

46

Glimpses of Emptiness

Vipashyana experience and practice is absolutely necessary for a person who follows the Buddhist path and really wants to understand the dharma. Both intellectually and intuitively, vipashyana practice is necessary. You have to make an acquaintance with yourself. You have to meet yourself, to know who you are and what you are. Without vipashyana experience, you do not have any idea of who you are, what you are, how you are, or why you are, at all!

erful experience, based on the confidence that you have found the correct path, and therefore you cannot forget it. You finally realize that there is no other practice than this. You have been converted to vipashyana, and you have faith and trust in it.

THREE STAGES OF VIPASHYANA

Traditional texts describe three stages that are very important to understand in connection with vipashyana: *chipa nyerchö*, or “acting like an infant”; *ro-nyam* or “equal taste”; and *teshin milkpa*, or “seeing things as they are.”

Acting like an Infant

The first stage is called *chipa nyerchö*. *Chipa* means “infant,” *chö* means “acting,” and *nyer* means “being closer to it”; so *chipa nyerchö* means the “acting like an infant” level of meditation experience. *Chipa nyerchö* is the first glimpse of vipashyana. It is like teaching an infant to walk. *Chipa nyerchö* develops from very intense shamatha practice, which brings up what are called “visions of emptiness.”

When you suddenly stop speeding and you become absolutely still, you get a kind of backfire of speed within the stillness. Because you are so confused between stillness and speed, you create visions, or hallucinations, which do not have any substance. The Japanese Zen people call such hallucinations *makyo*. Such nonexistent hallucinations have no root or background. Things shift in front of your eyes, or you begin to see smoke passing by. You might begin to have a sense that your toes are gigantic and your body is tiny, or you have a gigantic head and a small body. You might think the ceiling is sinking above your head, or your *zafu* is shifting around. Your vision changes and all kinds of sounds are heard. Some people hear a complete orchestra, with singing and chanting. Different tingling sensations occur in the body. Sometimes there is terror that you don’t exist.* Such experiences may seem profound, but as long as there is humor or play, I don’t think they are a problem.

TO UNDERSTAND buddhadharma, a person must meditate under the guidance of a teacher and be properly trained in vipashyana. Without an understanding of vipashyana, such discoveries as the four noble truths or egolessness cannot be completely comprehended or experienced.

Vipashyana practice is divided into various categories. In one system, vipashyana is divided into lower vipashyana and higher vipashyana. Lower vipashyana is a shamatha-type of vipashyana, based purely on concentration; higher vipashyana is more inspirational, based on such insights as discovering the four noble truths.

In another system, vipashyana is divided into two aspects: discriminating awareness and immovability. Discriminating awareness is the ability to see clearly, and through that clarity to develop definite mindfulness practice. Immovability is a kind of absorption in which awareness is constantly present and stable, and cannot move or shift. Different degrees of immovability happen in the various stages of vipashyana. Immovability is a pow-

* When a student asked at this point what that experience of terror was like, Trungpa Rinpoche replied, “I suppose more or less like this,” and continued to sit normally.

Equal Taste

The second stage is called ro-nyam. *Ro* is “taste,” and *nyam* means “equal”; so *ro-nyam* means “equal taste.” Ro-nyam is a slightly higher stage, a little bit more on the adult level. You begin to experience the four noble truths and you also begin to experience the simplicity of awareness, so although the sensorial hallucinations might continue, they don’t mean anything to you. There is a quality of one flavor, or one taste. Your shamatha practice continues in a very solid way. You have developed mental stability and you are able to stay with the practice. Because you are already completely involved with shamatha, you also begin to see the simplicity and straightforwardness of vipashyana. So at the second stage, or ro-nyam, shamatha and vipashyana are combined. That combination is the goal of the Burmese meditation schools in particular. They highly recommend the second category of vipashyana as a most important experience.

Seeing Things as They Are

The third stage is called *teshin mikpa*. *Tes* means “that,” *shin* means “like”; so *teshin* means “like that.” *Mikpa* is “perception,” “understanding,” or “knowledge”; so *teshin mikpa* means “seeing things as they are,” which is known as the mahavipashyana experience. The mahavipashyana experience creates a link between hinayana and mahayana practice, in that you begin to experience emptiness, or shunyata. *Shunya* means “empty,” and it makes it a noun; so *shunyata* means “emptiness.” You sense that you are basically shunya, or empty. Your psychological makeup, the embellishments you indulge in, and your thought process are all nonexistent. Because awareness is very direct, precise, and simple, it brings spaciousness and a glimpse of shunyata. You begin to see not only simplicity, but emptiness, or intangibility. In mahavipashyana, a quality of conviction begins to take place, a primitive shunyata experience. So mahavipashyana is a step further than ro-nyam, because with mahavipashyana you have a glimpse that you are inherently nothing—not as a meditation experience alone, but as a kind of fundamental devastation.

In mahavipashyana, there’s an enormous feeling of being helped “out” rather than helped “in.” You are pulled out of whatever realm you are in, into a realm, or psychological state, that is completely empty. You begin to realize that you do not have an origin, and you don’t belong anywhere.

You are treading on a path that is a path in terms of experience but is no longer a concrete path, so there is a lot of fear. It is as if you are riding and you lose your grip on the reins, or as if your car begins to go by itself and the steering wheel doesn’t work. Something slowly begins to take over so that the path comes to you; you don’t go to the path. Practice becomes constantly apparent. It is in your mind all the time, so there is a lot of fear and a lot of concern.

But mahavipashyana experience can also lead to celebration. It depends on your attitude. If your attitude is that the world is playing a trick on you, you will complain to everybody, or at least try to find a source of complaint, so that your ground will be solid and your ideas will be appreciated. However, if you don’t have that attitude of competitiveness, then realizing that there is no ground becomes a source of celebration and joy. At this stage, the experience that you have nothing to hold on to is continual. And that experience will go on, until at a certain level of vajrayana it takes a different form, with further sophistication. However, in this case it is just the simple experience that you exist, but at the same time you do not have any ground. You have no ground because awareness is constant, and the characteristic of awareness is emptiness. Awareness does not have a portrait, a reflection, or identification. So a positive feeling of nothingness becomes very real at the stage of *teshin mikpa*, or mahavipashyana experience.

In mahavipashyana, it is as though you have been released. It is like catching a fly and throwing it out the window so that the fly flies away rather than being squashed on the table. The idea of release or liberation in mahavipashyana discipline is to have a glimpse of groundlessness. The basic idea is that the closer you are to enlightened mind, the more your development takes you in that direction, the more groundless you are.

In terms of the idea of egolessness, the closer you are to enlightenment, the less ego there is. Egolessness is the root of *vipashyana*. Since the ego provides an ongoing ground and reference point, you are losing your foundation; therefore, you are helped “out.” You lose your reference point and you become thinner and thinner, so to speak. *Vipashyana* experience cannot be given birth to, developed, or taught unless there is some understanding of egolessness. At the mahavipashyana level, you have been introduced to the egolessness of self, and you are just about to be introduced to the egolessness of phenomena. But you haven’t actually been completely introduced yet—you just have a “flu” of it.

In ordinary language, shamatha is simply the experience of concentration. It has been said in the texts that even hunters develop shamatha. By one-pointedness with the target, hunters develop their mindfulness or concentration. So you could develop a form of shamatha independent of vipashyana, but to shift from that to a Buddhist-type of concentration, or shamatha, you have to have some experience of, or feeling for, egolessness. You have a sense that there is that possibility, that it is just about to present itself to you, and you practice in that way.

Mahavipashyana is influenced by the mahayana. When you become highly trained in the hinayana and thoroughly absorbed in shamatha practice, your outlook and your experience naturally become mahayana-like. No matter which hinayana school you may be in, the various doctrinal or philosophical labels and distinctions are irrelevant as far as you are concerned.

Unless you develop vipashyana and realize the importance of wakefulness, you will have only a very distant view of vajrayana or even the higher levels of mahayana. It is necessary to have that kind of basic training and growth. So vipashyana experience and practice is absolutely necessary for a person who follows the Buddhist path and really wants to understand the dharma. Both intellectually and intuitively, vipashyana practice is necessary. You have to make an acquaintance with yourself. You have to meet yourself, to know who you are and what you are. Without vipashyana experience, you don't have any idea of who you are, what you are, how you are, or why you are, at all! So it is very important and absolutely necessary to respect the need for vipashyana experience and practice.

48

Sharpening One's Perception

Vipashyana is the heart of the buddhadharma. It sets the general tone of the psychology of Buddhism. A Buddhist has clear thinking and an objective view of the world. He or she is able to recognize and use relative logic. There is no chance that such a person will be swayed by fascinations or extremes. With vipashyana, everything becomes very precise and very direct.

WHATEVER is knowable in the world, of either relative or transcendent nature, can be understood and experienced by means of vipashyana meditation. Vipashyana leads to a complete understanding of the knowable. This does not mean that you will become a great scholar by practicing vipashyana, but that the attitude and approach of vipashyana opens your way of thinking, so that obstacles to learning are no longer prominent.

THE SIX DISCOVERIES

There are several attributes of vipashyana experience, based largely on the intellectual sharpness developed, rather than simply on the meditative experience. These attributes develop out of the four categories of vipashyana: discriminating dharmas, fully discriminating dharmas, completely comprehending dharmas, and completely investigating dharmas. The Tibetan term for attribute, *tsööwa*, means "searching," but in this context, I thought "discovery" would be a better translation. The point is

that through vipashyana, by means of hearing and seeing the dharma, you make six discoveries, or six types of tsölsa.

Meaning: Discovering the Meaning of Words

The first discovery is discovering the meaning of words, or *tön tsölsa*. *Tön* is "meaning," and *tsölsa* is "discovery," so *tön tsölsa* is the "discovery of meaning." In this discovery, you are relying more on the sense of the teachings than on the words. You develop trust in yourself as you begin to realize that you have the potential of knowledge and wisdom within you. You realize that dharma is a question of waking up, rather than painfully cultivating knowledge.

Tön tsölsa means that you have an understanding of how language works, how expressions work, and what happens when you talk dharma. The basic point in regard to language is to have tremendous precision. You know the meanings of words; you understand the subtleties. You understand how an idea is first initiated, then described, and then understood. Interestingly, English grammar is slightly lopsided in terms of our perceptions. Suppose, for instance, you see a white horse. As far as the thought process goes, when you see a white horse, first you see the horse and then you realize the horse is white. You actually see horse-white. Likewise, you see man-good or man-bad. That is how the thought process works. However, you don't have to strain yourself to speak pidgin English. The idea is to articulate and synchronize language with your state of mind.

Tön tsölsa is connected with an interest in language and the expressions of language. It is an understanding of the grammar used to express dharmic language. Fundamentally, this means that you have an understanding of threefold logic. For instance, when you say "individual salvation," you don't just jumble the sounds together; you understand the meaning of the word *individual*, and the meaning of the word *salvation*. In this example, the ground is the individual; the path is salvation, and the fruit is that the individual is freed—therefore it is "individual salvation." If you are trying to describe the dharma, you could say "good dharma" or "The dharma is good." If you say "good dharma," that can be taken as ground or as fruition. If you say "The dharma is good," that is path. Dharma is being qualified by good. First we reflect on dharma, and then we realize that dharma is—What? Good or bad? Good! Vipashyana

discipline allows us to ponder our thinking process and how we relate with words.

Form: Discovering the Objects of Inside and Outside

The next discovery is *ngöpo tsölsa*. *Ngöpo* means "object," or "gross thing." It is "thingness," "tangibleness." *Tsölsa* is "discovery," so *ngöpo tsölsa* is the "discovery of objects." In this discovery we learn to discriminate between our individual world and the world around us. We are discovering the objects of outside and inside. "Inside" means personal situations and emotions; "outside" means the external setup. Outside includes such things as good weather or bad weather, or the favorable or unfavorable rate of exchange from Canadian to American dollars.

This discovery is also called the "search for reality." All experiences in life, every word and every situation, involve subtleties, and those subtleties are clearly seen. Such discernment has nothing to do with paranoia; it is very relaxed. Once you have had an experience of vipashyana, of going out or expanding yourself, neurotic discrimination or paranoia no longer applies. It becomes irrelevant or useless.

Discovering the objects of inside and outside means discriminating between this situation and that situation, between introversion and extroversion. In terms of relationship and communication, you see the greater importance of going out and giving, rather than holding back. You might think this is quite a bizarre way of categorizing things, but when you work with the subtleties of the awareness process, you are able to see whether here and there are working together, whether they are synchronized or not. Then the discovery of this and that, inside and outside, becomes very powerful and important.

Characteristic: Discovering the Nature of Perception

The third discovery is the "discovery of the nature of perception," or *tsen-nyi tsölsa*. *Tsen* means "mark," "sign," or "characteristic"; it is analogous to the mark of being female or male. *Nyi* means "itself"; so *tsen-nyi* refers to how things are categorized according to their own individual existence. *Tsölsa*, again, means "discovery," so *tsen-nyi tsölsa* is the "discovery of individual characteristics." It refers to how things could be shared or not shared between yourself and others, or how things could be the

first thought or second thought. For example, when you give birth to a thought—"Hal! Cup of coffee"—that is first thought. The second thought is, "How and where can a cup of coffee be purchased or manifested?" There is the thought process of journeying from here to there.

This discovery refers to the nature of your perception, how you operate your prajna. For instance, when you want to turn on a light, you first think of the switch, then you can turn the light on or off. So it goes "switch," then "light." It is the same with listening and hearing, or looking and seeing. You discover how you first perceive your world by first thought, and how that is then translated into second thought.

Traditionally, this category has to do with both private and public, almost like the previous category of inside and outside. You are not confused about basic logic, and you can figure out the origin of thought patterns in communication. As a practitioner of vipashyana, you are not completely insulted, because although at face value someone is rude or aggressive to you, you are able to look beyond that to the causal characteristics of that person's reactions.

Direction: Discovering Sides

The fourth discovery is discovering sides. The Tibetan term *chok* means "direction," or "side"; *tsöläwa* means "discovery," so *chok tsöläwa* is "discovering sides." Discriminating the good side from the bad side is quite ordinary: you see whether you are on the side of the dark or the light. Being on the side of the dark means that you are causing harm to yourself or others; being on the side of the light means that you are being a positive influence on yourself and others. This category is about knowing what to do and what not to do. It is about discrimination and common sense. You are able to detect that which is not suitable or a hindrance to the path, whether it is a negative or a positive experience.

Discovering sides is not based on picking and choosing, or on making yourself comfortable. It has broad vision and an unyielding quality. You are able to seek wisdom, to seek good attributes. That is, you have an allegiance, or natural instinct, as to what is right for you and what is not. You are able to tune yourself instinctively in to the appropriate situations. It is very simple. In this discovery, you are relating with the common norms of good and bad, but with tremendous wisdom and clarity.

Time: Discovering Past, Present, and Future

The fifth discovery is discovering time. *Tü* means "time"; *tsöläwa* means "discovery," so *tü tsöläwa* means the "discovery of time," or "not being confused by time." This is not as simple as realizing whether it is daytime or nighttime. *Tü tsöläwa* means that time should be considered, so that what you have experienced in the past, what you are experiencing now, and what you might experience in the future are not confused. Past is past, present is present, and future is future.

You need to develop clear thinking, both intellectually and intuitively, so you are not confused by time or the duration of things. People have tremendous paranoia due to their confusion about time. For instance, you might regard what you think you will experience in the future as a present threat or problem, or because you have experienced something in the past, you might think that in the future it will happen again. There are all kinds of analogies for such paranoia. For instance, you might think that because the Second World War happened, another Hitler is waiting to do the same thing in the future. However, you could develop a clear sense of time so that what you have experienced is what you have experienced; what you are experiencing is what you are experiencing; and what you might experience is what you might experience. You could develop clarity in your experience of past, present, and future.

The instruction in a nutshell is that you could take advantage of your present situation. You have power over the present. Your future situation can be attained and achieved because you have the information and resources of the past: the past has gotten you this far, to the present; and at present, you have what you have. You understand that your future is somewhat predetermined by the present situation, and you realize what you are doing. You have inherited information, credentials, and knowledge from the past; therefore, you know how to act now, in the present, and you can attain what you might attain in the future. So the future is entirely dependent on you, whether or not you would like to put it into effect.

Because of this realization, you do not feel trapped in any way. You have confidence and dignity. You are no longer subject to the whirlpool. You no longer fear that once you jump into the rushing river, you are bound to be swept down Niagara Falls. By practicing *vipashyana* discipline, you are trying to get out of karmic encirclement. You are trying to

cut through karmic cause and effect, so that you can realize your dignity and elegance. You can be arrogant in the positive sense because you can cut through the vicious circle of karma by applying the techniques that have been presented to you. That is the realization or discovery of time.

Insight: Discovering Knowledge

The sixth discovery is discovering knowledge, or insight. In Tibetan it is *rikpa tsöläwa*. *Rikpa* is “insight,” and *tsöläwa* is “discovery,” so *rikpa tsöläwa* is the “discovery of insight.” In this context, insight refers to scientific insight, insight into cause and effect. It refers to relative reference, the ultimate logical mind. The Tibetan term for insight is *rikpa*, and the Sanskrit term is *vidya*, which means “knowledge,” and in particular “scientific knowledge.” That is what we are discovering: knowledge. We are beginning to know the nature of cause and effect. In other words, we have an understanding of karma. In the simple example of planting a seed, we know that when we care for the plant, it is going to grow and develop to fruition. Insight involves faith and the appreciation of scientific discoveries. Albert Einstein could be an example of this kind of discovery. I heard that Einstein was more interested in knowledge than in cash, so he used to use his checks as bookmarks.

Vidya, like science, is based on understanding and trusting the norm of truth that exists in the phenomenal world. It is said in the texts that the knowledge that comes from vipashyana is based on understanding that fire is hot, water is liquid, and so forth. Understanding the elements of earth, water, fire, and air—that earth is solid, water is wet, fire burns, and so on—is basic science. Anything that scientists have discovered is included in the teachings, even simple things, like if you bang your head on the wall, it hurts. You might think this is the kind of lesson you get in sixth grade, and that you are above it. Nonetheless, you have to consider how much you have taken for granted, how much you have ignored, how little trust you have had in the cause and effect of circumstances.

The workings of the elements are very important. If you realize the workings of the elements, you begin to realize the workings of the cause and effect of karma as well, because they are basically the same. According to Buddhism, if you kill, you get killed. You might not have to go through the courts and receive capital punishment, but if you kill somebody, sometime in the future it will happen to you. Through insight,

or *vidya*, we discover the truth about karma. This allows the *kleshas*, or confused emotions, to dry up by themselves.

APPLYING THE SIX DISCOVERIES

You could apply these six discoveries to anything in your life. As an example, in dealing with pain, the first discovery, meaning, is connected with one's psychological attitude toward the experience of pain or pleasure. Form has to do with not being deluded by your imagination, but beginning to make a connection with the reality of the pain. That is, pain is pain; the meaning of pain is pain; and the feeling of pain is pain. The characteristic, or nature, of pain is that it is threatening to one's existence. Pain may involve the fear of death, or the fear of continuing to live. All kinds of fears are involved, which provide various reference points toward the pain. With direction, you are discovering how much space pain occupies and how much space pleasure occupies. And within that space, you discover how important your body and this particular existence is to you. As for time, in relating with pain you apply time, whether it is the duration of a situation that you created yourself, or an experience that is presenting its case to you. With insight, you have an overview. You are viewing all of life, or in this example all your pain, in terms of its meaning, form, characteristic, direction, time, and insight.

The six discoveries are the result of the clear thinking of *vipashyana*, the result of the process of seeing very precisely. They are not something to look for; instead, they are behaviors or patterns that develop. *Vipashyana* is the heart of the buddhadharma. It sets the general tone of the psychology of Buddhism. A Buddhist has clear thinking and an objective view of the world. He or she is able to recognize and use relative logic. There is no chance that such a person will be swayed by fascinations or extremes. With *vipashyana*, everything becomes very precise and very direct.

Throughout the teachings, and in all the practices you are given, nothing is held back. All the aspects and the attributes of the practices, all the definitions of terms and their contexts, are given to you right at the beginning. Nothing is a mystery. You know everything back to front, which exhausts your expectation of anything extraordinary. There is no reason to be excited about *vipashyana*. If you are in the state of *vipashyana*, so what?

On the whole, we are studying dharma so that we know how to handle our life properly. We do not just naively go along with everything, nor for that matter do we become overly paranoid. Instead, as Buddhists we have an understanding of balance. We know how to handle life, and we understand cause and effect. We do not regard our life as though we are constantly being cheated. Whether we are being cheated or not, if we extend ourselves too far or indulge ourselves, we will be cut short. If we are overly sensitive, some accommodation will be provided. That is how the world works according to the vipashyana vision of discriminating-awareness wisdom, which comes from relaxing your mind. So in Buddhism, we are doing more than purely relating to our meditation practice in the shrine hall—we are training in how to live our life.

Vipashyana exists within us, and although we may not yet have experienced it, there is such a thing as complete awareness beyond the technique of simple breathing meditation and walking meditation. We might not expect that there could be a state that is completely clear and empty, spacious, without any problems. However, it is possible and we could experience it.

IN VIPASHYANA you develop a sense of the world containing its own intelligence. Since the world automatically has its own intelligence, you do not need to add a new perspective to it; instead, you could just tune in to that intelligence. You are not trying to discover Martians; you are simply relating to color, form, and experience. The very fact of reality, so-called reality, begins with the reality that you have a body. You have sense perceptions; therefore, you can function. You can see, you can hear, you can taste, you can feel, you can smell, you can exist. That is why we are known as human beings.

The purpose of vipashyana is to fully experience and communicate those sense perceptions. You can experience the reality of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell thoroughly and properly. You are not lost in complexities. When you eat, you eat; when you hear, you hear; when you smell, you smell. You experience what is there. You never miss an inch. The point is that you experience reality as real.

BURNING CONCEPTUAL MIND

In his synopsis of *vipashyana* experience, Jamgön Kongtrül writes about seeing the phenomenal world as empty space. He says that the phenomenal world is empty—it does not have any form, any qualities, any perceptions, any anything at all. Out of that nonexistence, and because of it, we are able to shape forms, objects, colors, and conceptualizations of all kinds. Fixed concepts, shapes, and colors arise, but they are like firewood. That firewood is an aspect of one's intelligence, or discriminating awareness; and the fire is the discipline that burns the fabric of discriminating mind. That is, through the experience of *vipashyana*, apparent phenomena are seen as fuel. Such firewood should be burned so that there is no difference between the phenomenal world and its occupants—they are one. When the fuel of fixed concepts is burned up by the fire of discipline, we have nothing to hang on to. And having discovered nothing to hold onto, we find that the whole thing dissipates. That is the total experience of *vipashyana*.

RIKPA AND REFINED DISCRIMINATION

Although solid discrimination is burned up like wood burned by fire, ashes of refined discrimination, or rikpa, remain. In the larger vision of *vipashyana*, beautiful flower petals and dog shit on the pavement are the same; at the same time, dog shit is still seen as dog shit, and a flower is still seen as a flower, because discriminating awareness remains. It is very simple and very ordinary. For instance, when Jamgön Kongtrül was writing texts, he had three pens—one thick, writing in big letters; one medium; and one small—and he never confused the three of them. They were each put in their particular place on his desk.

To realize *vipashyana*, you must study and use your intellect, or rikpa. It is like getting a PhD. Rikpa is the instigator of *vipashyana*. *Vipashyana* exists within us, and although we may not yet have experienced it, there is such a thing as complete awareness beyond the techniques of simple breathing-meditation and walking meditation. We might not expect that there could be a state that is completely clear and empty, spacious, without any problems. However, it is possible and we could experience it. The space we live in is filled with perceptions and nonperceptions. It is like breathing pollution and fresh air simultaneously. With *vipashyana*, we are

trying to relate more with the fresh air so that the pollution can be transformed at the same time.

TOTAL EXPERIENCE

Vipashyana experience is total experience that goes beyond techniques and beyond mindfulness. *Vipashyana* awareness expands and opens constantly. We could call it active space, self-perpetuating space, or self-perpetuating awareness. Through *vipashyana*, you have a different way of being, in that you are more open to life both psychologically and physically. Everything should be included in the process of awareness. Such self-perpetuating awareness is possible. It is not so much that you can do it, but there is the possibility that you can see it. When the firewood has burned up, the original fire and wood no longer exist. They have dissolved into open space, which is very real to us and very personal.

Vipashyana practice is a growing-up process. You are transcending infancy. As you grow up, you discover that there are lots of things that your parents haven't told you, but you pick up yourself. As you come across experiences in your world, you discover a lot of details and learn a great deal about the world. *Vipashyana* is that kind of personal experience. A very key point of *vipashyana* practice is that it is directed toward growing and developing.

Through *vipashyana*, you begin to realize how much of the world you have missed, and you begin to pay attention to it. With the help of shamatha tranquillity and its concentration—by joining shamatha and *vipashyana*—you begin to experience the world as if the sun and moon were put together, or for that matter, as if your right and left eyes were put together, or your right and left ears. Through shamatha-vipashyana, you could have a cheerful, celebratory life. You do not need to take your life too seriously, but you should not be too frivolous either. You could maintain both your discipline and your cheerfulness. Shamatha and *vipashyana* work together: they are like sky and earth, ocean and land, sun and moon, the four seasons.

THE STAGES OF MEDITATION OF SHAMATHA AND VIPASHYANA

THE TREASURY OF KNOWLEDGE BY JAMGON KONGTRUL

Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chryssoula Zerbini

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

ROOT TEXT

SHAMATHA

1. The Prerequisites for Shamatha

To rely on the conditions for shamatha is to reject everything unfavorable, to stay in a favorable area, to have few desires, to be content, to adopt pure ethics, and to give up distraction and discursive thoughts.

2. The Progressive Classification

When classified, it comprises the mind of the desire realm, the concentrations, the formless absorptions and the absorption of cessation.

3. The Way to Meditate: Posture

During meditation one should be seated comfortably in the eightfold posture.

4. The Methods for Setting the Mind - The Objects of Observation

There are generally four types of objects of observation, in accordance with the individual: pervasive objects, objects for purifying deeds, objects that render skillful and objects for purifying afflictions.

5. The Progression of the Actual Meditation

a. Setting the mind with a concrete support

The particular method for setting the mind is to focus on an impure and a pure support.

b. Setting the mind without concrete support

"Without concrete supports" refers to setting the mind on individual parts', on the complete form; outwardly; and inwardly on the body and on that which depends on the body.

c. Setting the Mind in the Essential Nature

Strive to remain absorbed in the essential nature, waves of thought having dissolved into the ocean of the all-basis.

6. Identifying the Experiences Arising From Meditation

a. Brief Explanation

There are two ways of identifying the experiences arising from these.

b. Detailed Explanation: The Tradition of the Great Treatises

The Eight Antidotes to the Five Faults

According to the treatises, there are five faults: three types of laziness, forgetting the instructions, laxity and agitation (each with two aspects), non-application, and over-application.

The eight antidotes to these are: aspiration, exertion, faith and suppleness which counteract the first; the samadhi of not forgetting with three particularities; examination; application; and equanimity when resting in a balanced state.

The Six Powers, the Four Mental Engagements and the Nine Mental Abidings

The nine mental abidings such as setting the mind on the object etc, arise through the six powers of listening, reflecting, mindfulness, introspection, joyous effort and familiarity. To these mental abidings correspond four mental engagements: forcible, interrupted, uninterrupted and spontaneous.

c. Detailed Explanation: The Tradition of Oral Instructions

In the oral tradition, the five experiences of agitation, attainment, familiarity, stability and perfection are illustrated by examples.

7. The Measure of Accomplishment of Shamatha and its Benefits

a. The Way Shamatha is Accomplished and the Signs of Correct Mental Engagement

Shamatha is accomplished when suppleness is brought to perfection. The signs are bliss, clarity and no concepts of designations, as if merged with space.

b. The Necessity of Accomplishing Shamatha

It is the foundation of all the concentrations taught in the Sutras and Tantras, and it suppresses all suffering and afflictions.

VIPASHYANA

1. The Prerequisites for Vipashyana

The prerequisites for vipashyana are to rely on a wise person and to seek the view by listening extensively and reflecting accordingly.

2. The Particular Types of Vipashyana

The types are

- *The non-buddhists' contemplation of the peaceful and coarse levels;*

- *The shravakas' and pratyekabuddhas' contemplation of the four noble truths and their attributes;*
- *And the paramitayana's contemplation of emptiness, which in the mantrayana is taught to be endowed with bliss.*

The common preparatory stages are similar to those of the mundane path; however, those who have entered the mantrayana and the others do not strive for them.

3. The Classifications of Vipashyana

a. Various Classifications

The classification is into

- *The "four types of vipashyana investigating the essence": discriminating, fully discriminating, examining, and analyzing;*
- *The "three gateways": designations, thorough investigation, and individual analysis;*
- *And the "six investigations": meaning, thing, character, direction, time and reasoning, the latter being of four kinds: the reasoning of dependence, of function, of logical proof, and of nature.*

Through these six, discrimination is applied to each and every phenomenon from form up to omniscience.

b. Summary of the Six Investigations as Three

The six investigations should be known as three: the meaning, the mode of being and the varieties.

c. Twofold Condensation

Vipashyana can also be condensed into preparatory or "analytic" and actual or "non-fluctuating."

4. The Way to Meditate

The way to meditate is to analyze selflessness by means of superior knowledge, and then to rest in a state free from mental fabrications. Non-analytical images are the basis for analysis; having identified the particular object, one cuts through misconceptions regarding its qualities.

5. The Actual Meditation on Vipashyana

The nature of the percept is understood to be empty like space; the perceiver is examined as to origin, abiding, shape, etc.; discriminating knowledge itself, like a fire produced by rubbing wood, vanishes in the expanse of "not finding"; thus one rests free of grasping.

6. The Measure of Accomplishment - Suppleness

When suppleness is obtained, vipashyana is said to be accomplished.

7. The Training in Shamatha and Vipashyana Conjoined

Though Madhyamikas differ with respect to the method of development, they agree on what is to be developed, namely shamatha, vipashyana and the two together; these three are to be practiced in succession and the main point is non-distraction.

8. The Union of Shamatha and Vipashyana

When practicing meditation with designations, the full discrimination of phenomena focuses on the images arising out of shamatha; this is union. When non-conceptual vipashyana is attained, they have become one essence; thus they are unified.

9. The Fruition

This is the genuine samadhi, by the perfection of which non-abiding nirvana, freedom from the bondage of existence and peace, is attained.

10. Brief Listing of the Categories

a. The Different Categories of Shamatha

In brief, the meditations on ugliness, love, the cycles of breath, pratyahara, nadis, prana, generating phase, mantra recitation, resting the mind naturally - all are but methods for developing the concentration of shamatha.

b. The Different Categories of Vipashyana

Analysis of definiendum, definition and example, and of general and specific character; dependent arising; the five reasons; pointing out the nature of mind by means of scripture, reasoning, spiritual influence and symbols - all are methods for developing supreme discriminating knowledge in accordance with the faculties of individuals.

11. The Accomplishment of Shamatha and Vipashyana by means of analytical and stabilizing meditation

Shamatha and vipashyana can be equally accomplished by either analytical or stabilizing meditation.

12. Supplementary explanation of the three stages of concentration

First by child-like concentration, one perceives signs such as smoke, etc.; by the discrimination of phenomena, the sameness of pairs of opposites is realized and supreme concentration is accomplished; by focusing on suchness, all phenomena are seen to be emptiness, which in turn is realized to be peace by nature.

13. Conclusion

This completes the first part being the explanation of the stages of meditation of shamatha and vipashyana, the basis of all samadhis.

THE STAGES OF MEDITATION OF SHAMATHA AND VIPASHYANA

THE TREASURY OF KNOWLEDGE BY JAMGON KONGTRUL

Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chrysoula Zerbini

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

VIPASHYANA SECTION

The Prerequisites for Vipashyana

The prerequisites for vipashyana are to rely on a wise person and to seek the view by listening extensively and reflecting accordingly.

In his *Stages of Meditation II*, Kamalashila says:

"What are the prerequisites for vipashyana? To rely on a wise teacher, to spare no effort in listening extensively, and to reflect accordingly."

Relying on a scholar who has full knowledge of the meaning of the teachings, one listens to authentic treatises and develops the view, i.e. the understanding of suchness, through the superior knowledge arising from listening and reflecting; such are the indispensable prerequisites for vipashyana. This is because without an unmistakable view, it is impossible to give rise to the realization of vipashyana. Moreover, it is necessary to rely on the definitive rather than on the provisional teachings in order to develop such a view; thus, an understanding of the deep definitive teachings must be preceded by a knowledge of the differences between these two levels of teaching. Furthermore, one should seek the view, that is, the understanding of profound emptiness, by relying on the genuine traditions founded by Nagarjuna and Asanga.

The Particular Types of Vipashyana

The types are:

- The non-buddhists' contemplation of the peaceful and coarse levels;
- The shravakas' and pratyekabuddhas' contemplation of the four noble truths and their attributes;
- And the paramitayana's contemplation of emptiness, which in the mantrayana is taught to be endowed with bliss.

The common preparatory stages are similar to those of the mundane path; however, those who have entered the mantrayana and the others do not strive for them.

The classification of vipashyana in terms of types is as follows:

- i) Mundane vipashyana, which suppresses evident afflictions, and consists in contemplating the higher and lower levels as peaceful and coarse respectively—this is common to both buddhist and non-buddhist systems;
- ii) The Shravakas' and Pratyekabuddhas' practice of contemplating the four noble truths and their sixteen attributes such as impermanence, etc.;
- iii) The Paramitayana's contemplation of emptiness; and
- iv) The Mantrayana teaching according to which emptiness is endowed with bliss.

The latter three types are supramundane vipashyana, which completely eradicates afflictions. The way to accomplish the actual concentrations, common to buddhist and non-buddhist systems, by means of the seven preparatory stages of which the first is shamatha, has been described in the chapter dealing with the mundane path. However, those who have entered the Mantrayana and those who have realized the outstanding view of the Paramitayana do not particularly strive for these.

The Classification According to the Essential Nature

The classification is into:

- The four types of *vipashyana investigating the essence*: discriminating, fully discriminating, examining, and analyzing;
- The three gateways: designations, thorough investigation, and individual analysis;
- And the six investigations: meaning, thing, character, direction, time and reasoning, the latter being of four kinds: the reasoning of dependence, of function, of logical proof, and of nature. Through these six, discrimination is applied to each and every phenomenon from *form up to omniscience*.

What is mainly taught here is not the vipashyana of the high levels and paths, but the vipashyana to be practiced by ordinary persons. There are three main types of classification for this:

1. Firstly, according to the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought*, there is a classification known as the four types of vipashyana investigating the essence. These are discriminating and fully discriminating, each of which is divided into thoroughly examining and analyzing.
 - Discriminating involves focusing on the varieties of phenomena, distinguishing them into categories such as the aggregates, the elements and the entrances, and proceeding to a detailed subdivision of each.
 - Fully discriminating involves focusing on their mode of being and realizing the absence of a self of persons and of phenomena.
 - Examining and analyzing refer to the coarse and subtle aspects of discrimination respectively.

The way of examining is described in the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* as "fully examining, definitely examining, fully understanding and closely understanding." This also applies to analyzing. Thus, the extensive classification involves sixteen subdivisions. The detailed presentation of these can be found in the *Levels of Hearers*:

"A classification similar to the one given in the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* was given in the Compendium of Knowledge: "What is vipashyana? It is discriminating, fully discriminating, thoroughly examining and thoroughly analyzing phenomena; it is the remedy to rigidity and conceptuality, draws the mind away from the erroneous and settles it in that which is not erroneous."

2. Secondly, there is a three-fold classification of vipashyana known as the three gateways. The *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* says:

"O Bhagavan, how many types of vipashyana are there? Maitreya, there are three: the one arising from designations, the one arising from thorough investigation, and the one arising from individual analysis. If one identifies those three in relation to meditation on selflessness, they are as follows:

- One focuses on the recognition of selflessness, concentrating on its attributes, without making use of much logical argumentation;
 - One uses reasoning in order to ascertain what one formerly could not understand; and
 - One analyses repeatedly as before the meaning which has been ascertained.
3. Finally, there is a six-fold classification of vipashyana known as the six investigations. Here one thoroughly investigates the six aspects of phenomena, which are meaning, things, character, direction, time and reasoning; this is also a case of vipashyana arising from individual analysis:

- a. Investigation of meaning entails finding out the sense of a given word or phrase;
- b. Investigation of things entails classifying them as either internal or external;
- c. Investigation of character entails identifying the general (or abstract) and the specific (or concrete) character of phenomena, referred to as common and uncommon investigation respectively;
- d. Investigation of direction entails investigating what is unwholesome by considering its faults and shortcomings, and what is wholesome by considering its qualities and benefits;
- e. Investigation of time entails considering what has happened in the past, what will happen in the future and what takes place in the present;
- f. Investigation of reasoning is of four types:
 - i. The reasoning of dependence refers to the investigation of the dependence of an effect upon causes and conditions for its arises. In this context one investigates the deceptive, the ultimate and their basis of imputation individually;
 - ii. The reasoning of function refers to the performance by each phenomenon of its own particular function: for example, fire, burns, etc. Here one investigates by identifying the phenomenon, the function and their mutual relationship;
 - iii. The reasoning, of logical proof refers to establishing the validity of propositions in accordance with valid cognition. Here one investigates phenomena with respect to three types of valid cognition, namely, direct valid cognition, inferential valid cognition and the valid cognition of trustworthy scriptures;
 - iv. The reasoning of nature refers to investigating phenomena in terms of their conventional nature, e.g. fire being hot, water wet, etc.; their inconceivable nature; and, their abiding nature. One accepts these natures as such and does not look for other reasons for their being so.

Thus, by means of the six investigations, one discriminates and comprehends each and every phenomenon, from form up to omniscience, whether afflicted or pure.

The six investigations should be known as three: the meaning, the mode of being and the varieties.

The six investigations should be known as three: the meaning, the mode of being and the varieties. Vipashyana can also be condensed into preparatory or “analytic” and actual or “unfluctuating.”

This six-fold presentation of vipashyana can be condensed into three main categories which are what a yogi should know:

1. the meaning of words,
2. the varieties of phenomena and
3. their mode of being.

The first of these corresponds to the first investigation; the second corresponds to the investigation of things in general and of the specific character of phenomena; and the third corresponds to the last three investigations as well as to that of the general character of phenomena.

The three gateways are the entrances to the four vipashyanas explained at first, and the method of investigation was presented as six; therefore the three gateways and the six investigations are included in the four vipashyanas.

Vipashyana can also be condensed into preparatory or *analytic* and actual or *non-fluctuating*.

The Way to Meditate

The way to meditate is to analyze selflessness by means of superior knowledge, and then to rest in a state free from mental fabrications. Non-conceptual images are the basis for analysis; having identified the particular object, one cuts through misconceptions regarding its qualities.

If one has no understanding of the view of selflessness, whichever type of meditation one may do will be mistaken with respect to suchness; therefore, it is necessary to establish the view. On the other hand, even though one may have an intellectual understanding of the view, if one does not rest within that understanding, suchness will not have been meditated upon. Therefore, one first analyses selflessness by means of superior knowledge and then rests within the sphere of complete freedom from mental fabrications.

Furthermore, if the ability to rest in equipoise decreases due to extensive analytical meditation, one should emphasize stabilizing meditation, and thus restore the abiding aspect. If one loses interest in analysis due to too much stabilizing meditation, one should go back to analytical meditation. Thus shamatha and vipashyana are said to be most effective when practiced equally in this way.

The method explained here, namely to analyze the object of meditation by means of discriminating knowledge and finally to rest in a state free of mental fabrications, is common to all systems of tenets. Moreover, according to the Gelug tradition, during the actual phase of equipoise, the mode of apprehending the object is repeatedly brought to mind.

The Actual Meditation on Vipashyana

When meditating on shamatha, due to the concentration of mind, many images appear which may or may not be similar to what is found in the external world. These are known as “non-analytical images.”

In the practice of vipashyana as well, such images arise due to the force of shamatha, and are then taken as the basis for individual analysis; thus the analysis is not actually directed towards the outside, since the mind is solely turned inwards. When analyzing these images arising out of samadhi, it is necessary to begin by focusing on each object individually with discriminating knowledge, since without identifying a particular object, it is not possible to cut through misconceptions regarding its qualities. Therefore, one begins by clearly bringing to mind the object regarding which one wishes to eliminate misconceptions, and proceeds to examine it through perfect discriminating knowledge; thus ascertaining its lack of inherent existence. Then, grasping the object of samadhi (i.e. the non-analytical image) undistractedly, one should realize its being mere appearance, empty of inherent existence.

Thus, sammadhi and superior knowledge are unified, being focused on the same object. As said in the *Compendium of Knowledge*: "Shamatha and superior knowledge have the same object of observation."

The nature of the percept is understood to be empty like space; the perceiver is examined as to origin, abiding, shape, etc.; discriminating knowledge itself, like a fire produced by rubbing wood, vanishes in the expanse of 'not finding'; thus one rests free of grasping.

While resting in equipoise on form etc., one also realizes its empty nature by means of discriminating knowledge, and remains in that state without being attentive to the attributes of the object. One begins by familiarizing oneself with this practice, and as a result one comes to cognize emptiness as if suspended in the midst of space, with no reference even to the nature of mere percept. This is the yoga of non-referential percept and is the external aspect of meditation, i.e. meditation on appearance and emptiness as inseparable.

The internal aspect refers to the perceiver. When for example anger arises in consciousness, one should identify it and examine it with discriminating knowledge. First, one looks for the cause of its arising, then whether it dwells within or without, and if it has any shape or color; finding nothing whatsoever, one rests in equipoise within that understanding. This method is to be applied to whichever of the six root afflictions may arise, as well as to neutral thoughts, etc. In short, whatever type of thought arises, one should be aware of it and meditate as described above. This is the yoga of non-referential perceiver and is the internal meditation on awareness and emptiness as inseparable.

Finally, the object examined "and discriminating knowledge itself, just as a fire produced by rubbing wood together, vanish into the sphere of not finding." At that point, one rests in a state free of grasping.

The main points regarding these two yogas are given by Atisha in his *Quintessential Instructions on the Middle Way* as follows:

"Thus, the mind of the past has ceased altogether; the mind of the future has not yet arisen and the present mind is extremely difficult to examine; this is because, just like space, it has neither shape nor color, and therefore cannot be established as truly existent. Alternatively, this lack of true existence can be proven by reasons such as "neither-one-nor-many" and "non-production," or because it is by nature luminosity, etc. Thus, one investigates with the sharp weapon of reasoning and realizes this absence of true existence of the present mind."

"In this way, when neither percept nor perceiver can be established as anything whatsoever, discriminating knowledge as well is understood to lack inherent existence. For example, by rubbing together two pieces of wood, fire is produced, which in turn consumes that very wood; as a result, the fire itself subsides. Likewise, when all abstract and concrete phenomena are established as non-inherently existent, then discriminating knowledge itself is beyond duality. It cannot be established as anything whatsoever, it is luminosity beyond mental fabrications. Therefore all conditions such as laxity and agitation are cleared away. At that point, awareness is totally free of concepts, nothing is perceived, and all recollection and mental activity have been eliminated. For as long as the enemy or thief of conceptuality has not arisen, let awareness rest in this manner."

The Measure of Accomplishment

When suppleness is obtained, vipashyana is said to be accomplished.

When practicing analytical meditation by means of discriminating knowledge, until suppleness is attained, one only cultivates a similitude of vipashyana; when suppleness has arisen, one has achieved vipashyana proper.

The essential nature of suppleness and the way it arises are as previously explained in the section dealing with shamatha.

According to the *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* and the *Quintessential Instructions on the Prajnaparamita* by Shantipa, as well as other scriptures, vipashyana is said to be accomplished when suppleness can be induced by the power of analytical meditation itself. This applies to both kinds of vipashyana, namely the one focusing on the varieties of phenomena and the one focusing on their mode of being.

The Training in Shamatha and Vipashyana Conjoined

The Actual Method of Training

Though Madhyamikas differ with respect to the method of development, they agree on what is to be developed, namely shamatha, vipashyana and the two together; these three are to be practiced in succession and the main point is non-distraction.

With respect to achieving the non-dual wisdom resulting from the conjoined practice of shamatha and vipashyana, the various Madhyanika masters explain the method of development differently. However, they all agree regarding what is to be developed, namely the union of shamatha and vipashyana.

According to the master Bhavaviveka, one first develops shamatha by contemplating ugliness, love, etc., after which vipashyana is generated by the power of reasoning. However, according to the master Shantideva, one begins with cultivating shamatha by means of meditation on bodhicitta, and then generates the superior knowledge of vipashyana by focusing on emptiness. According to the master Kamalashila in his *Stages of Meditation II*, one begins with developing shamatha by using an object of observation such as an image of the Buddha, etc., and then proceeds to accomplish vipashyana by analysing the nature of that very object. The master Chandrakirti considers that both shamatha and vipashyana are to be accomplished in dependence upon the view based on the analysis of suchness.

All of these methods are correct, unerring paths; all explanations agree in that these three practices, i.e. shamatha, vipashyana and their conjunction should be definitely accomplished in succession since they are related as cause and effect; and in all of them, the main point is an undistracted, one-pointed mind.

The Union of Shamatha and Vipashyana

When practicing meditation with designations, the full discrimination of phenomena focuses on the images arising out of shamatha; this is union. When non-conceptual vipashyana is attained, they have become one essence; thus they are unified.

At which point can shamatha and vipashyana be said to be unified? When practicing shamatha and vipashyana with designations, both the non-discursive mind that focuses on the images arising out of shamatha, and the realization of the vipashyana which fully discriminates phenomena come together in a natural way - this itself is the union of shamatha and vipashyana.

Here, when both non-conceptual shamatha and non-conceptual vipashyana are attained, they have become one essence; therefore they are known as "unified." *The Stages of Meditation I* says:

"When focusing on the essencelessness of all phenomena in a state free of laxity and agitation, etc., where awareness rests without any conceptual effort, the path of unifying shamatha and vipashyana is completed."

The Fruition

This is the genuine samadhi, by the perfection of which non-abiding nirvana, freedom from the bondage of existence and peace, is attained.

Such a samadhi, which is the union of shamatha and vipashyana, is authentic samadhi. Maitripa's *Commentary on the Ten Suchnesses* says:

"The phrase 'by correct, authentic samadhi' means that the conjoined practice of shamatha and vipashyana is correct, authentic samadhi; thus, this is what accomplishes the path."

The perfection of this samadhi results in the attainment of non-abiding nirvana, freedom from the bondage of conditioned existence and peace. The *Sutra Unravelling the Thought* says:

"If the practitioner familiarizes himself with shamatha and vipashyana, he will be freed from the fetters of rigidity and conceptuality."

In the post-meditative phase, with the understanding of the illusion-like nature of all phenomena, one should exert oneself in applying skillful means such as making offerings to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, practicing compassion towards all sentient beings, dedicating all virtue etc.