

What is Vipashyana: VCTR and Traditional Versions

Introduction

Vipashyana, insight meditation. I'd like to take this opportunity to try to formulate my understanding of what vipashyana is, how to practice it, and how it functions on our paths. I'm going to try to explain my understanding of Trungpa Rinpoche's version of vipashyana along with the traditional Mahayana and Mahamudra versions, comparing, contrasting, and ideally reconciling these.

Traditionally, vipashyana is a meditative practice that cultivates insight into the true nature of reality. The earliest traditions of Buddhism rely on the teachings found in the Pali Canon and other comparable collections. In those teachings, insight is the faculty that understands the Four Noble Truths and vipashyana is the practice that cultivates the faculty of prajna, or knowledge and understanding. So looking into—or gaining insight into, or investigating—results in understanding whatever it is we're looking into.

That's sort of a neat thing about this world that we inhabit, by the way: When you look at any one part of it, you can actually gain greater and greater understanding of that one part almost endlessly, until it sort of merges into an understanding of all parts. Which begs the question: At what point does that actually happen? And why is one part different from another part, or all the parts, at the beginning? But that's not really our topic today.

The True Nature of Reality and the Four Noble Truths

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering and it has four parts: impermanence, dissatisfactoriness, essencelessness, and egolessness. So insight begins by experiencing or understanding that whatever phenomena arise in our mind or in our experience, externally or internally, have those characteristics, and it cultivates the immediate ability to see those qualities in whatever we experience, more and more rapidly, more and more deeply.

And when we begin to cultivate insight based on the Four Noble Truths, we fairly immediately start looking for a cause. And this is our habit pattern—we're looking for, like, what do we blame? But it also has the upside of leading us to ask, "How can I work on the cause to alleviate the result?" So then we investigate: How am I producing? Am I participating in the production of suffering and those other qualities, or is the so-called external world responsible for these situations, and if so, how?

At some point, we realize that it's not the external world that's the problem, it's that we thought it was different. We've been living for quite a long time thinking that the external world did not have those qualities of impermanence, dissatisfaction, essencelessness, and egolessness, but now we see that it completely, utterly, thoroughly, and continuously does. So by seeing the various ways that we contribute to that situation, through impulse, desire, and conceptual mistake, we begin to work on those habit patterns. The habit patterns are the key handle in the practice of vipashyana initially.

Starting in Shamatha

When we start out in meditation practice, at first we sit down and we try to **not** notice our habit patterns. We try to be mindful of whatever our object is and aware of whatever our situation is, so that we can be more mindful, more present, and less enveloped in our habitual conceptual thought patterns. This is shamatha, which is also known as stabilizing or calm abiding meditation. Our goal is to just experience what's happening.

At some point, we reach some stability in our shamatha and we begin to become curious about the continuing stream of habitual patterns and mental patterns. They haven't actually stopped, they continue going, but we're not so invested in them. We're much less likely to get caught in them, but they're still going on. At this point, we realize that there are two things going on at the same time in meditation—there's a feeling that's both spacious and grounded and there's also the thoughts.

Gradually, we begin to shift our balance more and more towards the grounded, spacious feeling. At some point, we're encouraged to practice vipashyana, in the sense of, well, let's look at those habit patterns. Those habitual thought patterns that continue while we're meditating manifest as activity of body, speech, and mind outside of meditation practice—we continue to perpetuate the stream of samsara outside of our meditation. So we realize that we need to look at those patterns and not just distance ourselves from them. And we come to appreciate that, now that we have some distance from them, we can actually see them more clearly and investigate their nature and their cause.

So vipashyana practice, from an experiential point of view, begins with researching our mind, researching who we are. Various schemes are provided for doing this. There are totally negative schemes, such as the five poisons, which say we are being poisoned by attachment, aversion, ignorance, pride, and jealousy. Then there's the scheme which

presents the different realms that we go through—in a day, in a lifetime, in between lifetimes, or over spans of many lifetimes—which range from the hell realms to the god realms. On a momentary level, this is a way of characterizing habitual mental patterns and seeing how they propel us through the different realms of samsara so that we can find and expose the root of the whole thing, which is simply this innate sense of wanting to be. Outer versions are like wanting to be this or that. But the innermost version is just wanting to exist. That creates this sense of “I.”

Vipashyana practice begins with that search, giving us various exercises to examine our mental and visual patterns, and then proceeds with the exercise of seeing how we create them. And so we’re basically deconstructing our world by seeing it as empty, by seeing its nature as consisting of those four qualities of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, essencelessness, and entitylessness.

Traditionally, there are various ways of approaching vipashyana practice, various categorizations, and they sort of overlap. And so the usual way of talking about types and stages doesn’t really cover the nuances of the different categorizations. So for example, there’s the vipashyana that consists of analysis, which is the process that I’ve been describing. And then there’s the vipashyana without analysis. There’s vipashyana of the Hinayana, where they focus on those four aspects of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, essencelessness, and entitylessness as they apply to the person. There’s the vipashyana of the Mahayana, where, after looking at those four aspects, they then focus on the aspect of entitylessness of phenomena. And then there’s the vipashyana of the vajrayana, which focuses on emptiness infused with bliss, whatever that means. There’s also non-Buddhist vipashyana, which from the Buddhist point of view is the exercise of spiritual materialism, where they try to achieve the next better level of samsara by progressing in the *jhana* (Pali, *dhyana* in Sanskrit) or absorption states. That vipashyana entails a very fine analysis of the quality of one’s being in those different levels of meditative or concentrative absorption.

“Panoramic Awareness”

One of the oddities of Trungpa Rinpoche’s presentation is that in many places he affiliates panoramic awareness with vipashyana. The way that he describes this awareness is identical to the way that one of the three main characteristics of shamatha is described in the traditional literature (stability, clarity/vividness, and strength). So I’m convinced that he’s really talking about that second quality of shamatha, clarity/vividness, without calling it such. And he’s doing that because, I believe, that quality is the bridge to actual vipashyana. So he’s giving us the stepping stone, the transitional step, instead of just teaching vipashyana in such a way that it would become

nothing more than an intellectual exercise. He's helping us build the capability of experiencing non-analytical vipashyana, which is the type of vipashyana that is talked about, indirectly cultivated, and focused on in the vajrayana traditions of Mahamudra.

So in blending these systems together in this way, he's teaching us not only conceptual vipashyana, by emphasizing the quality of panoramic awareness and calling that vipashyana, but at the same time he's teaching us how to do analytical vipashyana, only he's not calling it that. He teaches the realms endlessly, being aware of our going through these different realms both in meditation and outside of it. And that is the process in vipashyana of getting to the root of our conceptual structures, our conceptual fabrication of the world.

The Four Slogans

To get a clearer idea on how this might work, let's take a closer look at the traditional mahayana version of vipashyana. It has four stages, which map to the absolute bodhicitta slogans of Atisha very clearly and nicely.

The first one is, "Regard all dharmas as dreams." That's what Rinpoche is teaching us to do when he talks about the six realms. He's saying, all the stuff we're experiencing about the world we're in is just one of multiple realms. All of the realms are the dream of the sleep of ignorance. So regard all dharmas as dreams, regard all of what we experience as just being part of the endless journey through samsara, circling, circling around. And he's telling us that one progresses in this process by continuing to investigate.

After we investigate the object of the dream—what we could call its outer projection, or this so-called environment we find ourselves in—we then examine the perceiver, and we begin to realize that the perceiver has an impact on, at least, the experience of the environment. And so one examines the nature of the perceiver in terms of those four qualities—in terms, in particular, of its identitylessness. This is the second stage. So then, as in Atisha's slogans, we "Examine the nature of unborn insight," as it says in one translation. But the word that's used for "examine" can also mean "understand," so I think it's saying "Understand that awareness is unborn and that we can't find our awareness."

So in what way does Trungpa Rinpoche teach us the second step? In a few places, he talks about asking yourself who's meditating while you're meditating. He doesn't present it as a formal practice. He doesn't present it as being part of vipashyana. He doesn't make a big deal about it, but he does present it. So there comes the question:

Are there things that he did not present clearly and emphatically that should still be focused on—or not? Does the fact that he didn't emphasize it mean that I'm stretching and extrapolating those instructions, in two or three places, as being really important and pointing toward the second stage of vipashyana? Good question.

The third stage is "Abandon even the antidote." So, letting go of this idea that I have to find some cause, some culprit, that there's still something to do. Realizing that the quality of the fundamental, innate clinging to existence, that desire to be, is the same thing as this search for the source. We realize that the searcher is the crux of the biscuit, as Frank Zappa would say. And so then we rest, we let go and "Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence."

So in what way does Rinpoche teach steps three and four? That's a good question. He certainly does in the vajrayana teachings. Basically, he transitions to vajrayana in his presentation of vipashyana, those four stages. The second stage is the bridge to vajrayana. And the third and fourth stages are vajrayana—the third stage is Mahamudra and the fourth stage is Dzogchen.

Examining and Analyzing

The actual object of contemplation or the procedure that one uses is described in three different ways in the traditional Mahayana literature. One way has two types of investigation, one called examining and one called analyzing, and both of them have a lesser or greater level of intensity. And again, these different categorizations do not seem mutually exclusive, they seem very much to overlap. So the other procedures that I'm going to recite here, in my humble opinion, enjoy the qualities of these two types of investigation: examining and analyzing.

Translators give them different terms, there are different translations all over the place, and I'm going to find the Sanskrit and the Tibetan for referential continuity for what we're talking about here, since you can get more nuance about what they are in different translations. There's some sense that they are a progression within themselves, that one type leads to another. (provide chart of the terms)

The Six Discoveries or Investigations

There's another scheme that's called the six discoveries by Trungpa Rinpoche, and usually translated as investigations by other translators, which are sort of like areas of investigation. Things like understanding language, understanding time, understanding space, understanding the objectification process, understanding the different layers of

thought, different types of cognition, and understanding the different levels of reality. Those, in my humble opinion, seem to me more fruitional—through the practice of vipashyana we begin to understand those six—although certainly we could actually do vipashyana on one of those six. So in that sense, any one of those six could be the object of meditation in vipashyana practice, understanding how do we go from the sound that we make with our mouth to meaning, and how has that impacted our world, and so forth.

The Three Aspects of Vipashyana Practice

I've left the third way to practice vipashyana till last because I think it's the one that's most used and that really provides a way of understanding the practice. And that is through three aspects, which are: the relative world, the ultimate world, and their interrelation. That's basically acknowledged to be the nicest way of summarizing or encapsulating what is it that we're investigating in vipashyana practice, since our misunderstanding of the ultimate truth, our misunderstanding of the relative realm, and our clinging to the relative as if it were the ultimate is very much what perpetuates the experience we call samsara.

Common Misunderstandings

There are a couple of other aspects of the situation we should cover. One is this idea that there is a thing called analytical meditation and a thing called resting meditation. It seems to be a fairly common misunderstanding that resting meditation refers to shamatha and analytical meditation refers to vipashyana.

To start with vipashyana, I've been describing the four stages of vipashyana, which proceed from analytical to non-analytical vipashyana. These are also called, respectively, preparatory and actual vipashyana by Jamgon Kongtrul in his *Treasury of Knowledge*. So all of analytical vipashyana is called preparatory. That makes it sound like preparatory vipashyana is not the real thing, it's not the important part. We get this idea that actual vipashyana goes on much longer, much further, or has more to it than preparatory vipashyana. And I'm pretty sure this is a misconception in that non-analytical or actual vipashyana is the fruition, where one is basically enlightened—really experiencing the Four Noble Truths, experiencing the nature of reality as empty, and so forth.

With vipashyana, preparatory vipashyana is the vipashyana that we have to practice for a very, very long time in order to get anywhere close to experiencing what Jamgon Kongtrul calls actual vipashyana. So the terminology is somewhat misleading in that it sets up an unrealistic expectation that one should be able to rather quickly go thru the

preparatory stage and then practice actual vipashyana, whereas instead one must cultivate the so called “preparatory” vipashyana for many lifetimes, or at least most of this one!

So there are these two types of vipashyana, analytical and non-analytical. Because many of us are focused on the non-analytical type of vipashyana as taught by VCTR with his emphasis upon panoramic awareness, and because shamatha seems busy with attending to posture, breath and thoughts, obstacles and antidotes, we tend to affiliate resting meditation with vipashyana, however the characterization of meditation as being either of a resting type or an analytical type is actually applicable to both vipashyana and shamatha. There are types or stages of shamatha practice that are analytical and types that are resting, just as there are analytical and resting types or stages of vipashyana.

One type of analytical shamatha is sort of structural or very focused on content. This type of shamatha includes shamatha on the stages of decomposition of the body, shamatha on the five skandhas or the five poisons or the presence of the five elements in the body, or shamatha on interdependent origination. Basically, you can do shamatha on all these different categorizations of the dharma that we normally think of as being only vipashyana because they involve understanding or analysis. And so, what we’re not, I think, clear about is that having understood these topics intellectually one can then use them as an object, like we use any other object such as the breath. For example, having understood what the breath or the body is, we can meditate on the breath or the body as our object, or having understood what perception is, we can meditate on that as an object, do shamatha on that. These are complicated objects—breath, body, perception, and so forth—so they require analysis to identify them as the object of focused attention. Shamatha in these cases involves analyzing these various objects, what they are and how they function or manifest and how they are perceived, which involves analysis, but because one is well versed in them, the analysis enhances the experience of stability, clarify, and strength in shamatha. Thus analytical shamatha.

So analytical shamatha can be sort of clunky, as in these ways I’ve described of doing shamatha on various types of objects, but it can also be settled in the sense that it becomes basically constant watchfulness, where we’re constantly looking at our mind and seeing its propensity to not succeed the way we want it to in meditation practice. So it’s an active shamatha and it actually is analytical—we’re analyzing “Am I present or not, am I sluggish or not, am I lost in thought or not?” We’re constantly doing that level of very basic analysis.

So that's analytical shamatha, and non-analytical shamatha doesn't happen until the stage where one has become utterly familiarized with the object. This is why Trungpa Rinpoche says the antidote to overapplication is familiarization, which is a really cool term. Because it's also used later on in the Bodhisattva path in higher stages, when one is familiarizing oneself with the experience of emptiness. One has meditation while in post-meditation.

So shamatha and vipashyana are not distinguished as either analytical or resting, i.e. non-analytical, by virtue of the degree of mental activity involved, but by what they are oriented towards accomplishing, and they can both be accomplished by either analysis or relaxation.

In fact, by "trying" to accomplish shamatha, we are being analytical since we are not calming the mind by any physical activity but by the mental activity of watching, noting, bring back, investigating, applying antidotes and so forth. Only at the last stage with the practice of not applying antidotes anymore and the mind being released from preoccupational habituation do we achieve full shamatha.

So then resting shamatha is when we are completely familiar with the object, such as the breath. And then we find as we progress that something unusual happens—the objectness of the object sort of dissolves and we go from shamatha with an object to what's called shamatha without an object. That terminology might also be misleading, though, because there cannot really be such a thing as shamatha without an object before one achieves the path of seeing because you always have conceptual mind. The fabric of conceptual mind, which is the *alaya vijnana*, is continuous through sleep, deep sleep, and waking life until one achieves the path of seeing, and only at that point is its continuity severed. It's like one has disconnected it, but it is not fully uprooted until buddhahood.

Resting shamatha is described in terms of the nine stages of shamatha and also highlighted in terms of the obstacles, antidotes, and powers, where basically the last stage of shamatha is effortless, spontaneous, and concentrated equanimity infused with all sorts of wonderful vitamins and minerals. At that point, one could call that resting shamatha because what produces it is the antidote of no longer applying the antidote. Up until that point in shamatha we're doing something. This ninth stage of shamatha [see chart] is just a complete resting on top of meditation.

In Kongtrul's TOK and many other texts, it is said that there is kusulu, or yogi, meditation and pandita, or scholar, meditation. And there's been a simple affiliation of pandita meditation with mediation with analysis, and in particular vipashyana with analysis, with

the implication that scholars do not ever do non-analytical, non-fluctuating, or actual vipashyana. But that would basically mean that panditas don't ever achieve enlightenment, the first bhumi on the third path of seeing, so that's probably not true. And on the other hand, the idea that kusulu meditation just consists of resting meditation is naive in the sense that it implies that a yogi can immediately achieve the state of actual resting shamatha or vipashyana without having gone through the stages of analytical shamatha.

Basically, what we see is a convergence of these different categories into a way of understanding all of them as using different terminology to indicate different aspects of the progress that one goes through on the path of shamatha and vipashyana.

Lastly, there's a scheme that Trungpa Rinpoche presents in the *Profound Treasury* which indicates three categories of meditation: childlike meditation, meditation of one taste, and seeing things as they are. The way that it's presented in the *Profound Treasury* implies that it's a categorization of the stages one goes through in vipashyana practice. However, if one looks in *The Treasury of Knowledge*, which is what Rinpoche is teaching from, and specifically at the section Rinpoche was commenting on, it does not apply specifically to either shamatha and vipashyana alone. It is actually in the section that comes after the union of shamatha and vipashyana. So the implication is that these stages are a mapping of the progress one goes through in general in the meditative practice of shamatha and vipashyana. And that author, Jamgon Kongtrul, emphasizes bringing the two together, to the extent that you're able to, as being the correct way to practice either of them. They need to be practiced together.

The Practice of Vipashyana on the Cushion

Now, let's talk some more about the general frame of how one practices vipashyana on the cushion, as well as some of the nuances of the practice. Some of the ways that Trungpa Rinpoche explains this are not extremely clear, so let's talk about what they might mean.

We settle into meditation by working with the breath and the posture and so on. Initially, we have a very dualistic experience of thoughts, as well as toward what we regard as success in meditation, which hinges on whether we're being mindful. What we call "mindful" is when we're focused on our posture and our breath and we're looking at our thoughts. And we say we're not mindful when we're lost in thinking about something. So we have this sort of black and white framework—either I'm present and mindful and meditating or I'm lost in thought.

In Trungpa Rinpoche's presentation on how to do shamatha, he's constantly emphasizing the second of the three aspects of shamatha—stability, clarity/vividness, and strength—which is the quality of awareness, knowing what's going on. It's a way of getting us out of the dualistic framework of either being mindful and present by concentrating on the objects of posture, breath and mind, or not. There is a general awareness that envelops all of them. So he's constantly trying to get us to understand that larger awareness and to cultivate the ability to shift into it and stay there.

It begins when we just notice when we're lost in thought. And then we have almost the physical sensation of coming out of the clouds of thoughts back into our body and the room. But he describes how that dualistic experience gradually dissolves into general awareness. At that point, when thoughts come in, there isn't this feeling of being dragged away, nor of coming back.

Trungpa Rinpoche offers a very helpful technique to enhance or cultivate or encourage this process that involves expanding one's sense of "here" from just the body to the entire room, which is why he talks about extending out into the space of the room. To the extent that we're able to sort of hold or be in a larger space, we have less of a sense of here and there.

He describes how to provoke this experience in meditation by saying things like, "Go out with the outbreath and extend it." Or he talks about the difference between the quality of the breath as an object in shamatha versus vipashyana. He says in vipashyana we're not enveloped in the breath, as we are with shamatha, where we merge with the breath, to the extent that we can. In vipashyana, if we do what he describes, we're just being aware of the outline or the verge of the breath.

So first, in shamatha, we're enveloped within the breath, which includes being aware of the larger space around the breath and he talks very specifically about that. Then, in vipashyana, we're aware of the space around, in all aspects of "around."

Bringing Thoughts Along

Rinpoche says that, whereas in shamatha we come back from thought, in vipashyana we bring thoughts along. Now this is a highly vague and interpretable statement. What does this mean, we bring thoughts along?

Let's say we go on a trip and we bring our dog along. In this case, we bring our thoughts along. So one of the questions is, where are we going? I don't think he means that on the path to enlightenment we bring our thoughts along. I think he's saying we bring

them along as we meditate and experience the process of expanding out into the space, which he basically uses as the main technique for setting up one's capability to experience both types of vipashyana, analytical and non-analytical. Let me say a little bit about that. This whole technique of expanding out into space is basically the setup for experiencing one's habitual patterns more clearly.

By the way, one other technique that he provides in relation to the second stage of vipashyana—seeing the unborn nature of awareness—is to look at the rising, dwelling, and disappearing of thoughts, which is standard mahamudra practice of working with the perceiver, working with the mind. Mahamudra practice switches the order around in approaching these two major domains. In the mahayana, we start with the external world—“Regard all dharmas as dreams”—whereas in the vajrayana in general we start with the perceiver. The idea is that the perceiver is where it's at, which differs from the mahayana, where we're working our way backward from the external world to the perceiver. And that's just the general trend of sutrayana—it's a cause-based path where we're always looking at the current situation and trying to determine its cause in order to be able to unravel that cause and dissolve the usual result.

Vajrayana, by contrast, is called a result-oriented path, where we start from the result, which is the dissolution of the conceptual fabrication of self and other and so on. We start from that point of view, which means seeing that the mind is the creator of everything, the main driver in the equation.

The Buddha taught this very early on, we can see it in the opening chapter of the *Dhammapada*, which in English just means “verses on the dharma.” The first chapter of that collection of verses talks about how the mind is the forerunner of all things. And he uses very literal, down-to-earth examples, like if we have an evil mind, we experience an evil world, and if we have a kind mind, we experience a kind world. He doesn't go all the way yet in terms of explaining how that world is actually a projection of our mind. The implication in the *Dhammapada* is that the quality of the world that one experiences is based on one's mental state, by virtue of the working of karma. There's an implication there that any transformation in that state of affairs has to happen over time, not be instantaneous, whereas later on, on the Vajrayana level, the idea is that that we can transform our world instantaneously by transforming the mind.

Working with Thoughts

When Rinpoche talks about bringing thoughts along, I believe he means that in vipashyana we bring the process of working with thoughts along to its conclusion or to its additional stages. Whereas in shamatha, we basically close down thoughts—we let

go of them or we drop them or maybe we cut them off—and while he doesn't recommend cutting them off, it's a style of some other traditions. Basically, in shamatha we transcend thoughts in some way because our goal is to experience this dual aspect of mind. Whereas in vipashyana, we're trying to uproot the fixation on the mind as being anything at all.

So we bring thoughts along in the sense that we don't drop them, we don't cut them, but we let them continue in order for us to experience more profoundly their nature. So we bring thoughts along in that we explore the nature of our preoccupations, the stages and qualities of our experience, which are described as the six realms of existence. We experience the realms as the external environment, we experience the projector of the realms through examining our thoughts, and then, gradually, we experience the complete groundlessness of thought.

So I believe that's what he's implying. We're simply working with thoughts in vipashyana meditation, we're not avoiding them. Now, it's important to note that this instruction is directed toward meditators who have already established some stability of mind in shamatha—stillness, strength, familiarity. At that point, we can pursue this further stage of meditation, but without that stability, it's not possible.

Echo of the Breath

So we bring thoughts along and touch on the verge of the thoughts; we touch on the breath, as opposed to being in the breath. He uses the analogy of an echo—to experience the echo of the breath. An echo is a traditional metaphor that is used to represent egolessness or emptiness. The idea is that if you're in a place that has a good echo and you speak, the sound will reverberate and repeat whatever you just said, but at that point there's no speaker. That's pretty obvious from everyone's experience, but the teachings take it further to say that even when we first spoke, when we said those words and made those sounds, there was no speaker also. The physical situation somehow created a certain arrangement of sounds, but there is no person who can take ownership of that situation.

So the echo represents the egoless quality of existence, the ownerless quality of the breath and all phenomena. In this case, the echo is that there's a conceptual reverberation of the object of experience.

Part of the understanding of cognition in the Buddhist tradition is that sense cognition—cognition from the five senses—is non-conceptual initially. And then there's a registering that occurs—not even at the level of thought, just a registering of that

cognition on a conceptual level. That could be called an echo, that conceptual representation of the actual sense experience.

So he's saying we experience the echo of the breath because, in working with the breath, we begin to see the (imagined) owner of the breath, or this quality of breathing on the one hand in terms of perceiver. Then, on the other hand, as we get more sophisticated in investigating the breath, we see more and more that this thing that we call the breath is not so simple to identify as a discrete entity. Where does the breath begin? Where does it end? How big is it? There's different parts of the body involved in it, so if we look at the contraction of the abdominal muscles in bringing the air in and then pushing it out, is that the breath?

We find that breath is really a nebulous label for a process that we all know, in some sense, but which is hard to locate in any fixed way. It's almost like the term space, where space is a word that indicates the absence of content, the absence of something that can be talked about.

Letting the Dust Settle

Rinpoche uses an analogy for meditation that Judy Lief has talked about at the Profound Treasury retreat—this image of letting the dust settle in meditation, which is actually reminiscent of the more common image of the particles of silt in a pond settling, allowing one then to see clearly what's going on. However, dust settling has more of a feeling tone to it that we can relate to in a visceral way, since we have experienced it, whereas the pond is more like an image we generate, as if the mind were a snow globe. The dust settling has this sense of no longer giving energy to the mechanism of karma. When we sit down to meditate, we're relaxing our activities of body, speech, and mind, and the ramification of that is that the sort of after-effects of those activities, the dust, is beginning to settle down as well.

There are a number of ways in which Rinpoche describes the quality of knowing what's happening in meditation, which is this factor called *samprajñana*, or clearly or presently knowing. *Samprajñana* is traditionally affiliated with shamatha and it's the quality that gradually leads us into vipashyana. Rinpoche talks about cultivating this through simple exercises such as noting what you're wearing when you sit down to meditate, noting what's going on in the room around you and whether you shaved or not, whether your clothes are dirty or not, things like that.