bliss and non-dual wisdom repeatedly, no matter what circumstances we may encounter.

In Praise of Big Love

Dear Nick,

I am writing to you this evening to express my deepest thanks for the publication of Big Love. I would have written sooner, but I kept having to wipe away the tears from my eyes...

I know now what it means when they say something is an auspicious event, because you have done justice to Lama Yeshe's remarkable life, which is quite an achievement.

I celebrate tonight, knowing full well that in times to come, all those who meet Lama through this book will be meeting his Great Love, and Wisdom. They will be connecting with the Mahayana Dharma, and incalculable benefit will surely come from that.

A little into the second volume, I suddenly realized that I was holding a sacred object in my hands. It is the result of millions of virtues, those of Lama Yeshe's, and *his* teachers; those of his students and benefactors, and the faith, and love and devotion of all those who worked over the years to bring this project to completion.

My deepest thanks to Adele, to you, Nick, to Lama Zopa, to the editors, designers, and printers, and all those who have added to the creation of this sacred work.

With gratitude,

Jason Espada.

With faith, we know with our hearts so much more than can be understood with the intellect.

Faith is also associated with devotion. If faith is trust and reliance, relaxing and believing in something, then devotion acts more like a magnet, drawing what we are devoted to to us.

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche has these beautiful and true things to say about devotion:

Devotion creates readiness, just as in the Spring the sun and rain make gardens ready to plant seeds and start growth.

and,

Devotion is the key that opens the door of pure vision. It leads us beyond darkness, doubt and hesitation; it will help us recover from periods of difficulty. Devotion takes us beyond conceptions to an understanding of the true nature.

- From A Belief in the Miraculous

When your mind is filled with devotion you also experience great inner peace. Your heart is full of incredible joy and you see yourself as unbelievably fortunate. Even though there might be other difficulties in your life, such as no money, no visa or no job, your strong guru devotion overwhelms your problems and external things don't bother you much. Your life becomes very enjoyable and very meaningful.

- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

To have devotion constantly in your mind will endow you with lasting serenity and satisfaction. Remembering even the name of your spiritual teacher is enough to completely transform your perceptions. Visualizing the guru above the crown of your head, even for an instant, can dissipate the veils of illusion.

Devotion is the ring that allows the hook of the teacher's compassion to pull you out of the mire of samsara.

Enlightenment, inherent though it is in the mind, seems so difficult to unveil, but if you develop fervent devotion and fuse the guru's enlightened nature with your ordinary mind, enlightenment can be realized. Truly, to meditate on the benevolent teacher is a spiritual practice more profound than any other.

– Dilgo Khyentse, from “The Hundred Verses of Advice”

Devotion can be cultivated by appreciating the exceptional qualities of the object of our faith.

Obviously, some people like Asians and maybe Latinos, in general, have a natural capacity for devotion, perhaps it is because they seem to have a closer connection with their heart emotions, but we can all practice.

Really, all can practice opening the heart, because this is how blessings are received. It's very important, if we want to get the blessings, then we have to open up our heart, and our heart is opened through our faith and devotion. So we need to recognize how important this is.

The way that Buddhism has been transplanted in the West, often bypasses faith and devotion, and it becomes very cerebral almost, all up in the head. We need very much to bring our practice down into a much deeper level of consciousness, which is opened through our faith and devotion.

And definitely, as I say, if we think of the object of our devotion and really appreciate that,

Why is this special?

What qualities do they enact which I also need to develop?

- then we feel deep appreciation and love and devotion. It just comes up from the heart...

~ Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

From Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, by Pabonkha Rinpoche

They say we should recite verses on the guru's kindness when we contemplate how very kind he is. The following verses were spoken by Kumara Manibhadra in the section on the kindness of the spiritual guide from *The Laying Out of Stalks Sutra*:

*My spiritual guides, my exponents of the Dharma,
Are qualified to teach me all the Dharma;
They came with but one thought: to fully teach me
The tasks facing the bodhisattva.*

*Because they gave birth to me, they are like my mother;
They are like wet nurses feeding me the milk of good qualities;
They have thoroughly trained in the branches to enlightenment.
These spiritual guides keep me from that which harms.*

*They are like doctors who free me from death and old age,
Or like Indra the celestial lord raining down nectars;
They increase white Dharma like the waxing moon
And, like the shining sun, show the way to peace.*

*They are like mountains, unmoved by friend or foe.
Their minds are undisturbed like oceans.
They are dear ones who protect completely.
These were the thoughts that made me go to them.*

*Bodhisattvas, who are developing my mind,
Children of the buddhas who bring me enlightenment-
They guide me, the buddhas sing their praises.
I came to them with these virtuous thoughts.*

*They are like heroes for they shield me from the world;
They are my captains, my refuge and protection;*

*They are my very eyes, my comfort;
With these thoughts honor your spiritual guides.*

From *The Essence of Nectar lamrim*:

*I have given up family life, that pit of fire,
And carry out in solitude the Sage's deeds;
I taste the succulent nectar of the Dharma.
This is the kindness of my venerable gurus.*

*I have met the teachings of Tsongkapa,
Hard to find in a thousand eons of searching,
And gained faith in the way he taught -
This is the kindness of holy tutors.*

*Therefore my spiritual guides
Are protectors shielding me from lower realms,
Captains to free me from samsara's ocean,
Guides to lead me to high rebirth and liberation.*

*Doctors to cure me of chronic delusion,
Rivers to douse the great fires of suffering,
Lamps to remove the darkness of ignorance,
Suns to light the path to liberation.*

*Liberators from the closed prison of samsara,
Clouds that gently rain the holy Dharma,
Dear friends who help me, dispelling harm,
Kindly parents who are always loving...*

Contemplate these verses as you recite them, and remember the kindness of your own gurus.

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!*

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

Homage to the lama!

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

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

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

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

Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2015.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Use mindfulness as a support for your practice. Maintain the natural state in this way for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. While you are practicing emptiness meditation, occasionally bring up joy, appreciation, and devotion, as well as love and compassion for a few moments - then return to emptiness. This will bring more vitality to your emptiness meditation.

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

A Song to Introduce the View, by Khenpo Gangshar

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

Hey, you of great fortune!

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

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

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

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

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

When you are able to practice for longer periods, it can be like, for example, when muddy water is stirred up and then allowed to settle – the innate lucidity of the water becomes clearer. Similarly, when myriad appearances arise and are realized to be like reflections, they cause the natural clarity of

mind itself to become ever clearer. This in turn leads to the effortless arising of various qualities, such as the various types of clairvoyance and so on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translated by Sean Price, 2015

A Prayer to Shakyamuni Buddha and to All Noble teachers

The Buddha taught the Way to end suffering
and to peace and well being,
and so I hold him on the crown of my head

He had great wisdom
and great love and compassion for all,
and so I hold him in my heart

And those who accomplished his teachings
throughout time
and became benefactors and teachers themselves,
I celebrate *all* of their accomplishments and activities,
all the peace and health they help bring into this world

My own teachers,
incomparably kind to me,
have supported and encouraged me in so many ways,
bringing them to mind brings me joy and strength

Having received all these gifts,
and seeing what great needs there are in the world at this time,
I pray
May I accomplish the best purpose with the Dharma

May I use it to bring benefit
to all who need help today
Now and always,
may it be this way for me

I pray to all my teachers to help me to do this,
and,
May all the prayers of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas
be accomplished exactly as they were made

Finding Refuge

Note to myself, on the occasion of this day called Chokhor Duchon, commemorating the Buddha's First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, in Sarnath, India, 2,600 years ago

If you're not suffering,
weighed down and weary,
with no end in sight,
without companionship, or aid given,
the idea of finding a safe haven
would never come to mind

Too many people and places,
these days especially, advertise,
they're trustworthy, they say,
and we want to believe them
until we wake up and everything we own is gone,
and we're driven back out into the cold

I don't blame you for not trusting
I know how hard it can be -
how fear, despair, and aggression can twist our senses
We paint the storms, and the enemies too
until nothing reaching us
of beauty, or peace, or pleasure,
or the love that is offered...

but keep looking, I say,
there are trustworthy guides,
and safe places,
where people are honest,
and willing to talk you down,
or just give you a place to rest

for as long as you need to,
to recover your strength and clarity

One Person spoke a true word
and storms have been stilled in every direction since

Finding refuge
is not like the common barricades and false friends,
it's not like mourning, or distraction and numbness,
but a bright and solid ground for your whole life

and from that time on, even in your sleep and dreams,
through all your trials, lifetime after lifetime,
devotion will lead you back home

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato
Arahato Samma Sambudassa!*

*Homage to the Blessed One,
the Worthy, and Fully Awakened One!*

Selections from Our Pristine Mind II, by Orgyen Chowang

The Beauty of Pristine Mind

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

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

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

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

Who we are not

When we have ordinary, unenlightened perception, we see and perceive thoughts and emotions as just who we are. We think that our ordinary

mind - our thoughts and emotions and the swirl of events in our mind - actually make up the "I" we speak of when we refer to ourselves.

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

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

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

Avidya and Vidya - a teaching by Namkai Norbu

{Avidya: fundamental ignorance, misknowledge; not seeing, not knowing; Wrong View as a basis;

Vidya: Fundamental wisdom, understanding, seeing and knowing correctly, Right View as a basis}

If, through fundamental misperception of reality, an individual enters into the confusion of dualism, primordial consciousness, which is in fact the source of all manifestation (even of dualistic consciousness and, in fact, of all phenomena), itself becomes obscured.

The individual's deluded mind then mistakes the manifestations of its own pure, innate primordial awareness for an external reality existing separately from itself, which it endlessly, and ultimately unsuccessfully, attempts to manipulate, trying in vain to bring an end to the continual underlying sense of dissatisfaction and unease which is the inevitable experience of the obscuration of pure awareness.

The experience of underlying dissatisfaction that unavoidably arises with a deluded mind, continues, no matter how 'successful' the individual becomes in dealing with his or her world in materialistic terms, until the individual regains the experience of the primordial state.

Distinguishing Sem and Rigpa, by various teachers

From Naturally Liberating Whatever You Meet, by Khenpo Gangshar

Distinguishing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Four Reliances:

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

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

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

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

When we come to meditation

Here the mind is not active. You do not entertain any thoughts at all, whether recalling the past or thinking about the future. Simply rest in the present moment of awareness, fresh and uncontrived. Without any kind of

examining, or analyzing whatsoever, the mind dwells, tranquil and at peace, in a non-conceptual state. This is the basis from which you start.

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

As you maintain this state and continue your practice over a period of time, the stupidity and dullness can, when certain factors come into play, be gradually removed. *Rigpa - because there is a distinction to be made between the ordinary mind and rigpa here - becomes fully evident, extremely clear and lucid, undistorted by the thoughts and concepts of the ordinary mind, and divested of the stupid quality of stable alaya. (italics added)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

From Meditation on Buddha Nature, by Gebchak Wangdrak Rinpoche

Student: Rinpoche could you speak about the difference between the clear light mind and a blank mind?

Rinpoche: A blank mind, or a totally empty mind with nothing happening, is an extreme of nothingness. This is a misunderstanding of emptiness. In understanding the difference between a blank mind and clear light mind, we should understand that when we say clear light we do not mean as in a shining light. We are not talking about a yellow light or a colour, but rather a lucid, aware clarity. When we talk about the aspect of clarity in Rigpa, it is not like light rays from the sun. Rather it is clear and pure awareness. If we are thinking of a colour, then we don't have the ultimate view. As soon as we've identified a conceptual colour, then there is an opposite to it. For example if we've identified a vivid colour, then there is an opposite of darkness or dullness. Therefore that is not it. That is not the ultimate view.

Westerners are generally very well educated and liberal. They have bright potential and sharp intellects. But perhaps westerners face a problem of taking the intellect too far. They are always making efforts to understand intellectually. They are trying to discover the subtlest points, the deepest and most profound understandings, through intellectual reason. But the ultimate truth cannot be known with the intellect. It can only be known within one's own experience, one's own nature of mind, with strong faith, pure vision and the compassionate heart of Bodhicitta. That is where it is.

Devotion stated in other terms is faith and pure perception. The experience of pure perception is empty and appearing. It is both empty and clear – a union. There is nothing solidly existing there, but at the same time it is awareness and clarity. In order to realise the true view, the Buddhist view,

we require a lot of conditions. It takes Bodhicitta, the warm heart, and it takes devotion and faith. There are many different conditions required to realize the ultimate view.

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

~ Thubten Yeshe

From *As it Is*, by Tulku Urgyen

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

In every sentient being there is mind. The essence of this mind, whether known or not, is *rigpa*. Sentient beings have both mind and *rigpa*. A true yogi, a practitioner of this path, abandons the dualistic frame of mind while allowing the state of *rigpa* to remain when *sem* falls away.

At Shukseb nunnery in Central Tibet, the great female master Ani Lochen expressed a single wish whenever someone requested her blessings. With an implement in her hand she would touch people's head, saying, "May you

recognize the essence of mind." She repeated this to every person she blessed: "May you recognize the essence of mind." She would always say exactly the same thing. She never said "May you recognize mind," meaning sem. She always said, "May you recognize the essence of mind." In other words, may you no longer be caught up in dualistic mind, like water seeping into soil, but may you be innately stable, like mercury.

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

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

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

A Lamp to Dispel Darkness

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

The Homage

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

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

The Instruction that Cracks Open the Egg-shell of Ignorance

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

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

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

As *The Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra* says:

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

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

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

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

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

The Instruction for Cutting through the Web of Saṃsāric Existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Instruction for Remaining in the Equalness which is like Space

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

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

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

At times, you might experience states of bliss on which you fixate, while at other times you might experience states of bliss free of such fixation.

At times, you might have various experiences of clarity with grasping, while at other times you might experience a vivid clarity that is unsullied and free of grasping.

At times, you might have unpleasant and disturbing experiences, while at other times you might have pleasant and soothing experiences.

And at times, you might experience an extreme turbulence of thoughts which carries your mind away, causing you to lose your meditation; while at other times, you might experience unclear states of mind because of a failure to distinguish between mental dullness and vivid clarity.

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

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

At this point, investigate the distinction between the recognition and nonrecognition of rigpa, between ālaya and dharmakāya, and between ordinary awareness and wisdom.

Through the master's pith instructions, and on the basis of your own personal experience, have confidence in the direct introduction you receive.

While you are maintaining this, just as water clears by itself if you do not stir it, your ordinary awareness will settle in its own nature. So you need to focus mainly on the instructions which clearly show how the true nature of this awareness is naturally arising wisdom.

Don't analyze with a view to adopting one state and abandoning another, thinking, "What is this that I am cultivating in meditation? Is it ordinary awareness or wisdom?" Nor should you entertain all kinds of speculations based on the understanding you have gained from books, because doing will only serve to obstruct both śamatha and vipaśyanā.

At some point, the aspect of familiarity or śamatha - which here means settling in an utterly natural way with stable and continuous mindfulness - and vipaśyanā - which here means the awareness that knows its own nature by itself - will merge together automatically. When this happens, and you gain some stable familiarity with it, you come to understand how the śamatha and vipaśyanā that are the primordial stillness of the natural state and the clear light of your own nature have always been inseparable, and the naturally arising wisdom that is the wisdom mind of Dzogpachenpo dawns.

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

The glorious Saraha said:

*Having gone beyond thinker and thinking,
Remain like a young child, free of thoughts,
This is the way to be.*

He also said:

*Focus on the master's words and apply great effort -
Then, if you have received the master's instructions introducing you to your rigpa:
There is no doubt that your inherent nature will arise.*

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

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

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

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

Profound! Guhya! Samaya!

This profound instruction was written by Mipham Jampal Dorje on the twelfth day of the second month, in the Fire Horse year (1906), for the benefit of village yogis and others, who, while not able to exert themselves too much in study and contemplation, still wish to take the very essence of mind into experience through practice. It has been set out in language that

is easy to understand, in accordance with the experiential guidance of a great many old realized masters. Virtue! Mangalam!

Rigpa Translations, Adam Pearcey, 2005.

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

From Tara's Enlightened Activity, and A Garland of Views, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

This is our original, unborn, and undying wisdom, which radiates all the time. This is the most powerful light. At this moment the undying flame of wisdom is hidden behind or within our phenomenal conceptions. This inner light resides within us, never dimming, never losing its qualities, never dying out.

Whatever brightness, clarity, analytic energy, or understanding we have actually arise from that original, unborn wisdom. All are none other than the innate nature of our own mind. This wisdom nature of the mind is the ultimate fire that consumes all deluded perceptions.

and,

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.

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

Namo guru!

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

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

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

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

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

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

To the glorious Primordial Protector, I pay homage!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thoughts will continue to arise at first, but, without having to resort to any other remedy in order to stop them, they will be freed by themselves in an

instant simply by leaving them as they are - like a snake uncoiling its own knots by itself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Inuit Song

And I thought over again
My small adventures
As with a shore-wind I drifted out
In my kayak
And thought I was in danger,

My fears,
Those small ones
That I thought so big
For all the vital things
I had to get and to reach

And yet, there is only
One great thing,
The only thing:
To live to see in huts and on journeys
The great day that dawns,
And the light that fills the world.

The Instruction of Pointing the Staff, by Padmasambhava, revised

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

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

Listen here old man! Look into the awakened nature of your own awareness! It has neither form nor color, neither center nor edge. At first, it has no origin but is empty. Next, it has no dwelling place but is empty. At the end, it has no destination but is empty. This ungraspability is unconstructed and is clear and cognizant. When you see this and recognize it, you know your original nature. You understand the nature of things. You have then seen the nature of mind, resolved the basic state of reality and cut through doubts about topics of knowledge.

This awakened mind of awareness is not made out of any material substance; it is self-existing and inherent in yourself. This is the nature of things that is easy to realize because it is not to be sought for elsewhere. This is the nature of mind that does not consist of a reified perceiver and something perceived to fixate on. It defies the limitations of permanence and annihilation. In it there is no thing to awaken or improve upon, or cause to continue;

the awakened state of enlightenment is your own awareness that is by nature awake. In it there is no thing that goes to the hells; awareness is naturally pure. In it there is no practice to carry out; its nature is naturally cognizant. This great view of the natural state is present and complete in yourself: resolve that it is not to be sought for elsewhere.

When you understand the view in this way and want to apply it in your experience, wherever you stay is the mountain retreat of your body. Whatever external appearance you perceive is a naturally occurring appearance and a naturally selfless and ungraspable; let it be, free from mental constructs added on and taken hold of. Naturally freed appearances then become your helpers, and you can practice while taking appearances as the path.

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

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

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

Once you realize this, your material body may be old, but awakened mind doesn't age. It knows no difference between young and old. The innate nature is beyond bias and partiality. When you recognize that awareness, innate wakefulness, is present in yourself, there is no difference between sharp and dull faculties.

When you understand the innate nature, free from bias and partiality, is present within yourself, there is no difference between great and small learning. Even though your body, the support for the mind, falls apart, the dharmakaya of awareness wisdom is unceasing. When you gain stability in this unchanging state, there is no difference between a long and a short life-span.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rigpa, primordial being, innate awareness, is primordially awakened: free, untrammled, perfect, and unchanging. Yet we need to recognize it within our very own being if it is to be truly realized. Rigpa is our share or portion of the dharmakaya. Those who overlook it have forgotten their true original nature.

Subject to suffering, karma, and confusion, we must recognize rigpa in order to actualize our own total potential, the sublime joy, peace, and freedom of enlightenment itself.

What does it mean to gain certainty?

Again the king asked: What does it mean to “gain certainty”?

The master responded: Gain certainty in the fact that since the very beginning your own mind is the awakened state of buddhahood.

Gain certainty in the fact that all phenomena are the magical display of your mind.

Gain certainty in the fact that the fruition is present in yourself and is not to be sought elsewhere.

Gain certainty in the fact that your master is the buddha in person.

Gain certainty in the fact that the nature of view and meditation is the realization of the buddhas.

To gain such confidence you must practice!

Padmasambhava - Advice From the Lotus Born. - Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

Hitting the Essence in Three Words

“The Special Teaching of the Wise and Glorious King”

The Root Text

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

Homage to the master!

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

1. Introducing directly the face of rigpa in itself

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

2. Decide upon one thing, and one thing only

Then, whether in a state of movement or stillness,
 Of anger or attachment, happiness or sorrow,
 All the time, in any situation,
 Recognize that dharmakāya you recognized before,
 And mother and child clear light, already acquainted, will reunite.
 Rest in the aspect of awareness, beyond all description.
 Stillness, bliss and clarity: disrupt them, again and again,
 Suddenly striking with the syllable of skillful means and wisdom.
 With no difference between meditation and post-meditation,
 No division between sessions and breaks,
 Always remain in this indivisible state.
 But, until stability is attained,
 It is vital to meditate, away from all distractions and busyness,
 Practicing in proper meditation sessions.
 All the time, in any situation,
 Abide by the flow of what is only dharmakāya.
 Decide with absolute conviction that there is nothing other than this—
 The second vital point is: decide upon one thing, and one thing only.

3. Confidence directly in the liberation of rising thoughts

At that point, whether attachment or aversion, happiness or sorrow—
 All momentary thoughts, each and every one,
 Upon recognition, leave not a trace behind.
 For recognize the dharmakāya in which they are freed,
 And just as writing vanishes on water,
 Arising and liberation become natural and continuous.
 And whatever arises is food for the bare rigpa emptiness,
 Whatever stirs in the mind is the inner power of the dharmakāya king,
 Leaving no trace, and innately pure. What joy!
 The way things arise may be the same as before,
 But the difference lies in the way they are liberated: that's the key.

Without this, meditation is but the path of delusion,
 When you have it, there's non-meditation, the state of dharmakāya -
 The third vital point is: confidence directly in the liberation of rising
 thoughts.

4. Colophon

For the View which has the three vital points,
 Meditation, the union of wisdom and love,
 Is accompanied by the Action common to all the bodhisattvas.
 Were all the buddhas of past, present and future to confer,
 No instruction would they find greater than this,
 Brought out as a treasure from the depth of transcendental insight,
 By the tertön of dharmakāya, the inner power of rigpa,
 Nothing like ordinary treasures of earth and stone,
 For it is the final testament of Garab Dorje,
 The essence of the wisdom mind of the three transmissions.
 It is entrusted to my heart disciples, sealed to be secret.
 It is profound in meaning, my heart's words.
 It is the words of my heart, the crucial key point.
 This crucial point: never hold it cheap.
 Never let this instruction slip away from you.

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

| Rigpa Translations, 2008.

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

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

Ema! Listen here, you fortunate yogis.

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

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

You must tame your own shortcomings and cultivate impartial pure perception, for a biased attitude will not let you shoulder the Mahayana teachings. Since all the sentient beings among the six classes in the three realms have without exception been your own parents, unless you make pure aspirations with ceaseless compassion and bodhichitta, you cannot

open the jewel mine of altruistic actions. Unless you generate a devotion toward your kind guru exceeding even that of meeting the Buddha in person, you will not feel the warmth of blessings. Unless you genuinely receive the blessings, the seedlings of experience and realization will not sprout. Unless realization dawns from within, dry explanations and theories will not help you achieve the fruit of enlightenment.

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

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

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

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

When my time has come, from Longchenpa

When my time has come and impermanence and death have caught up
with me,

When the breath ceases, and the body and mind go their separate ways,
May I not experience delusion, attachment, and clinging,
But remain in the natural state of ultimate reality.

You Are the Great Perfection, by Mingyur Rinpoche

You are already perfect. You are already a buddha. In fact, there's no difference between your true nature, right now as you sit reading this, and the true nature of the buddha, or any enlightened being for that matter. That's the view of Dzogchen, a Tibetan word that means "Great Perfection."

Dzogchen is treasured above all other practices in the Nyingma school of Vajrayana Buddhism because it helps us connect directly with our own enlightened nature.

Your essence, and the essence of every living creature, is pure, whole, and complete. There's nothing missing, and that's why we call it the Great Perfection.

YOU are the Great Perfection. Don't forget that. Dzogchen is talking about you.

This Great Perfection is *you right now*, right here in this moment, not some fully developed you after you do a lot more meditation.

In Dzogchen, we call this enlightened nature *rigpa*, or pure awareness. Unlike some approaches in which buddhanature is taught in a more theoretical way, and you need to study and meditate for a long time to figure out what it is, Dzogchen is experiential. You get introduced to pure awareness directly, right on the spot.

A traditional way to describe Dzogchen is in terms of the ground, the path, and the fruition.

The Great Perfection is our true nature, whether we realize it or not. That's the *ground* of Dzogchen. It's the reality of our experience and who we are.

But that doesn't help if we don't experience it for ourselves. The way to do that is by having this pure awareness introduced to us, and then getting familiar with it until it becomes stable and enduring. That process is the *path*.

Then, once we're familiar with our own true nature, once we've realized it fully and integrated it into every aspect of our lives, we will fully manifest the enlightened qualities that were there all along. That's the *fruition*.

The Ground of Dzogchen

It might be a little unclear what this "true nature" really is, so let me explain a bit more about the ground.

When we use all these fancy terms like "buddhanature" and "pure awareness," what are we actually talking about? Well, there are three main qualities to look for here. We refer to these as the "empty essence," "luminous nature," and "all-pervasive compassion." That's the ground, your true nature.

"Empty essence" means that the true nature of mind, the essence of pure awareness, transcends all our ideas, concepts, and beliefs. It is utterly beyond all our suffering and problems. It is completely free. The term for this is "innate purity" - the essence of who we are was, is, and always will be perfect. It's completely pure, and nothing can change that.

This empty essence is ungraspable, beyond our ordinary way of seeing things, but it's not nothing. There is also a luminous, knowing presence. This is what we call the "luminous nature." Sometimes it's called "self-clarity," because this clarity is spontaneous and natural. It's just there, all the time. Even when we're asleep, distracted, or completely neurotic. It's there.

The empty essence and clear nature are one and the same. They're inseparable. This inseparability is the third quality of the ground, which we call "all-pervasive compassion." This open, spacious clarity manifests as all our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, just like the sun radiates light. These experiences, in fact *all* of our experiences, are none other than the manifestations or play of pure awareness.

The Path of Dzogchen

But what good does just knowing this do us? Not much. That's why we need a path. We need to translate this from nice words and ideas to an actual experience.

The Dzogchen path is really quite simple. That's not to say it's easy, but it is simple.

The only thing we need to do is to recognize this pure inner nature. We need to experience it for ourselves. That's it. If we want to make it a little more complicated, we could say that first we need to have pure awareness introduced to us, and then we become familiar with it.

So, how does that happen?

This is where a teacher becomes important. There's a lot going on in our minds. We have all sorts of memories and reactions, emotions and expectations. In short, we have monkey mind.

Seeing the subtle quality of empty clarity in the midst of all this mental activity isn't easy. If it were, we would have recognized *rigpa* a long time ago! But a skilled teacher who has recognized pure awareness in him or herself, and who holds an authentic lineage, can point it out to us. They can help us find our way through all the complexities of the mind to see this simple, ever present reality.

You might think that because you are already perfect, because this awakened nature is fully present as the very nature of your mind, then you don't need to meditate or practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. The trick is *how* you practice. You still need to meditate, but meditate effortlessly. You still need to practice, but practice naturalness.

Rather than practicing with the notion that there's some level to achieve beyond where you are right now, the main practice is learning to trust that this original purity is always present, especially when it feels like it isn't.

Every step you take on the path should reinforce your trust that pure awareness is right here, right now. Until your recognition is unshakeable, you still need to do formal practice.

The Fruition of Dzogchen

As I said, the core of the path is simply recognizing the nature of mind and coming back to that recognition again and again, until it's as familiar as an old friend. If you do that, there will come a time when you've experienced this pure awareness so thoroughly and completely that you never lose touch with it. When you're meditating, you're meditating in pure awareness. When you're eating, you're eating in pure awareness. Even when you're sleeping, you're still resting in the recognition of pure awareness.

That's what we call "full realization," the fruition of the path. At this point, all the qualities of the ground, your true enlightened nature, become manifest. These were there all along, but because you didn't know they were, it was almost as though they didn't exist. But now you know them. You know them thoroughly and completely. Perfect wisdom, boundless compassion, the spontaneous capacity to benefit others - all of these manifest.

This fruition is simply the full expression of your true nature. It's as though you go out and travel the whole world, looking and searching high and low for some peace of mind. But in the end, you come home and realize that everything you were looking for was right where you started. That's the Great Perfection.

Practice: Dzogchen

The trickiest part of Dzogchen practice is that it is not something we can *do*. The whole point is that we are learning to recognize what is already there, while our "doing" impulse is based on the assumption that who and what we are in the present moment needs improvement. So how do we put this into practice?

Dzogchen meditation involves three important qualities: effortlessness, presence, and naturalness. In traditional terms, these three are called non-meditation, non-distraction, and non-fabrication.

To connect with effortlessness, we shift from a mode of "doing" to one of "being." We let go of the impulse to fiddle with the knobs of experience and give ourselves permission to simply be. We rest in effortless awareness;

But while we rest in effortless awareness, we are not lost or distracted. We are fully present, alert and aware. This presence is the second quality. It's not something we need to make happen. It's already here, with us all the time. When we drop the effort and simply rest, we're giving ourselves the opportunity to recognize the open clarity of awareness, to *be* this open clarity.

Nothing can diminish this effortless awareness. All our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and impulses arise from this knowing presence, and dissolve back into it. For this reason, we do not need to create any special state of mind to experience the mind's innate purity. We don't need to block our thoughts and emotions or control the movements of our attention.

Just be as you are.

This is the third quality - naturalness. We let everything unfold without trying to correct, alter, or improve anything.

As we grow more comfortable with resting in awareness, these qualities of effortlessness, presence, and naturalness will emerge, and we will slowly come to see that this spacious awareness is who we truly are.

Essential Advice for Solitary Meditation Practice

From "Great Perfection in the Palm of Your Hand" by the late Dudjom Rinpoche.

Direct instructions on practice explained in a manner easy to understand called *Extracting the Very Essence of Accomplishment*

I go for refuge and bow with devotion at the feet of my incomparably kind, glorious sublime lama.

Grant your blessings to my followers and me that the profound path's flawless realization arises swiftly in our mindstreams, and that we may then reach the unassailable state in this very life.

In this text I present essential advice for solitary meditation practice in an easily accessible way. My words will place direct instructions for the practice of the innermost secret Great Perfection in the palm of the hands of fortunate individuals. Their previous lifetimes' positive aspirations and pure karmic propensity have led them to feel heartfelt trust in the teaching of the profound, secret Great Perfection, and in the lama who reveals it; and they wish to take their practice to completion. For them, this text will provide an open gate to the path of Great Perfection.

This can be understood through three general topics:

1. Preparation

How to purify your mindstream: direct your mind toward the teachings after having severed all ties of attachment.

2. Main Practice

How to directly cultivate the experience of Great Perfection: resolve any misconceptions regarding the view, meditation and conduct.

3. Post-meditation

How to keep your vows and samayas, and how to include all activities of this life within the dharma.

First, the Preparation

Now I will say a little about the first topic. That which is called mind- this so very vivid awareness- appears from the very beginning at the same time as Buddha Always Noble, (*Kuntu Zangpo*).

Nevertheless, Buddha Always Noble knew this awareness as his own. Alas! Sentient beings endlessly wander in samsara because they do not recognize this, taking rebirth in countless forms of the six types of beings. Everything they have done has been meaningless.

Now, one time out of hundreds you have obtained a human form. If you do not do what you can now to avoid rebirth in the lower realms, your place of rebirth might be unknown, but wherever it might be among the six classes of beings, suffering will be its only sure feature.

It is not enough to have just obtained this human form. You must at once practice the authentic Buddhist path since the time of your death is unpredictable. Furthermore, at death you should have no regrets and should not be ashamed of yourself, like Jetsun Milarepa.

*In my, Milarepa's religious tradition,
We live so as not to be ashamed with ourselves.*

When entering the Buddhist path, it is not sufficient to be a person who only adopts the outer appearance of a person on the path. Cut all entanglements to desirable things and to this life's affairs. When you enter the gate to Buddhist practice without having cut these ties, you will lack determination, but not attachment to homeland, wealth, possessions, lovers, spouses, friends, relatives and so forth. Your attitude of attachment becomes an underlying cause; the objects of your attachment, catalysts. When these meet, negative forces[i] will create obstacles. You will once again become an ordinary worldly person, and will turn away from creating positive karma. ...

The Actual Purification of One's Mindstream

The common practices are the four thoughts that turn the mind away from samsara. The uncommon practices are taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, purifying obscurations and gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom. Exert yourself according to each of their commentaries until experiences arise. Especially, embrace guru yoga as the vital essence of practice, and practice diligently. If you do not, your meditation will grow slowly, and even if it grows a little, obstacles will arise and genuine realization will not manifest in your mindstream. Therefore, forcefully pray with uncontrived devotion. At some time the realization of wisdom mind will be transmitted to your mindstream, and an extraordinary realization that can not be expressed by words will definitely arise from within yourself.

As it has been said by Lama Shang Rinpoche:

*To nurture stillness,
To nurture spiritual experiences,
To nurture samadhi and other spiritual states—
These are common.
But by the strength of your devotion,
For realization to arise from within*

*Due to the lama's blessings-
This is rare.*

Therefore, for the ultimate truth of the Great Perfection to appear in your mind is dependent upon the preliminary practices. This is what Drigungpa meant when he said:

*Other spiritual teachings regard the main practice as being profound.
We regard the preliminary practice as being profound.*

It is just as he said.

Second, The Main Practice

The main practice is to cut through misconceptions regarding the view, meditation and conduct, and how to put our practice to the test.

The View

To begin, the view is recognition of ultimate reality as it is.

As for this view, your mind's nature is the ultimate nature of reality. Once you have concluded this with certainty in awareness free from all characteristics of intellectual mind's fabrications and contrivance, awareness nakedly manifests as self-originating primordial wisdom. Words cannot express it. Metaphors cannot illustrate it. It does not get worse in samsara, nor better in enlightenment. It has not been born, nor will it come to an end. It has not been liberated, nor deluded. It does not exist, nor not exist. Awareness is unlimited and impartial.

In short, from the very beginning, awareness has never been established as being material and having characteristics that can be conceptualized, because its essence is primordially pure, sublime, all-pervasive emptiness. The ocean of realms of phenomena of existence and enlightenment

naturally manifest as the display of unobstructed emptiness, like the sun and its rays. Therefore awareness is neither partial nor a completely empty void, because its nature is the supreme spontaneous presence of primordial wisdom and noble qualities.

Thus, awareness, the indivisibility of appearance and emptiness, epitome of the three kayas, is the primordial nature of reality. Precise recognition of awareness, ultimate reality as it is, is what is called the Great Perfection's view beyond the intellect.

Our sublime master Guru Rinpoche said:

The dharmakaya, beyond the intellect, is ultimate reality.

We actually hold in our hands the wisdom mind of Buddha Always Noble (Kuntu Zangpo). How wonderful! This is the very essence of the six million, four hundred thousand Great Perfection tantras, themselves the consummation of all eighty-four thousand divisions of the Victorious One's collection of teachings. There is nothing beyond this. You should resolve all phenomena in this awareness. Definitively conclude that all phenomena are contained with this awareness.

Meditation

Now, once you have resolved all your inner doubts and misconceptions regarding this view, to sustain its continuity is called meditation.

All other meditations with reference points are conceptual meditations fabricated by the mind. This is not how we meditate. Do not lose hold of this view previously described, and in that state release all consciousnesses of the five senses within the natural state, and rest at ease.

Do not meditate to arrive at a conclusion, "That's it!" If you meditate in that way, it becomes intellectual activity. Here, there is no object of meditation

whatsoever, nor even an instant of distraction. Distraction from resting in awareness is true delusion. Don't be distracted!

Whatever thoughts arise, let them arise. Do not follow after them and do not suppress them. If you ask "In that case, what should I do?," whatever objective phenomena arise, whatever appears, do not grasp phenomena's appearing aspect as you rest in a fresh state, like a small child looking inside a temple. When all phenomena are left as they are, their appearance is not modified, their color does not change, and their brilliance does not diminish. If you do not spoil phenomena with clinging and grasping thoughts, appearances and awareness will nakedly manifest as empty and luminous primordial wisdom.

However, many teachings considered very deep or extremely vast have left individuals of lesser intelligence mystified. If I put my finger on the concise essential meaning, it is this: in the gap between the last thought's cessation and the next's arising, isn't there a fresh, present knowing, that has not been modified even in the slightest- luminous, naked awareness? That itself is awareness' abiding state!

But one does not permanently abide within the nature of reality. Doesn't a thought suddenly arise? That is the natural display of awareness. However, if you do not recognize thoughts as soon as they arise, they will naturally spread. This is called "the chain of delusion," the root of samsara. Mere recognition of thoughts as they arise breaks their flow. Release thoughts within that recognition. When you remain in that state, arising thoughts will all be liberated equally within awareness, the expanse of dharmakaya. This is the main practice in which the view and meditation of Cutting Through Solidity, *Trekchö*, are cultivated as one.

Garab Dorje has said:

*From within the nature of originally pure stainless space,
Awareness suddenly manifests. That moment of mindfulness*

*Is like finding a jewel at the bottom of the ocean.
This is dharmakaya, not fabricated nor created by anyone.*

Persevere in this way. You must meditate without distraction day and night- do not leave emptiness in the domain of mere understanding. Bring everything back to awareness itself.

Conduct

Now I will describe how conduct can enhance meditation and how to put our practice to the test.

The main point, as I previously explained, is to never part for an instant from the perception of your spiritual master as a true buddha; make heartfelt, intensely focused prayers to your spiritual master. This is known as "devotion that is the sole sufficient cure," superior to any other method to remove obstacles and enhance your practice. You will forcefully and decisively travel all paths to enlightenment.

Faults in Meditation

If you experience dullness and drowsiness, arouse awareness. If you experience excitement and agitation, relax your mind. Always, the mediator's vivid mindful awareness should not impose a disciplined mindfulness. Mindfulness is simple recollection of the recognition of your own nature.

Continuously sustain vivid mindful awareness at all times as you go about your daily activities, whether eating, sleeping, moving or sitting, whether during meditation or post-meditation. Never harbor hope or fear toward whatever thoughts arise, such as those of happiness or suffering, or of the passions; do not accept or reject them; and do not destroy them using antidotes, and so forth. Instead, whatever feelings of happiness and suffering are there, settle in their naked, vivid, lucidly present essence. This

single vital point, and none other, applies to everything. Do not confuse yourself with a lot of thinking.

A separate meditation upon emptiness as an antidote to what must be relinquished- thoughts and passions- is unnecessary. Awareness of what must be relinquished liberates it naturally with that recognition, like a snake's knot uncoiling.

Most people know how to say the words "the ultimate concealed meaning of the Clear Light Vajra Essence," like a parrot's chatter, but don't know how to practice it. We are all so incredibly fortunate! Carefully consider this once again—there's something to be understood. During our beginningless series of lives until now, our mortal enemy, dualistic clinging, binds us to the wheel of life. Now, thanks to our spiritual master's kindness, his introduction to naturally abiding dharmakaya releases both poles of grasping, like a feather consumed in fire, with nothing following and without a trace. Isn't that really satisfying?

If you do not practice once you've obtained the swift path's profound instructions such as these, it is as if a wish-fulfilling jewel were placed in a corpse's mouth. What a waste! Practice without being discouraged!

Furthermore, beginners will lose their mindfulness in distraction due to unwholesome thoughts that get out of control; these thoughts coalesce in the form of underlying mental activity. At some point, a piercing mindfulness returns, and the thought of regret arises, "Oh, I'm distracted!" Nevertheless, do not do anything whatsoever at that moment, such as stopping the flow of previous thoughts or regretting having been distracted. When this vivid mindfulness returns, it is sufficient just to sustain naturally resting in precisely that mindfulness.

A famous saying advises, "Do not reject thoughts; see them as dharmakaya." However, until you perfect higher insight's subtle power, you might dwell upon the thought, "This is probably dharmakaya!" and remain

in a blank state of peaceful abiding. You thus risk getting trapped in a spaced-out, indifferent, unreflective state. Therefore, in the beginning look directly at whatever thoughts arise; do not examine, analyze or reflect upon them at all. Rest upon the recognizer of thoughts, without making it a big deal, disinterested in what arises, like an old man watching children at play.

Once you've placed your mind as I described, the deepening of the experience of stillness in a non-conceptual natural state will be suddenly, abruptly destroyed. At that instant, primordial wisdom beyond mind will nakedly and clearly manifest.

While you tread the path, this experience of primordial wisdom will not come untainted with one or another of three meditative experiences- bliss, clarity or conceptionlessness. Nevertheless, placing your mind without the slightest bit of hope, fear, attachment or conceit, due to holding such experiences as supreme, prevents errors. It is very important to constantly give up distraction and to meditate with one-pointed vigilant mindfulness. When you lapse into sporadic practice and mere intellectual understanding, arrogance will arise out of just a little peaceful abiding. If you do not carefully observe your spiritual experiences, you will merely be skilled in pretense and knowledgeable of the right words, which is not beneficial.

As the Great Perfection tantras state:

*Intellectual understanding is like a patch,
It will fall off.*

And,

*Spiritual experiences are like mist,
They will evaporate.*

As this says, even some slight positive and negative objective event has deceived great meditators, and many lose their bearings in the midst of circumstances. Even when meditation is planted within your stream of being, the profound instructions will be left on your book's pages if you do not meditate consistently- your mind will become insensitive: you will become insensitive to the teachings, you will become insensitive to practice, and genuine meditation will never arise. Even old great meditators are in danger of dying completely lost, in the state of a newcomer to practice. Therefore, be very careful.

When you continually familiarize yourself with this over a long period of time, devotion or some other suitable catalyst will at some point cause these spiritual experiences to overflow into realization, and you will vividly see naked awareness, as if a veil were instantly lifted from your head. You will become utterly free and spacious. This is called "the supreme seeing that does not see anything." Thereafter, thoughts arise as meditation; mental stillness and movement are simultaneously liberated.

Moreover, at first, recognition of thoughts liberates them, like meeting someone familiar. In the middle period, thoughts are liberated by themselves, like a snake's knot uncoiling. Finally, thoughts are liberated without benefit or harm, like a thief entering an empty house. These three ways of liberation will occur gradually. A deep, decisive trust manifests within you that all phenomena are the magical display of your awareness alone—waves of realization of emptiness and compassion will surge. Choosing between either cyclic existence or enlightenment ends. You realize that buddhas are not "good" and sentient beings are not "bad." Whatever you have done, you will be carefree beyond words without knowing how to move from the sole nature of phenomena, and therefore you will uninterruptedly abide in this infinite space, day and night.

As it is said in the Great Perfection tantras:

Like the sky, realization is changeless.

This kind of Great Perfection practitioner appears to have an ordinary human form, but his or her mind is dharmakaya. He or she abides in wisdom mind free from effort and activity and, without doing anything, traverses all paths and stages. Finally, ordinary mind and phenomena exhausted, like the space of a broken vase, the body vanishes into atoms, and the mind vanishes into the nature of phenomena. This is called attaining the youthful vase body, which is the inner clarity of the original ground, stainless space. This will come about. Since this is the ultimate consummation of view, meditation and conduct, it is called "the fully manifest unattainable result." The stages of spiritual experiences and realization arise either in a progressive order, without a progressive order, or all at once. This occurs according to the particular faculties of people, but there is no difference when the result is achieved.

Post-Meditation

How the teachings encompass keeping vows and tantric commitments, and applying them in your daily life.

Although you applied yourself in the practice of the view, meditation and conduct as described above, if you were unskillful in post-meditation's conduct, and your vows and tantric commitments were damaged, impediments and obstacles will hinder your progress on the paths and spiritual stages in the short term, and ultimately you will certainly fall to the lowest hell called Incessant Pain. Therefore, it is extremely important to never be separate from vigilant mindfulness, not making any mistakes regarding the kind of conduct to accept and which to reject. ...

*His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche was the head of the Nyingma lineage during his lifetime. Despite his vast influence on twentieth-century Tibetan Buddhism, few of his writings have yet been translated into English. Ron Garry has a Ph.D. in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and is translator of *The Teacher-Student Relationship*. For *Wisdom Nectar*, he translated selected texts from the twenty-five-volume *Collected Works of H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche*.*

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[i]. In this context I have translated as "negative forces" the Tibetan word Dü (*bdud*), which is a translation of the Sanskrit mara. In general, mara represents clinging to a self, and one's attachment and involvement with the eight worldly concerns. Often mara is discussed in the context of the four maras, negative forces or demons (*bdud bzhi*). According to the Sutrayana tradition, the four demons are: the demon of the aggregates; of the passions; of death; and of the child of the gods. According to the Vajrayana tradition, the four demons are: the material demon; immaterial demon; demon of exaltation; and the demon of pride. The material demons refer to external phenomena, whether things or other beings who do us harm. The immaterial demons refer to the three poisons—anger, desire, and ignorance. The demon of exaltation refers to attachment to such things as inner spiritual experiences. The demon of pride- the root of all demons- is clinging to a self. For an excellent and detailed account of mara, see

Sarah Harding's introduction to and translation of *Machik's Complete Explanation*, pp. 33-38, and pp. 117-122. Also see Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, pp. 297-307.

From "**Great Perfection in the Palm of Your Hand**" by the late Dudjom Rinpoche.

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*

On Wisdom and Compassion Together

From The Continual Practice of Right View I

In Buddhism, the cause of suffering is a self grasping ignorance that is habitual, and pervasive, and reflexive. When this is seen through, or seen for what it is, we experience ourselves and others and our world differently...

Grasping at a self unconsciously cuts us off from our ancestors, our teachers, from one another and from our natural world. Removing this false view, we awaken to our connectedness, and inner treasures, joy, compassion, and peace. We enter into a dynamic, creative involvement with all our family and world.

* * *

When teachings speak of non-referential compassion, there is an immediacy that is referred to, a newness, and resourcefulness, and timeliness.

* * *

When we can begin to see with the eyes of the spirit, we are not separate from one another, or our own depths.

This is referred to at times as non referential compassion, seeing in a way that is not separate, dynamic and resourceful, and naturally responsive to every need.

As Suzuki Roshi said,

Strictly speaking, there are no enlightened people, there is only enlightened activity.

And as the Thai Forest Master, Ajahn Maha Boowa said,

For an enlightened being, there is no other response to the human condition, than compassion.

How then can we wish happiness for ourselves or another if they don't exist as we imagine?

The way we can have both wisdom and compassion present in our mind then is explained by the Eighth century saint, Shantideva, in his Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, where he asks,

'If no beings exist [in ultimate reality], toward whom should we have compassion?

and he answers:

'To attain the result [of buddhahood, which is to be achieved only through the awakening of great compassion], one should direct one's compassion toward whatever it is that unenlightened beings call 'beings'.

The modern day Tibetan teacher, Deshung Rinpoche, also taught on this same subject, when he said:

'On the conventional level of reality, beings do not exist as they are perceived by other unenlightened beings. The bodhisattva realizes that, in ultimate reality, there are no beings who exist as unenlightened beings think, but he directs his mind toward those beings as they perceive themselves.

'On the ultimate level, he sees no beings, but he realizes that on the conventional level, beings think they exist and do experience suffering. Out of objectless compassion, therefore, he directs his mind toward them.'

In the Diamond Sutra, The Buddha said:

So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. They should give rise to their intention without relying on form, nor should they rely on sound, smell, taste, touch, or objects of mind... They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere.

From The Continual Practice of Right View II - in the Vajrayana

We can represent *our motivation and Right View* to our minds symbolically in practices that use visualization.

The following is adapted from a teaching by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche:

(In Vajrayana) We aspire to a nonconceptually performed practice, free from grasping or clinging. This means that when we practice or meditate, we should not relate to our visualization as if it were a solid object.

Our visualization must be experienced as a dynamic display of the true nature, like a transcendent wisdom rainbow body. We must understand that the visualization is totally empty of inherent existence, yet totally full of dynamic energies of love, compassion, and wisdom.

Here is where we can use meditation to integrate our understanding. We train in seeing the world we live in as translucent, made of light, and holy, and that we are upheld by countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Saints and Sages, ancestors, and the sacred powers of the earth, sky, water, and fire. In this way, the tantras affirm that divine help is always available in abundance. Visualization in this way is the expression of Right View.

We can familiarize ourselves with the way things actually are by the practice of seeing ourselves and others and this world as transparent like a rainbow, with light shining through, appearing and yet ungraspable. What's more, when we realize our inherent worth and the preciousness of ourselves and others and this world, we can intentionally visualize all this

as being divine in nature, poetically adorned with jewels, exalted, and uplifting to behold in every way.

With this Right View and a pure motivation, as we recite verses of refuge and aspiration prayers, meditate, and recite mantra, we visualize that we receive blessings from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and from all the Bodhisattvas and Devas in the form of light and nectar. These dissolve into ourselves, and into all those we see as being with us now, our family and friends, those we don't know, and those who are experiencing any difficulty at all...

We visualize that the light and nectar heals and calms, and nourishes, and inspires us all.

May all share in these blessings.

May all beings receive all they need to awaken and be free.

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.

Meditate like this... Make prayers of aspiration...

Before dedication - A preceding reflection from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

'All phenomena – including the I, the action of dedicating, the merits that are dedicated, the goal of enlightenment to which they are dedicated, and the sentient beings for whom they are dedicated – are completely empty of existing from their own side. With the continual awareness of this, I now impute labels, and dedicate...'

In the words of the Avatamsaka Sutra:

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,*

*Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.
May all beings enjoy an abundance of positive conditions,
well being, and peace.