

VOLUME ONE

THE PROFOUND TREASURY
OF THE OCEAN OF DHARMA

The Path of Individual Liberation

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

Judith L. Lief



SHAMBHALA • BOSTON & LONDON • 2013

not have an ego. But that does not seem to work. You have to start at the beginning, with sitting practice.

Meditation practice is based on the idea of being yourself, as you are—something you have rarely done. All along you have had problems with that. Even at an early age, you tried to please your world. You tried to please your mommy and daddy or your nanny, if you had one. Sometimes you got angry with your parents, but you never made a relationship with yourself. Instead, you created a kind of emotional insulation, which became more prominent as you grew from a teenager to an adult. Now you are continuously insulated. You carry that insulation with you in your timid smile and timid aggression. Such timidity, shyness, and uncertainty represent what is known in Buddhist psychology as passion, aggression, and ignorance. Because of that insulation, you have never experienced real life. You have not really learned to be with yourself, although you might have experienced a glimpse of such a possibility in a practice retreat. However, having recognized that fact, you also discover that your existence is workable. Your timidity, uncertainty, and fear can be worked with by means of sitting practice.



THREE ASPECTS OF SITTING PRACTICE

The purpose of meditation is to teach you how to be. It has three aspects: posture, technique, and joy.

Posture

Posture organizes your being and makes you a true human being with good head and shoulders, as opposed to an ape or a banana. Posture is one difference between animals and human beings. In *tüdro*, the Tibetan word for animal, *tu* means “bent over,” and *dro* means “to go,” or “to walk” so an animal is a sentient being that walks or moves bent over. Unlike animals, human beings are capable of sitting upright and having good head and shoulders.

Technique

The second aspect of sitting practice is technique. Basically speaking, the technique is to be spacious and not wait for anything. If something

is about to happen, it will happen; if it is not going to happen, it won't. Don't expect anything from your practice. Sitting practice is not a punishment or a reward. Don't expect it will bring you sudden bliss or a new relationship with reality. You have to sever yourself completely from any such view! Nobody is going to help you; you are on your own. John Doe or Jane Doe. Be alone, be lonely. Loneliness has the quality of somebody playing a bamboo flute; it has the quality of somebody strumming a guitar at the foot of a waterfall. Occasionally you sneeze, which might shock you. Loneliness will make you resentful and horny. Loneliness will make you cry and laugh at the same time.

Joy

The third aspect of sitting is joy, or appreciation. Sitting practice is joyful, but not in the usual sense. It is hard joy, tough joy, but you will achieve something in the end. Joy is connected with hard work and exertion: you appreciate working hard and you are not trying to escape from pain. If you stay with the pain of practice, it is like carving a rock: it is not necessarily pleasurable, but you are achieving something. It is like sawing a tree or trying to swim across a big river: you keep going and appreciate keeping going.

Practice is like medicine: it is bitter, but good for you. Although it is a bittersweet experience, it is worth it. When you sit on your cushion, it is tearful and joyful put together. Pain and pleasure are one when you sit on your meditation cushion with a sense of humor. Sitting practice is remarkable, fantastic, extraordinary! It is like watching a traffic light: stop, wait, go. It is like an orgasm, which could be both painful and pleasurable. That is life.

THE INSPIRATION TO PRACTICE

Understanding how you came to be practicing and why is very important. You need to know why you are practicing or not practicing, what actually motivates you. Meditation is not like suddenly being fixed, which is impossible. So why do you stick with your practice? Why don't you go do something else and forget the whole thing? The motivation to practice arises because each time you practice, there is a sense of joy and well-being. From that feeling of well-being, conviction, or faith, arises.

technique, but encouraged direct opening, a sudden flash. However, in intensive meditation programs, that approach became a problem. Those students began to question whether that open experience was genuine or a hallucination. Although they had nothing to do but sit and let that openness happen, all kinds of thoughts began to churn up in the mind. Auditory, visual, and physical sensations began to take them over. So although such instructions are valid on their own merit, during intensive practice I feel that students should practice the more conservative approach of mindfulness of breathing. Also, there are different styles of breathing belonging to different levels of meditation practice, such as *shamatha*, *vipashyana*, *mahavipashyana*, or “great vipashyana,” and *shunyata*. However, instead of classifying the different styles of practice, I prefer to present very simply and directly what it is necessary to do to begin sitting.



GOING OUT WITH THE BREATH AND DISSOLVING

In sitting meditation, you are dealing with body, speech, and mind simultaneously. You are developing a sense of precision and accuracy. There is no room, none whatsoever, for imagination or improvisation in sitting practice or in walking practice. In mindfulness of breathing, you have a sense of the breath. You are being with the breath and the subtleties of the breath. You do not have to be too scientific concerning your lungs, your nostrils, hot and cold temperatures, or the impression the breath creates on your lips as you breathe out. Instead you should have a sense of the breathing as the ongoing survival mechanism that governs you. You are becoming mindful of the natural breathing. Mindfulness is not looking at, thinking about, or imagining something better or higher than your natural breathing. You have a sense of breathing out. You experience the breath going out and dissolving, and on the in-breath there is a gap. You do not have to follow the in-breath as you draw it in; you can let it drop. So the in-breath is an insignificant space, a gap; then you breathe out again.

In mindfulness practice, you are simply identifying with the breath. In particular, you are trying to follow the out-breath. The in-breathing is just a gap or space. You wait. Then, when you have breathed out, you dissolve, and—gap. You breathe out, dissolve, and—gap. In that way, openness and expansion take place constantly. By creating a gap area, there is less strain. Once you breathe out, you are sure to breathe in, so there's room for

relief. It is a question of openness. Out-breathing is an expression of stepping out of your system. It has nothing to do with centralizing in your body. Usually everything is bottled up, but here you are sharing, you are giving something out. All that is associated with the out-breath.

The out-breathing is an expression of being. In-breathing is a confirmation of being, because we need oxygen to live. Psychologically, however, it helps to put less emphasis on the thisness, and more on the ongoing process of going out. Also, strangely enough, you find that the attention on physical being, the awareness of body, becomes more precise if you begin to feel that sense of going out. Relating with yourself in terms of going out is automatic confirmation that you are breathing without any difficulties. Your breathing is no problem; you don't need an iron lung. The in-breathing is a sign of struggle. If you are short of breath, you breathe in. Out-breathing has a feeling of relaxation and well-being, a feeling of existing.

SIMPLIFYING

The shamatha approach is to simplify everything to the basic minimum. You should not try to improvise or do anything other than follow your breath very simply. You should walk in and sit down properly on your meditation cushion. You should arrange yourself fully; you don't just plop. You should feel your cushion and make yourself as comfortable as you can. Don't rush into the technique; first settle down and adjust yourself. After that, feel your breath, your ordinary breath. If you are alive, you are always breathing; unless you are dead, breathing is constant. Feel your breath, identify completely with the breath, *be* the breath. Become one with the breath. As your breathing goes out, you go out with the breath; and as the breathing dissolves, you dissolve. As you dissolve and the breathing dissolves, there is a momentary gap. Breathing in follows as the natural process of preparing for the next out-breath. You pick up on the breath again when you breathe out. So in the practice of meditation, you go out and dissolve: out-dissolve, out-dissolve. There is a gap; there is openness. It is a process of expanding.

Some traditions feel that you should be cranking up all the time. They think that you should be kept occupied, be a busybody, otherwise you are wasting your money. However, in our approach to shamatha, there is a contrast between doing something and doing nothing. That is the secret,

actually! The gap is just a gap: you do nothing. So there is a slight tinge of vajrayana in our approach to shamatha practice; it is not exclusively hinayana. You should not be afraid of that gap. According to traditional historical accounts, when the Buddha first began to talk about emptiness, several of the arhats, or senior disciples, had heart attacks and died. That sense of gap is precisely where their heart attacks began! You might think, "What am I going to do if I don't have anything to do?" Precisely! That is a very beautiful illustration of this.

TAKE YOUR TIME

In group practice, when the leader rings the gong to begin, don't mentally start to practice right away. When the gong strikes, prepare yourself and pay attention to your body. Correct your posture. Feel your breath, your lungs, your legs, and your posture. Just feel them. The gong is the signal to feel your body, your head and shoulders, and your cushion. Just feel. Having felt everything, as the sound of the gong fades, you can start working on mindfulness of your breath.

The reason you should take your time is to make everything very genuine and honest. When the gong is rung, you don't just go *bam!* into samadhi. When you sit, you have to work with your mind and body and with everything that happens, so prepare yourself. This might take as much time as counting from one to twenty-five. When you first sit down on your cushion, be kind and gentle to yourself. Be natural. Don't tell yourself, "Now I'm going to give it a go, and I'm going to do it the hard way. I'm going to give myself pain." That doesn't work. When you sit down, first settle nicely on your cushion and treat yourself well. Give yourself a good time.

As the sound of the gong fades, having settled yourself on the cushion, raise your posture. Don't straighten up right at the beginning when you first sit down. You could even hunch down. Then as the sound of the gong fades away, raise yourself up so that you achieve good posture. Having done so, you can exert yourself further. Ideally, you should not have to reshuffle yourself too much as you are sitting. If you made a mistake when you first started to sit, you can correct that, but if possible don't reshuffle at all. If you take this approach, you can have a nice sitting.

When the sound of the gong has faded completely, having taken your posture, you are ready to start working with your breath. It is as if

somebody were leading you on a mountain trail on horseback and finally gave you the reins: "You have to ride your own horse. It's all yours." So first you give yourself a good time, and then you become well disciplined.

To review, first you hear the gong, then you settle, then you go out with the out-breath—*tshoo!*—then you come back to your posture. So you have the mind together with the breath, with the body as an overall reference point.

Breathing Out

[In meditation practice,] the body becomes insignificant, and space and breathing become more important. In fact, the breath is the most important part of the practice. Thoughts come up with the sense of body, the sense of “me” being here. However, if there is no central authority, if your practice is purely activity in space, thoughts become transparent.

As you meditate, your breath is going in and out. You may have ideas about your breath or think there is some problem with the way you are breathing, but you should just try to go along with the breath you have. It is important to breathe normally. Your breath will be affected by your posture, by exercise, or by whether you had a heavy meal or a light meal. Your breathing is also affected by your vision. If your vision is too focused, for instance, your breathing will begin to pick up. Along with that will come sudden discursive thoughts: sexual fantasies, aggressive fantasies, all sorts of fantasies. So it is better not to focus your vision, but to let your vision rest. Even if your breathing is affected by such things, you still should not force yourself to breathe in a certain way, but let your breath flow naturally. And if your breathing happens to be fast, you should give it time to settle.

In meditation practice, you place your attention on the out-breath. As you are breathing, you just go out with the breath and the breath dissolves. As you breathe in, you wait, and then go out again. It is very natural and very slow. When thoughts come up, you label them “thinking,” and return to the breath. You have to be very precise about the whole thing;

you can't miss an inch. You should not think twice, thinking that you are thinking "thinking." It has to be right on the dot. When you breathe, you are utterly there, properly there; as you breathe out, you dissolve or diffuse. Then you come back to your posture, and you are ready for another out-breath. Over and over you come back to your posture, breathe out, and come back again. It is quite hard work. As the breath dissolves, it is becoming less important. As your breath goes out and begins to reach beyond you, there is space. You just keep breathing out and dissolving; breathing in just happens. So it is out . . . rest . . . out . . . rest. You don't use any tricks; you just put an emphasis on *out*. And while you are practicing, you should not think about what you're going to get out of meditation. You just do it.

LEARNING HOW TO LET GO

As you practice, you should keep it very simple. After each breath goes out, there is a gap—not a big drop, just a gap. That gap could be felt. You might feel it as a moment of waiting, or expectation, or being ready for the next out-breath. As you breathe out, ideally about twenty-five percent of your awareness is on the out-breath. Beyond that, you don't need to be aware of anything—there is simply a gap—then you breathe out again. If you do not scheme, but just sit and follow your breath, that makes life very simple.

The sitting practice of meditation is basically: out-breath . . . dissolve . . . gap; out-breath . . . dissolve . . . gap; out-breath . . . dissolve . . . gap. Keep it at that level. If any jolt takes place, it is usually due to your posture, so your posture has to be extremely good. If your out-breath doesn't quite dissolve, it isn't quite out-breath; so each time you breathe, your practice has to be precise—very simple, very direct, and very accurate.

When you breathe out, you do so with some tension or tautness. You look at your breath, but you do not use it as a means of achieving absorption. Sounds, temperature, the feeling of your clothes, the food you might or might not have in your stomach, all sorts of pains in your joints, your back, your neck, and your arms—you could regard all those as thoughts. It is all thinking.

The out-breath is connected with the idea of letting go. You are always breathing out. When you talk, you breathe out; when you eat, you breathe out. Breathing out is not gymnastics, but simply learning how to

let go. You develop mindfulness as you let go. Mindfulness is in jeopardy when you are busy projecting toward something, or when your mind is distracted because you are trying to make sense of something as you are breathing out.

In meditation practice, you are in the process of developing action along with nonaction as you begin to touch the world. When you meditate, you have mindfulness of the breathing going out, then you cut that; then you have another mindfulness of the breathing going out, and you cut that. In other words, you go out with the transport—and suddenly you have no transport! Then you start again. In that way, the gap of the in-breath becomes extremely spacious. By focusing on the out-breath, your practice is not based on the ongoing speed of out-and-in, out-and-in, all the time. Instead, a leap is involved, a miniature leap. It takes a little effort, but you could feel very refreshed.

If you follow both the in-breath and the out-breath, you are being too faithful. The whole thing becomes very linear; you go out and you come in; you go out and you come in. If you go out and come in again and again, in the end that makes you very heady. You have no rest, and everything is extremely hard work. In contrast, when you go out, then nothing happens; then you go out again, and nothing happens—it is very clean-cut. The out-breath is threatening in a sense, but focusing on the out-breath is a much freer approach. If you allow yourself a rest as you breathe in, the out-breathing becomes more of a journey, however short that journey may be. You simply go out with the breath. When you do so, the body becomes insignificant, and space and breathing become more important. In fact, the breath is the most important part of the practice. Thoughts come up with the sense of body, the sense of “me” being here. However, if there is no central authority, if your practice is purely activity in space, thoughts become transparent.

LIGHT TOUCH

As you breathe, you should not try to reach perfect breathing; you just breathe. Even animals can do that. Breathing obviously comes from your lungs and your nose, but if you are just feeling the breathing coming out of your nostrils, you are not feeling where it actually begins and how it flows. At first, your sense of the breathing may be very general and vague, but as your mindfulness of breathing continues, you experience the whole

process very specifically. There is a pattern as your breathing goes out, a sense of it really happening, so you do not have to focus on your nostrils. It is like hearing a noise: when you hear a noise, a sound traveling through space, you can relate with the sound rather than having to relate with your ears.

The practice of shamatha is environmental as well as technique oriented. In shamatha practice, a twenty-five-percent touch of awareness on the breath seems to be about right. In any case, you can't do more than that. Because you keep your eyes open, you see things; your ears are not clogged, so you hear things. You are aware of the way your clothes feel and of the temperature in the room. You are aware of your stomach being full or empty. If you took a shower before sitting, you feel clean. You feel your hairdo and the spectacles you are wearing. You feel whether your mouth is dry or wet. There are all sorts of little sensations like that, which leaves only about twenty-five percent of your awareness left for working with your breath.

That is a natural situation. You exist as a human being, and your sense perceptions are operating everywhere all the time. The idea of shamatha is to narrow all that down into twenty-five-percent awareness of the breath as a way of training yourself. You are internalizing a little, as opposed to trying to cast off the sights you see, the sounds you hear, the smells you smell, and the tastes you taste, and the physical sensations you experience. During your sitting practice, you reduce all that into the breath, which will be about twenty-five percent of your attention, if you calculate scientifically how much is going on in your body. You might as well come back to the breath. It is more joyful, more wholesome, and you don't have to be startled by anything. In shamatha, you are bringing the rest of the things going on in your existence back to one particular thing: the breath. It is very simple.

RELYING ON GUESSWORK

You may find that as you are keeping your heedfulness on the breathing, the thinking process continues to freely function at the same time. That is quite common; it happens with a lot of practitioners. Once you develop a feeling of the rhythm of the breath, you can be aware of the breathing and at the same time entertain yourself with all kinds of thoughts. The problem with that approach—by the way, it is not regarded as a problem



Labeling Thoughts

Don't regard yourself as good or bad. You are just you, thinking and coming back to the breath. You are not trying to push thoughts away, nor are you trying to cultivate them. You are just labeling them "thinking." No matter what thought comes up, don't panic; just label it "thinking"—stop—and come back to your breath.

THE THINKING process takes place all the time. That is everybody's problem. In order to solve that particular problem, you have to discover what goes on in your mind. It is very direct and personal. In sitting practice, you spend at least eighty percent of your practice dealing with thoughts, but that does not mean you are being extraordinarily naughty or terrible. Even if you are so completely occupied with your thoughts that you do not have much time left to work with the technique, don't think you are being bad. You should feel grateful that your sitting practice is not one-hundred-percent thoughts! Eighty-percent thoughts is pretty good, so don't punish yourself. You are not doing anything wrong and you are not committing any sin.

In meditation practice, you regard everything that takes place in your mind—every little detail, every little explosion—as thinking. You are not trying to separate thoughts from emotions. If you feel angry at somebody; if you have a sudden burst of passion, your own private porn show; if you are going through cookbooks and visualizing beautiful food or drink; if you are on the coast swimming in the ocean or walking barefoot along the seashore—all those little outbursts of anger or passion are regarded as just thinking. Metaphysical dialogues or debates, evaluations of art and

music, questions of reality and enlightenment, ideas of mathematics and science, ideas of love and friendship—all those philosophical questions that come into your head are regarded as just thinking. Even if you have very dedicated thoughts or dharmic thoughts, they are still regarded as just thinking.

Regarding emotions as thoughts may seem dry, but when you have a strong thought it involves your whole being. For example, if you are in a battlefield, you can be shot to death by an enemy sniper at any time. That is a thought, but a very real thought. You think that to your right and to your left, your friends are turning into corpses instantaneously, and since you are standing in the middle you too could be a corpse pretty soon. Those are really strong thoughts. However, although such thoughts have some reference point of reality, they are still thoughts. Even when you take action, it is your thoughts that drive you into action. For instance, driving manuals talk about having a thinking distance, a braking distance, and a stopping distance. When a car in front of you stops, first you think about stopping, then you step on the brake, and finally you actually stop. It always works like that.

You might think you are making a breakthrough this very moment and that you are just about to dissolve into space. You might think you are going to kill your mother or father on the spot because you are so upset with them. You might think you are going to make love to somebody who is extraordinarily lovable. You might think you are about to have such a fantastic affair that it could exhaust the whole universe. You might have a thought of assassinating your guru, or you might want to make lemon juice and eat cookies. A large range of thinking goes on, but in terms of sitting practice, it does not matter whether you have monstrous thoughts or benevolent thoughts, sinful or virtuous thoughts—any thought is just thinking. So please don't be shocked by your thoughts, and don't think that any thought deserves a gold medal.

You do not need pigeonholes for all the concepts that arise. It doesn't make any difference whether you have good thoughts or bad thoughts, whether you think that you are the Buddha himself or you think you are in the realm of hell. It is all just thinking. Thoughts arise all the time. If you have a hierarchical bureaucracy in which every thought pattern that occurs in the mind is labeled as good or bad, all kinds of problems develop. When you feel hurt, you think about that; when you feel good, you think about that.

In the Buddhist approach, doubt is just a thought. Doubt could be said to be a powerful thought, but it is still a thought. You may have doubt as to whether doubt is a thought or not, but that doubt itself is a thought. Guilt is also just a thought. You do not try to get rid of guilt, and you do not try to feel that you are doing something worthwhile. If you have a guilty thought, so what? It is a thought. It is your mind.

In shamatha, you have to look at such thoughts, but not because they have a case history. It is like seeing rain, snow, a hailstorm, or a cloudy day—it's all just weather. This might seem too easy, but it is very useful to look at things in this way. We usually do not do so, however. If you are extremely angry with somebody and your wife comes along and tells you, "Darling, this is just your thought," then you get angry with her as well! You scream, "It's *not* just my thought! He did something wrong to me, and I am extremely angry. I want to kill him!" But we have to give up that idea. It seems to be a big thing to give up, but your wife is right—it is a thought.

We have to accept that all experiences are just thought patterns. Buddha said that when a musician plays a stringed instrument, both the strings and his fingers are his mind. According to Buddhist psychology, there are fifty-two different types of thought processes. Some are pious, some are political, some are domestic, some are sensible. But all of them are just thoughts. As far as meditators are concerned, that is the key. With that key, you begin to find that you can handle life as it happens around you. With so many pigeonholes, you cannot handle the whole thing. But once you begin to realize that everything is thought process, you can handle your life because nothing is complicated. Everything is thought.

The traditional technique for dealing with all those mental activities is mentally to note them and label them "thinking." Inevitably, once you are settled into your practice—*bing!*—there will be a thought. At that point you say "thinking," not out loud but mentally. Labeling thoughts in that way will give you tremendous leverage to come back to your breath. When a thought takes you over completely, so that you are not even on the cushion but somewhere else—in San Francisco or New York City—as soon as you notice, you say "thinking" and bring yourself back to the breath. You don't regard yourself as good or bad. You are just you, thinking and coming back to the breath. You are not trying to push thoughts away, nor are you trying to cultivate them. You are just labeling them

“thinking.” No matter what thought comes up, don’t panic; just label it “thinking”—stop—and go back to your breath.

By labeling thoughts “thinking,” you are simply seeing them and acknowledging them as they are. You acknowledge everything as thoughts, as the thinking process, and come back to the technique. Labeling practice has to become instinctual. You can talk to yourself, but that is a second-rate experience, arising out of extreme boredom. It is not necessary to verbalize. Rather than saying, “Now I should get back to the breath,” just come back! There has to be some abruptness. Introductory remarks as to what you are going to do are a waste of time.

Coming back to your breath is not regarded as suppression; it is returning to where you began. Your work has been interrupted, so you are coming back to it. It is as if you were chopping wood, then your friend came along and you got involved in a conversation. You tell your friend, “I must get back to work,” rather than “I must suppress our conversation.” You don’t come back to the breath because things are becoming unpleasant, or use coming back to the breath as a protection or shield. At the shamatha level, whether a thought is unpleasant or pleasant doesn’t really matter. You just label it “thinking,” and come back to the breath.

If you seem to be working with the breathing and having thoughts at the same time, that means you are unable to identify completely with your breath. There is some deception in thinking that you can work with the thoughts and the breath at the same time. If a thought occurs along with the breathing, you are thinking; if a sense perception such as hearing occurs, you are thinking. You cannot hear without thinking. If you hear a sound, you know which kind of sound it is, whether it is music or a gunshot. You cannot hear without categorizing, so you are still thinking. Everything is thinking. It goes on everywhere continually. We have not yet come to any conclusion as to whose fault that is. Instead, we just label everything “thinking,” as in “I think I have a mosquito on my face.”

Meditation practice is very simple and straightforward. Don’t try to make a big game out of it. If you keep it simple, there is no confusion. While you are practicing, you should not think about what you are going to get out of it. You just do it. Also, unless it is practically necessary, it is very important not to think about what you are going to do after meditating. You should just settle down into the practice.

Everything that comes up in your mind is just thought process. It is thinking. Thinking might bring something else—nonthinking—but we

are a long way from experiencing that. As far as the hinayana is concerned, no mahayana exists. Everything is hinayana, the narrow path. In shamatha practice, you regard everything as thought. When you sit, you should think, "There are no nonthoughts." Even techniques are thoughts. That is straight shamatha, without soda and ice.

Touch and Go

Touch is the sense of existence, that you are who you are. You have a certain name and you feel a certain way when you sit on the cushion. You feel that you actually exist. . . . That is the touch part. The go part is that you do not hang on to that. You do not sustain your sense of being, but you let go of it.

THE ATTITUDE that brings about the possibility of mindfulness is mind's awareness of itself. Your mind is aware of itself, which means that you are *aware* that you are aware. Mindfulness is based on a sense of being and individuality. It is not mechanical. As an individual person, you relate with what is happening around you. We could use the phrase "touch and go." You touch or contact the experience of actually being there, then you let go. That touch-and-go process applies to your awareness of your breath and also to your awareness of day-to-day living. Touch is the sense of existence, that you are who you are. You have a certain name and you feel a certain way when you sit on the cushion. You feel that you actually exist. It doesn't take too much encouragement to develop that kind of attitude. You have a sense that you are there and you are sitting. That is the touch part. The go part is that you do not hang on to that. You do not sustain your sense of being, but you let go of it.

When you touch, you should experience that thoroughly, two hundred percent rather than one hundred percent. If you are committed two hundred percent, which is more than normal, you have a chance to let go, and you might end up experiencing one hundred percent. However, if you hang on to that awareness, touch becomes grasping. So you touch

and go. You do not try to experience the whole thing, but you just let go of yourself completely, halfway through the experience. The approach of touch and go is not so much trying to *experience*, but trying to *be*.

Experience is not particularly important. Experience always comes up as long as you touch. But you don't hang on to your experience; you let it go. You intentionally disown it. That seems to be the basic point of touch and go. Clinging to experience reminds me of the pain of having a tick on the neck: if the tick gets too fat, it will die on your body, so you have to pull it out in order to save its life. Our state of mind is like a tick that doesn't have an outlet and always bottles things up. If we cling to experience constantly and don't let go, we are going to be gigantic, enormous. If we bottle up everything within ourselves, we cannot even move! We cannot play with life anymore because we are so fat.

A SENSE OF BEING

In mindfulness practice, in touch and go, there is a sensation of individuality, of personhood. You are actually here: you exist. You might question that approach and think, "What about the Buddhist doctrine of nonexistence or egolessness? What about the issue of spiritual materialism? What's going to happen to me if I practice this? Isn't this some kind of pitfall?" Maybe it is, maybe it is not. There is no guarantee since there is no guarantor. I would recommend that you do not worry about future security. Just do touch and go directly and simply. Traditionally, such problems are taken care of by the sangha and the guru, somebody unshakable who minds your business. When you commit yourself to the dharma, you are asking somebody to mind your business, which could happen very heavy-handedly. So you do not need to feel too much concern about future security.

ACKNOWLEDGING STATES OF MIND

A further touch is necessary. Touch is not simply the general awareness of being. It also applies to mindfulness of your individual states of mind. That is, your mental state of aggression or lust also has to be touched. Such states have to be acknowledged. However, you do not just acknowledge them and push them off. You need to look at them without suppression or shying away. In that way, you actually have the experience of being utterly

aggressive or utterly lustful. You don't just politely say, "Hi, good-bye. It's nice seeing you again, but I want to get back to my breath." That would be like meeting an old friend and saying, "Excuse me, I have to catch the train and make my next appointment." Such an approach is somewhat deceptive. In shamatha, you don't just sign off. You acknowledge what is happening and you look at it.

The basic point of shamatha is not to give yourself an easy time so you can escape the embarrassing, unpleasant, or self-conscious moments of your life, whether they arise as painful memories of the past, painful experiences of the present, or painful future prospects. When such thoughts arise, you could experience them, look at them, and *then* come back to your breath. This is extremely important.

It is possible to twist the logic, and relate to meditating and coming back to the breath as a way of avoiding problems, but such avoidance is itself a problem. You might feel good that you are sanctioned by the Buddha and you have the technique of mindfulness, which is extremely kosher, good, sensible, and real. You might think that you don't have to pay attention to all those little embarrassments that happen in your life; instead, you could regard them as unimportant and come back to the breath. However, in doing so, you are patching over your problems. You are bottling them up and keeping them as your family heirloom. Since this kind of attitude can develop, it is very important to look at those embarrassments and *then* come back to the breath. However, in doing so, there is no implication that if you do look at them, that is going to be freedom or the end of the game.

Your greatest problem is not that you are an aggressive or lusty person. The problem is that you would like to bottle those things up and put them aside. You have become an expert in deception. Meditation practice is supposed to uncover any attempts to develop a more subtle, sophisticated form of deception. It is important to realize that basic point and to work with it. So you should experience your aggressive thoughts; you should look at them. This does not mean that you are going to execute those thoughts. In fact, we do not execute more than five or ten percent of our thoughts, including our dreams, so there is a big gap. When you do act, unless you have looked at such thoughts, you will not act properly. However, if you look at your aggressive thoughts, you do not usually put them into practice, but they dwindle.

Cutting Thoughts and Short-Circuiting the Kleshas

A sense of knowing, or seeing, always happens. If you are willing to acknowledge its existence, there is the potential of being wakeful, open, and precisely there constantly. This is not based on being a sharp person, a smart person, or a very careful person. Rather, it is about being a person who can actually be—by yourself, very simply.

PAGYÖ: A RESIDUE OF MINDFULNESS

The result of shamatha practice is pagyö, a residue of mindfulness. *Pag* means “residue,” and *yö* means “possessing”; so *pagyö* means “possessing residue.” Pagyö is also translated as “conscientiousness” or “being heedful.” *Pag* refers to deposits of little fungi found on rocks. In Tibet, we used these fungi, which are sometimes orange or red, and sometimes yellow or jade green, to color our *tormas*, or ritual cakes.

Residues are produced when what you experience on the spot is confirmed by your previous experience. Residues are partly a matter of memory, and partly a matter of what you are presently experiencing. Having such residues gives you something to connect with. Based on your experience of this world, you always have a residue of something or other. When you look at red, you have a residue of red, and when you look at white, you have a residue of white. Such residues enter into your system,

and those inputs should be acknowledged. Then you can begin to see things as they are. It's very basic.

The point of mindfulness is not to be aware of possible dangers, or to watch out in case something might go wrong. Mindfulness means being there on the spot, along with your residue. If somebody attracts your attention by saying, "Look out!" or "Look at this!" you do not have to be cautious; you could just look. You could raise your eyebrows and say, "What's going on?" You could be mildly attentive and inquisitive.

Sometimes *pagyö* is described as the gaze of an elephant. An elephant is not usually easy to startle. If you make a loud noise or if you throw a firecracker in front of an elephant, it just looks around. It has that "So what?" kind of approach. An elephant doesn't get excited. Likewise, *pagyö* is tentative but highly keen. You cannot be startled and you do not panic—you just have a residue of mindfulness. *Pagyö* is also referred to as decorum. Since you have developed perspective, sophistication, and subtlety, you are aware of what is going on. *Pagyö* is a very positive idea.

TREN-SHE: RECOLLECTION AND KNOWING

From mindfulness also stems *trenpa*, or "recollection," and *sheshin*, or "knowing." *Trenpa* can also mean "wakefulness." With *trenpa*, you are fully there, but you are not particularly overwhelmed by anything. *Trenpa* is a process of discovery in which you are touched precisely, rather than being overwhelmed by emotions or excitement. In the process of *trenpa*, you make very precise discoveries about yourself constantly.

With *trenpa* you have some kind of memory or recollection, and *sheshin* is a check on those recollections. *She* means "knowing," and *shin* means "as it is"; so *sheshin* means "knowing as it is." *Sheshin* is the kind of knowledge that makes you feel at home in the world, rather than regarding the world as a strange place and not knowing how to handle it. *Sheshin* functions within the environment of *trenpa*. Once you have a memory, you check it with what is happening in the present. It's like renting a car: if you rent a new car, you automatically refresh your memory of how to drive; you check out the gearshift, the brakes, the lights, and the steering wheel. *Trenpa* is the possibility of working with what is happening, and *sheshin* is actually dealing with what is happening.

The main point of *trenpa* and *sheshin* is that a sense of knowing, or seeing, always happens. If you are willing to acknowledge its existence, there is the potential of being wakeful, open, and precisely there constantly. This is not based on being a sharp person, a smart person, or a very careful person. Rather, it is about being a person who can actually *be*—by yourself, very simply. In our lineage, one example of such a person was His Holiness the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa. It may be rare, but it is possible that one could *be*, and at the same time act.

The combination of *trenpa* and *sheshin*, of recollection and knowing, is called *tren-she*. *Tren-she* is the kind of recollection that connects the past and the present together. For instance, you may remember that if you step in a puddle with your shoes on, it is likely that the water will run into your shoes, and your socks will get wet and dirty. It is something you have done before; therefore, you know what's going to happen if you do it again. The traditional analogy for *tren-she* is that of a warning, but I would like to correct that analogy. *Tren-she* does not simply mean being warned about something bad—it is realizing that you should be on the dot.

Tren-she is not concentrated awareness; it is a more general sense of awareness. For instance, if you are wearing a bright red coat, you are aware of the redness and brightness around you, and whether your coat is made of wool or cotton. Likewise, you are aware of your posture, your head and shoulders, and whether you are wearing your glasses or not, a watch or not, stockings or no stockings. That intrinsic awareness we always generate is like antennae. We know that “I have a beard” or “I have earrings on” or “I have a safety pin in my trousers to hold them up.” We are aware of things of that nature, beyond simply being aware of the in-breath and out-breath.

With *tren-she*, you know what you know and what you have without being told. It is almost at the level of clairvoyance. For example, you may get a sudden flash that your father is in trouble, and it turns out to be true. That sense of *tren-she* is the very early stage of the development of superconsciousness or clairvoyance. However, you should be very careful about such things. You might have an image of your father falling down and find out that he is perfectly well and happy in Miami Beach! So things could be other than you think. Nonetheless, when *tren-she* takes place on the spot in your existence, you simply know. *Tren-she* allows you to be very sensitive and very precise.

Rediscovering Yourself

In meditation practice the meditator uses any and all of these eight types of consciousness, so you need to learn how to work with them. The popular idea of meditation is that of trying to attain a higher state of consciousness. You try to clean up the eight consciousnesses into an absolute consciousness or into a higher, superior form of eight types of consciousness. But that approach seems to be a problem. Relating intelligently with the technique of meditation does not have to be a project of sticking out your neck and looking beyond what you are. You are not trying to avoid or to transcend anything. Instead you could remain in the state of what you are.

In meditation practice, using the eight types of consciousness as material, you find to your surprise that you have not made a real and complete relationship with them. You simply exist as you were born, with eight types of consciousness, but you haven't actually looked at those happenings in your being. In that way, you are much more akin to an ape than to an intelligent being. Therefore the first project, so to speak, of meditation practice is to realize and rediscover these eight types of consciousness. In working with them, you are not trying to overcome them or do anything funny with them or manipulate them in some cunning way. You do not have to race with yourself. Instead you are rediscovering them and becoming a more refined animal by developing perfect and complete understanding of your own mind.

Through meditation, you begin to understand the eight consciousnesses and to know their functions inside out and outside in. You begin to understand the five skandhas as well. Realizing the subtleties of consciousness in this way is by no means reinforcing ego. It is like examining your body: you think your body is beautiful and active and powerful, but once you begin to study the muscles, bones, and interior organs, and once you see an X-ray, you begin to feel slightly insecure. At the same time, it is very interesting. You get a new perspective of your body and how your body functions.

Usually the eight consciousnesses are all lumped together; but meditation practice begins to sort them out. You begin to see the functions of mind completely and clearly. You know which part is which. In the meditative state, there could be an experiencer of the unconscious. That is the whole point. So far, the whole thing has been so lumped together that you have forgotten your being, your existence. But once you have time to slow

down, think, and pay attention to the various little details, like breathing, you begin to realize yourself. It is as if you had been lying on a bed for a long time, not allowed to move around, and you began to rediscover your limbs, your fingers, and your toes—in meditation, you begin to rediscover yourself.

You might say, “What is the virtue of meditation, if we are just rediscovering ourselves? If we are already what we are, then what is the point of rediscovering ourselves?” But even if you develop a state of subtlety and sophistication, you are still rediscovering yourself. You can’t change yourself from an ape to a divine being—that’s impossible. The problem in not being able to see the real state of the eight types of consciousness is that you feel you are being condemned, punished, deprived, belittled. That sense of deprivation and condemnation comes from being unable to relate with yourself completely, let alone bring foreign information into your system. That is out of the question altogether, if there is any such thing. However, there does not seem to be anything transcendental or enlightened outside the eight types of consciousness. So the first step is to rest with what you have and not look ahead too far.

As you meditate, your experience of duality becomes sharpened, and you become more perky. Your deprivation becomes sharpened, but at the same time you begin to feel that your situation is workable. Before you were just stuck in the slums and you had no way of getting out, but now you begin to feel there are ways out. So the starting point is not to get out completely. Instead, you are given a kind of teaser: you get out partially. At that point, your original primitive pain is somewhat lessened—but then you have the ambition to get beyond that, to get completely better! You become very competitive. That kind of ambition grows and grows, and as ambition grows, confusion grows as well—but at a certain point, that confusion becomes encouragement rather than an obstacle. You feel much sturdier and more secure if you carry a heavy walking stick. Although it is heavy, it feels good.

It is exciting and it is good! You can practice the dharma by making use of the eight types of consciousness as vehicle, ground, food, shelter, inspiration, and information. You can become a dharma practitioner and turn the wheel of the dharma. To your surprise, turning the wheel of the dharma is not all that complicated. Anyone can do it.

Mixing Mind with Space

One of the problems meditators experience is that there is a slight, almost subconscious, guilty feeling that they ought to be doing something rather than just experiencing what goes on. When you begin to feel that you ought to be doing something, you automatically present millions of obstacles to yourself. Meditation is not a project; it is a way of being. You could experience that you are what you are. Fundamentally, sitting there and breathing is a very valid thing to do.

IN THE Kagyü tradition, we employ a special practice technique, which is the experiencing of *chung ne dro sum*. *Chung* is where the thoughts arise, *ne* is where they dwell, and *dro* is where they go, so *chung ne dro sum* is where the thoughts arise, dwell, and go. Those three are accompanied by the practice of *ying rik sewa*. *Ying* means “space,” *rik* means “conscious mind,” and *sewa* means “mixing”; so *ying rik sewa* means “mixing the conscious mind with space.” Sometimes it is called *lung sem sewa*: “mixing the mind and breathing.” *Lung* means “wind” or “air,” *sem* is “mind,” and *sewa* again means “mixing.” In either case, the idea is to experience space. You do not need to deliberately try to mix the mind with the breathing with a solemn effort. Instead, you are simply in contact with the breathing. It is similar to the way that you feel the well-being of your body.

In being mindful of where the thoughts come from, where the thoughts dwell, and where the thoughts vanish, it is not that you are supposed to manufacture a thought and then let it come, let it dwell, and let it go. You have thoughts in any case, and you can be with them. As one

thought vanishes, the next thought begins to arise; and by the time the next thought has arisen, the previous thought has already disappeared. You cannot usually experience the vanishing of a thought purely by itself, because to be aware of that thought you sustain it, so you do not really see the vanishing. The vanishing of a thought is seen in terms of the contrast of another idea coming up, at which point the previous thought has already subsided. The arising and dissolving of a thought is not exactly simultaneous, but the beginning, middle, and end happen very fast. When you acknowledge thoughts, they arise; in the process of acknowledging them, they dwell; after you acknowledge them, they drop. Acknowledging the dwelling of a thought does not mean staying with it for a long time, but just experiencing it as your thought. It is very simple.

Thoughts are generally connected with one or another of the eight types of consciousness, which are the working base for the practice of meditation. In meditation practice, you do not exaggerate the different levels of consciousness or disrespect them, but you have balance and respect. Generally, you begin with your physical well-being. You begin with your posture and your sense of discomfort or comfort. Your sense perceptions—the visions, sounds, sensations, tastes, smells, and thoughts that you experience—act as the fuse for your practice. Then, when those sense consciousnesses begin to wear themselves out a little bit, you become slightly bored with them and turn to the subconscious mind. Conversations are replayed, or particular events in your life are projected back to you in the form of a cinema show. Then there is a gap—a little gap where things don't happen and nothing occurs in the mind.

Physically, you may be comfortable and at rest with the sounds you hear and the visions that you see around you. You may be somewhat settled down. But then you dig up further excitement by looking into your personal relationships and emotional involvements with people. Are people being nice or nasty to you? Maybe you remember a particular scene, and experience the jealousy and passion you felt in that context, or maybe you plan your future. All kinds of thoughts begin to come up—and all of them should be experienced. If I say that you should be aware of the thoughts, then you will get into the area of being watchful, which is a project, and you will find that you are becoming a slave of your own awareness. That approach to practice does not work—it is too self-conscious—so I prefer the word *experience* to *awareness*.

The meditation technique universally used in all Buddhist traditions is mindfulness of the breathing, because breathing is an expression of being. For instance, you check whether a person is dead or just completely passed out by feeling whether the person is breathing or not. There is nothing particularly mystical about breathing. For instance, I do not think the early Buddhists thought about breathing in terms of prana, or life force; they were just breathing.

Traditionally, just being there is the outcome of the breathing technique. However, in the Tibetan tradition of formless meditation, you can also meditate without focusing on the breathing. The *shikantaza* practice of “just sitting,” from the Japanese Zen tradition, is similar. Some people find it easy to do formless meditation without focusing on the breathing. If they are provided with a short session of sitting practice, it is easy for them to just be there because they do not have to hassle with any technique. However, for long-term sitting practice, it would be advisable to start with the mindfulness of breathing. Later, the awareness of breathing falls away, and at that point you just go along without it. That seems to be the best, most systematic approach.

In terms of both breathing and formless meditation, one of the problems meditators experience is that there is a slight, almost subconscious, guilty feeling that they ought to be doing something rather than just experiencing what goes on. When you begin to feel that you ought to be doing something, you automatically present millions of obstacles to yourself. Meditation is not a project; it is a way of being. You could experience that you are what you are. Fundamentally, sitting there and breathing is a very valid thing to do.

in front of its mouth and chews it, and however much it chews through, that is how much space it has for its body and its belly. In fact, that is its entire space! In contrast, although the walk of an elephant or a tortoise is likewise slow and seemingly serious, it also has the quality of being cunning or playful.



BRINGING YOURSELF BACK TO MINDFULNESS

The effort of the third mindfulness practice has not quite matured to the level of dancing with the situation, or being so completely inspired by the sitting practice of meditation that you don't even have to sit, but sitting just comes to you. If you keep looking for an inspiration that will lead you to forget your pain and keep bringing you back to your practice naturally and effortlessly, then it ceases to be right effort. Instead, it becomes entertainment.

In right effort, the main technique that has developed is to constantly bring yourself back to mindfulness of the breathing. When your mind begins to wander, you realize it and bring it back. As far as the sitting practice of meditation is concerned, this technique is an extremely effective and useful trick. The interesting point about the technique of bringing your mind back is that you do not have to prepare. You do not have to hold your mind and drag it back, as if you were trying to prevent a naughty child from doing something terrible. Trying by deliberate effort to bring your mind back to the body, to the consciousness, to the here and now, seems to go against the general rhythm of expanding and going out with the breath. It seems to be directly contradictory. In right effort, you are not bringing your mind back in such a deliberate way. Instead, you are simply bringing your mind back from the dream world into reality. You are breathing and you are sitting—that is what you are doing—and you should be doing that completely, fully, and wholeheartedly.

SUDDEN FLASH: THE ABSTRACT WATCHER

There is a way to bring your mind back, which we might call the “abstract watcher.” The abstract watcher does not have an aim or goal; it is just mind being aware of itself. In mindfulness of effort, there is a sudden flash of the watcher's being there. At that point, you don't think in terms of getting back to the breath or trying to get away from thoughts. You

do not need to have a concrete and logical mind that repeats to itself the purpose of sitting practice. You don't need any of that. Instead, there is a general sense that something is happening here—and you are suddenly brought back. Without even a name or an idea why, how, or where, there is a quick glimpse or change of tone. That is the core of mindfulness of effort.

Mindfulness of effort cannot be manufactured. It comes along when there is discipline, which sets the general pattern of the sitting practice. Once you have the attitude or idea of discipline, then there's something that reminds you: *that! that! that!* "That what?" and "What is that?" no longer apply. Just *that!* So the mindfulness of effort triggers an entirely new realm of thinking, a new state of consciousness that brings you back automatically to sitting practice. It brings you back to the mindfulness of breathing and the general awareness of well-being.

Right effort is instant effort. You could call this sudden kind of effort "leap," "jerk," or "sudden reminder." You could call it "amazement," or "sudden, abrupt amazement." It could also be referred to as "panic," or "panic without conditions." It is unconditioned panic because it comes to you and changes your whole course. The idea is not to try to maintain that sudden instant of mindfulness, to hold on to it or to cultivate it, but to get back to the meditation. Rather than nursing the reminder or entertaining the messenger, you should relate to what the messenger has to say. That sudden flash of effort, or instantaneous reminding trick, is universal to all practices of meditation, from hinayana practices up to the highest level of tantra. Therefore, effort is the most important point in the practice of meditation.

The trick of bringing your mind back does not only apply at the time of sitting meditation; it also applies to postmeditation experiences, or meditation in action. It applies to day-to-day living. In the case of eating, for instance, you don't meditate on the breathing while you are eating—you just eat. When that flash comes up, you relate with the food. In daily life, that sudden jerk happens constantly.

Mindfulness of body creates the general setting, bringing meditation into the geography of your life. Mindfulness of life is about making a personal relationship with the meditation practice. Mindfulness of effort makes both the mindfulness of body and the mindfulness of life more valid and workable. With mindfulness of effort you are clearly on the path. Effort is like the wheel of a chariot, which connects the chariot and

the road. It's like the oar in a boat, which connects the boat to the water. Effort is the connection that makes things move forward and proceed. So mindfulness of effort—the sudden reminder or sudden jerk of mindfulness—is extremely important for the practice of meditation.

The sudden jerk of effort is not about improving your meditation, but about bringing it back to the ground, sitting on a cushion and breathing. With that sudden jerk, you are meditating properly; without it, you could be sitting for five hours a day and find that you had actually gotten back to your breathing practice only fifteen minutes during the whole period. Instead, you were reading your own autobiography and doing all kinds of other things.

You cannot bring about mindfulness of effort just by hoping a flash will come to you and you will be reminded. You cannot leave it up to that flash of effort to just happen to you. You have to set up some kind of general alarm system, so to speak, or general atmosphere of effort. That atmosphere of effort is important. You need to be diligent and not have the faintest notion of looking for any form of entertainment, none whatsoever. You have to give something up. Unless you give up reservations, it will be virtually impossible to develop instantaneous effort or to have it dawn on you. So it is extremely important to have respect, appreciation, and the willingness to work hard.

You need to understand the virtue and importance of effort. Diligence is an extremely powerful thing. If you are willing to give birth to such an inspiration, or if you have that conviction already, then that spontaneous, abstract flash of effort occurs more easily. In terms of the flash, you have to develop the sense that you are completely possessed and haunted, that you can't get rid of it, rather than that you have to cultivate it—which is an entirely different approach.

In the mindfulness of effort, appreciation is said to be similar to falling in love. When you are in love with a person or care for a person, your whole attitude is open toward that person. You get a very sudden abstract flash of your lover as being *that!* *That* is what first comes into your mind. Later you might ponder it, enjoy your daydreams, or entertain yourself by thinking about that person in detail, but those are afterthoughts. The idea is that first there is this jerk. You don't have to figure out where it came from; it just happens to you. You don't have to figure out, "Because I love this person, this thought occurred to me." You don't have to say that—it is in your *being*. You are in the state of love, rather than being in love with

somebody. It is almost as if you were in love with yourself. There is always such a result with openness: something flashes. It is like a bubble rising in the water. In the mindfulness of effort, sudden flashes of *that* and *me* happen.

In the Buddhist tradition, the two main analogies for right effort are that of a person in a love and a hunter. A hunter hunting for animals doesn't have to think of a stag or a mountain goat or a bear or any particular animal—he is looking for *that*. As the hunter is walking, if he hears a sound and senses the subtle possibility of finding an animal to shoot, he doesn't think of which animal he is going to find—just the feeling of *that* comes up. Anybody in any kind of complete involvement—at the hunter's level, the lover's level, or the meditator's level—has that same kind of openness. Such openness brings about sudden flashes, an almost magical sensation of *thatness*—without name, without concept, without idea.

That openness is the most important aspect of effort—awareness happens afterward. Within openness there is an instant flash of effort, concentrated effort, and awareness follows. Having disowned that sudden experience, awareness occurs very slowly and brings things back to level. If you are able to relate with this sudden mindfulness of effort, then you have no problem as to where you are coming from—you came from somewhere. That is what I mean by disowning the experience. You do not entertain the messenger and you do not have to find out where you came from. Instead you could be like a snowflake released from the clouds, just about to come down onto the ground. You have no choice: you are going to land on the ground in any case. It feels very real.

ORDINARY EFFORT VERSUS MINDFULNESS OF EFFORT

One of the problems with ordinary effort is that it becomes so dreary and stagnant. Ordinarily, any effort we apply to ourselves has to rely on sub-conscious verbalizations, such as “I must go and help somebody because it is half-past one” or “I must watch such and such in case anything happens.” Ordinary effort is based on thinking, “It is a good thing for me to perform this duty.” Duty is always verbalized. Though the speed of our conceptual mind is so fast that we do not even see the verbalization, the content is clearly felt, so the effort is still conditioned by thought. That makes things very boring and extremely unsuccessful in the long run.

the mountains: a rock is never tired of being a rock. It lives through the snows, the rains, and the four seasons. Unless you have that same kind of endurance, you cannot put into practice the techniques of mindfulness or develop ideal mindfulness. Such techniques are not trickery; they grow out of the practice itself. From forbearance, patience, and constant sitting come suggestions on how to improvise your sitting practice in the direction of mindfulness of body, mindfulness of life, and mindfulness of effort.

When we hear descriptions of all the meditative experiences that might occur to us, but nevertheless did not, we might begin to wonder whether we have been cheated or did not receive the complete methods. But it could be that we did not get into the practice rather than that we were cheated. It is total commitment that brings about an understanding of the real meaning of the four foundations of mindfulness. You may want to surrender your ego, your hang-ups, your problems, and commit yourself to the discipline with exertion. But often when you give in to a discipline, you begin to pick up something else. That is not quite surrendering. In the case of mindfulness of mind, surrendering means being on the dot. You are even surrendering any notion of surrendering. There is nothing but just this—this existence. Such surrendering is completely unfabricated and genuine.



TRANSCENDENTAL WATCHER

Mindfulness of mind is based on a somewhat glorified watcher—a transcendental or divine watcher, as opposed to an ordinary watcher. The term *divine* does not mean that a foreign agent is coming to help us, but that a superordinary watcher supersedes the ordinary watcher. The ordinary watcher is simply the state of consciousness that watches what is happening within us, takes note of it, evaluates it, and tries to compare whether it is good or bad, should happen or shouldn't happen. The ordinary watcher has feelings of fear, aggression, impatience, and all kinds of things mixed up with its ordinary watching. In contrast, the transcendental watcher is simple self-consciousness. It is not clumsy self-consciousness that feels me-ness, bigheadedness, and a faint element of embarrassment. It is simply being aware and conscious of what is happening, completely and totally. The superordinary watcher is able to see what is happening while the application of awareness of breathing is taking place. Knowing intel-

ligerly what is happening is still not complete freedom from the point of view of mahayana or vajrayana; nevertheless, it is the only way to develop the potential of prajna, or discriminating-awareness wisdom.

The best way you can begin to practice this is to be aware of what you are doing. There's no other way than that. From there, you begin to develop more space. Being aware of what you are doing does not have to become heavy-handed. You can just do it. Just be aware of what you are doing. Just *be* there and then disown: touch and go. You don't have to utilize that experience for something spiritual or metaphysical. For example, you might see that you are washing your dish. You see it. That's it. Disown it. Don't cling to it. Just continue. Don't break your bowls and plates; do it properly. Then look at yourself doing it properly. Go ahead and see yourself rinse them and put them into the cabinet. Just look at yourself. Look! That is all the mind can accommodate at that time. If you try to add something else, you will probably lose your grip or miss a speck of dirt. We are not secularizing mindfulness by doing this; instead, we are creating sacredness out of the secular. Whatever you are doing, such as driving, using the computer, or buying postage stamps, does not have to be a religious act—but whatever you do is dignified.

Effort comes into practice at the beginning and at the end—and during, occasionally. It is not that you have to strain to hang on to your effort and push yourself. A journey back and forth is taking place, rather than effort constantly being maintained. Otherwise there is no practice, and the whole thing becomes a big deal of effort all the time. There's no experience, no meditation, just effort. You are being effortful rather than actually meditating. So in meditating, something other than effort is happening: an alternating, shifting situation is taking place.

If you are one-hundred-percent effortful, you blow the whole thing. There's nothing left but a lump of tense muscle sitting in the middle of a field. If you are kneading dough and you knead too hard, you no longer have dough in your hand, you are just pushing on the board. So in working with the dough, you have to make some compromises. Otherwise, your effort ruins the whole thing. It doesn't work.

At the beginning, pushing yourself to the practice takes effort. During the practice you occasionally check that you are still keeping up with it. You may try to make effort continuous and solid, like a pipe running through the ground, but it is not solid, it is pulsating. In the end, you decide to deliberately let go of that particular project. So effort in the

Buddhist tradition of meditation is based on an enormous trust in impermanence. Nothing is continuous, but just let it be that way. Death and birth are taking place moment to moment. Let us work with that rather than work toward eternity.

This particular technique of Buddhist meditation allows a certain amount of subconscious gossip. Such gossip is not at the level of repeating or replaying events of the past or expectations of the future; it is simply taking note of what is happening at this very moment. It is keeping track of the nowness. That much gossip seems to be necessary at this point. We cannot expect complete perfection without any thought process or thought movement at all. If we try to do so, we are inviting the further confusion of real subconscious-gossip. We are engaging in fistfights with ourselves while we are sitting. In mindfulness of mind, mind is that which knows, that which takes note of what is happening. While still being fully mindful and steady, ongoing and patient, it is keeping track of the sitting practice of meditation and the techniques that have developed.

TEMPORARY MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES: NYAM

In Jamgön Kongtrül's writings, there is a very useful description of the various experiences that happen in one's state of mind in mindfulness practice. He describes these as experiences, rather than realizations, because they are temporary. A realization is something that stays with you as a result of having practiced meditation, whereas experiences are temporary. Real, solid realization is like a mountain, whereas experience is like a mist over the mountains. Such temporary experiences could either be regarded as interruptions or as adornments. However, if you reject them, you are feeding them and turning them into demons. The Tibetan word for this type of experience is *nyam*, which means "a temporary flash of experience."

Temporary experiences, or *nyam*, can be experienced not only in sitting practice, but during everyday life as well. So in eating, sleeping, working, reading, or whatever you are doing, there should be bare attention to what is happening. The way to do that is not by making yourself stiff, or holding on to awareness and mindfulness while you cook or while you work, but by a sudden flash of awareness. That sudden flash of awareness could be repeated, but whatever happens after that, you disown. In that way, you don't find everything becoming rigid. There is a reminder of now,



VIPASHYANA: THE PRACTICE OF AWARENESS

43

The Freshness of Unconditional Mind

First there is shamatha to tighten up your practice, to make it definite and ordinary. Beyond that, you try to let go of any notion of inhibition . . . while still retaining the heart of the practice. The precision is carried over, but a sense of freedom is added on.

VIPASHYANA REFERS to the sense of precision that could arise from the sitting practice of meditation and slowly infiltrate our everyday life. There are two different schools of vipashyana: the analytical contemplative way, and the nonanalytical experiential way. The analytical school talks about the possibility of becoming more aware if you ask more questions and examine the nature of reality and your own state of mind. In our tradition, in accordance with Jamgön Kongtrül, we talk mainly in terms of the nonanalytical, or experiential, approach. Because of that emphasis, the Kagyü tradition is known as the practice lineage.

Shamatha provides the ground, but too much emphasis on shamatha practice could be a problem. It is said that one should not be attached to the pond of shamatha, but let the flower of vipashyana bloom, like a pond beautified by a lotus flower. Taking shelter in shamatha is a perversion of shamatha discipline, so it is very important to convert the relaxation of shamatha meditation into the postmeditation activity of vipashyana. Traditionally, it is said that you should try to achieve a fifty-fifty balance

between shamatha and vipashyana. Having properly regrouped your state of mind and linked it with sanity, the postmeditation experience could be a tremendous expansion toward awareness.

Vipashyana is entirely different from shamatha. Shamatha practice could be regarded as a way of quieting and pacifying the mind. It is a paring-down process that leaves us very little reference point and very little to work on except the technique itself. Shamatha is a way to quiet oneself. It is the development of peace. Having already become quiet, having practiced and achieved that basic ground of shamatha, we could expand out and extend ourselves. With vipashyana, rather than cutting down our mental perceptions, we sharpen our awareness.

Vipashyana is referred to as insight, or the seed of prajna, in that we are preparing ourselves to become worthy of listening to the teachings. Through vipashyana we can hear the teachings properly. We are able to perceive the subtlety and the depth of the teachings. That is precisely why vipashyana is an important practice: it begins to open the gate of wisdom. Vipashyana practice includes the contemplative approach of pondering the dharma intellectually, as well as the meditative practice of the development of awareness.

In the contemplative practice of vipashyana, speculative mind is used as a way of looking beyond oneself. You have certain ideas and conclusions, and through philosophical speculation you try to create further ideas and conclusions in order to transcend yourself. In Buddhist philosophy, you are venturing out into different ground than the ground that you find secure. When you find it very confusing to understand things, then rather than formulating new ideas to make sure you have some ground to stand on, the Buddhist approach is to take a further leap and create your own nest in space. That is the philosophical approach in Buddhism. It is precisely the approach of vipashyana, if not prajna.

Vipashyana awareness arises from several different conditions, but fundamentally it comes from being without aggression. The definition of dharma altogether is the absence of aggression. It is a way of dealing with aggression, and shamatha is the starting point. Shamatha brings clear thinking and slows you down, because the only thing you have to work on is your breathing. Because aggression or anger is based on speed and confusion, shamatha leads to the absence of aggression. So shamatha is the development of peace.

In order to perceive or to understand the dharma, you have to develop a state of mind without aggression, a mind based on non-ego and non-speed. Dharma being without aggression means the materials of our experience are workable and could be woven into the pattern of the path. It may seem like a tall order to be without aggression, and it may seem impossible for beginners to develop such perfection. However, even for beginners, momentary states of mind occur that have elements of nonaggression and non-ego.

EGO, GAP, AND SUDDEN GLIMPSES OF AWARENESS

The eight types of consciousness and the five skandhas are all momentary events. We develop our first skandha after a gap, and from there onward we develop the other skandhas, up to the fifth skandha, then the whole thing goes back to the gap and starts all over again. So ego is not a constantly smooth-running, highly secured situation at all—there are psychological gaps of all kinds. Those gaps allow disorder for the ego, and at the same time, allow the possibility of ego reasserting its position. In fact, a gap of non-ego goes on constantly, and within that we rebuild the ego again and again, from the first skandha up to the fifth skandha. So ego, or the five skandhas, is regarded more as fickleness than as continuity. Because of that, the application of vipashyana is possible.

Through vipashyana, we can relate with those momentary open gaps. Such gaps are unconditioned psychologically, unconditioned by dualism, unconditioned by passion, aggression, and ignorance. A gap is very sudden: it happens in a fraction of a second, about one-hundredth of a moment. However, although it is very fast, within us there is still the possibility of one-hundred-percent gap. The reason we can arouse potential prajna by means of vipashyana is because there are such gaps. Because of those gaps, it is possible to insert vipashyana, to relate with unconditional mind.

VIPASHYANA TECHNIQUE

The technique or means of developing vipashyana practice is exactly the same as in the third foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of

effort: it is sudden effort, a sudden glimpse of awareness that brings us back to the practice. The basic technique is to see the shadow, or echo, of the awareness and then disown it. When a sudden glimpse of awareness comes to you, you *be* with it—but at the same time, you disown it. That same approach is used for all practices. We should not hang on to any meditative technique or trick we might use; rather, we should take advantage of it and then throw it away. However, although you throw it away, you never lose it. It comes back to you—that's the biggest trick about it!

In vipashyana there is a new attitude toward that sudden abstract flash. In shamatha, you have a flash and then you faithfully go back to shamatha practice. In vipashyana, when you have that sense of shadow, or echo, you do not quite go all the way back, but halfway. You are making use of that flash, not trying to go right back. You don't come back completely to being absolutely one with the breathing, and you don't *bring* yourself back—however, you do come back. You are approaching it from the outer realm rather than the inner realm, although as far as the flash itself is concerned, there is no difference.

Vipashyana-type flashes of awareness have to grow out of the shamatha-type at the beginning, so early vipashyana practice will still be shamatha-like. Much later, you begin to realize that there is a different approach, which creates another type of flash—a vipashyana-type flash that is associated with the unconscious mind.

In meditation practice, you definitely need a technique to work on, such as breathing or walking. Having an ongoing technique or discipline is the basic core of the whole journey. The technique of awareness of the breathing is the epitome of being down-to-earth. You are on the earth and breathing. As long as that is going on, your attitude doesn't make all that much difference. You will be aware or mindful naturally.

AWARENESS OF BREATHING

One of the subtleties of vipashyana practice is that we can still apply exactly the same methods of meditation that we used at the beginning, in shamatha. With vipashyana, mindfulness of breathing becomes awareness of breathing. With awareness of breathing, there is a sense of precision and accuracy, but there is also accommodation, in that one doesn't

have to constantly nurse the experience of being mindful. In the case of mindfulness, we still tend to trust a great deal in the messenger. The messenger brings back the message of what's happening and checks if we are being mindful on the spot; the messenger also checks on the sense of totality and of well-being. So a sense of *thisness* is still happening, rather than *otherness*. That seems to be the difference between shamatha and vipashyana. In the case of shamatha, importance is still placed on thisness. In spite of going out with the out-breath and dissolving oneself into the atmosphere, shamatha practice still belongs to the area of this, rather than to the area of other, or that.

A SENSE OF ATMOSPHERE

In the case of vipashyana, there is less emphasis on *this*. There is a very subtle and very faint emphasis on some kind of security—but then the emphasis is on letting go, letting be. In vipashyana, the *other* is more important. We can afford to let go more with the breathing. In shamatha practice, we are purely relating with the verge of breathing, the outline of breathing, using a light touch. In vipashyana it is slightly more than that. It is not more in the sense of letting go of our mindfulness of breathing, or making it looser and more casual, but in the sense that our attitude to the breathing has otherness involved with it. The breathing happens not only on its own accord, but in the realm of the atmosphere around it. When we talk about otherness, we are talking about atmosphere or totality—something completely outside of our body, completely outside of our antennae's radiation.

It could be very difficult to understand exactly what we are getting into with vipashyana, but if a person has a really good understanding of shamatha practice and its own sense of space, the vipashyana practice becomes much easier to work with. In some sense, the difference between the two meditation practices is that in spite of its vision, its feeling, its inspiration, and its discipline, shamatha is very literal, whereas vipashyana is more romantic or idealistic. In vipashyana there is room for ventilation or fresh air. Quite possibly a person at the early stage of vipashyana practice who is used to shamatha practice might feel extremely guilty for doing something unkosher, but that is just a form of hesitation. It is like not wanting to undress at a public swimming pool: although there are

swimming suits available and you can put one on, it is still regarded as a big deal.

LETTING GO

First there is shamatha to tighten up your practice, to make it definite and ordinary. Beyond that, you try to let go of any notion of inhibition or product of that meditation practice, while still retaining the heart of the practice. The precision is carried over, but a sense of freedom is added on. After you have practiced shamatha meditation, from then onward up to tantric practices, most of the techniques you practice are letting-go techniques of all kinds. At each stage, you think you have been letting go completely, but because of the dogma that you are involved in, you find that you have been keeping something private and personal. So as you go along, you find something to let go of constantly. With each new practice, you are learning to let go. Actually, the path is deliberately designed in that way.

Sometimes it might be necessary for the meditation master to change a student's style of practice. For instance, a student might find herself or himself in vipashyana, but feel guilty that what she or he is doing may not be orthodox enough. Students might mislead themselves. So the role of the teacher is to present a more and more loose and free style of practice. In going through the yanas, as one style of practice becomes orthodox, the teacher presents a new approach connected with the next yana, which in turn also becomes orthodox, and so on.

THE ECHO: LIGHTNESS AND SENSE OF HUMOR

In vipashyana, as in shamatha, sitting practice relates with the breathing. As breathing is felt, you go out with the breath; as the breath dissolves, you dissolve. But there is also an echo—not exactly a moderator, but an echo. You have developed your mindfulness practice so that as you breathe out, you know you are breathing out. You are mindful of that. At the same time, you are aware of your mindfulness, so there is a kind of delayed action of going out and going out; dissolving and dissolving; space and space. There is a kind of echo, a self-existing awareness. That echo is not

regarded as harmful or dangerous; in fact, there is a strong possibility that such awareness may be the seed of discriminating wisdom.

Going out and going out is a kind of shadow created by vipashyana practice. It is almost on the level of verbalization, or of feeling, "It's happening, it's happening." But it is not a confirmation; it is just a remark, a careless remark. It is simply seeing things. In other words, mindfulness is very serious—but if you have awareness with that mindfulness, you begin to see the seriousness of the mindfulness, and your mindfulness is lightened. So with awareness, your mindfulness becomes much lighter and less heavy. However, it doesn't become completely free and careless, because you are still continuing your practice, your basic training. You do not develop a completely free style of practice outside the technique. In fact, the whole process is still somewhat boring and technical. But that secondary spokesperson, or secondary awareness, allows the possibility of extending yourself to greater awareness practice.

The echo cuts the seriousness of your practice. If your basic mindfulness practice has gotten very clear and strong, and the whole thing has become too serious, it becomes self-destructive. Your honesty and seriousness get in your way. With the echo, there is a little humor. It is as if you were saying something very meaningful, and somebody kept repeating it back to you. Because somebody is making a joke out of it, your statement has less impact and is not as heavy. It is as literal as that. The seriousness of shamatha's one-shot deal is lightened by the echo.

Mindfulness followed by awareness is like settling down and having the dust come up. From a purely shamatha perspective, the element of vipashyana results in your actions not being as honest and as good as in the past. But in trying to make your practice definite, in solidifying the whole thing, you have a problem: you do not know your territory or what you are doing. However, if you have the awareness or mindfulness coming toward you, rather than you being aware of something, there is no problem. Awareness happens, and it also dies. You do not have to be aware of the breathing as *your* breathing, particularly. Even at the level of shamatha practice, you don't have to do that. The point is that breathing is happening properly. It doesn't really matter who is who or what is what, as long as there is flow taking place.

At this point, we are not discussing anything all that advanced. What we are discussing is just a light little shadow that goes along with your

mindfulness, which is known as awareness practice. Meditation practice can become very awkward. The function of early vipashyana practice is to make one less awkward. As far as the meditation technique of vipashyana is concerned, it continues to be based on the coming and going of the breath. However, with awareness, we learn how to handle ourselves, to work with ourselves. Since there is a one-shot deal as well as a soft landing, vipashyana allows us to be less awkward.

but while a flicker of thought is happening, you can cut it, and you can make sure that the next one does not come up.

When you begin to catch thoughts as they arise, they do not have a chance to get to the level of liking or disliking, or to fall into the categories of love and hate, so they don't plant further karmic seeds or debts. Therefore, you are free. Labeling thoughts "thinking" begins to nullify karma. It is the vanguard of trying to overcome karma altogether. So labeling is a very valuable practice. In order not to sow karmic seeds, it is important to develop mindfulness. Vipashyana could be said to be the postmeditation experience that develops out of shamatha. However, cutting actions through awareness is too late. Except for sitting meditation, any action is a result of the past. Sitting practice is not a result of previous actions—it is a fresh start. So vipashyana definitely has to be combined with shamatha.



VIPASHYANA AWARENESS

With awareness in your system, you begin to attain what is known as "vipashyana heedfulness," or "vipashyana awareness." And out of that, you begin to develop continual samadhi, or the stillness that comes from being able to communicate with the fundamental goodness of the world. You see that the world is neither for you nor against you. The world is workable: it is no longer problematic, nor is it extraordinarily helpful.

Some people feel that reacting to situations is always worthwhile. Modern psychology in particular talks about building our egos. In Buddhist psychology, when we talk about egolessness, one of the big problems we run into is that modern psychologists think we are advocating some kind of zombie-ism or jellyfish-ism. Some psychologists think that when we encourage people to sit and meditate, we are encouraging them to experience complete dullness, to the extent that if somebody pinched their arms, real Buddhists wouldn't even say, "Ouch!" But Buddhist practice is not going to turn people into zombies. Far from it; it may turn you into buddhas!

Vipashyana awareness develops during postmeditation. It is offset by mindfulness practice, or sitting meditation. Your sitting practice could be concentrated into half an hour or an hour; the rest of the time, you could develop vipashyana. Whether you live in the country or the city, in order

to integrate shamatha and vipashyana into your daily life, you need to properly organize your time. Vipashyana is all over the place. A city is living vipashyana. In the city, you could tune in to vipashyana very easily. You don't have to feel deprived if you live in the city, and you don't have to feel privileged if you live in the countryside. Such a dichotomy does not exist. It is all in the mind.

Developing vipashyana does not mean that you are graduating from shamatha. It is not that shamatha is only the sixth-grade level, while vipashyana is the fifteenth-grade level. Shamatha is the basic discipline of how you handle yourself in sitting practice, while vipashyana is how you handle yourself in postmeditation experiences. You could also have good vipashyana during your sitting practice. Shamatha experience builds up to one-pointedness, a pinpointed focus. Vipashyana, while still maintaining that pinpointedness, diffuses it into larger-scale experience.

Shamatha coordination comes from good vipashyana, from the vipashyana experience of synchronizing hearing, seeing, tasting, and so on. From that experience, you might be relieved to come back to your gomden and sit as a simple meditator. Some people say that it is easier to practice on the cushion, and some people say it is the other way around. I suppose more ambitious people would say that it is not workable on the gomden, and people who are more contemplative would say that it is. Milarepa would definitely say it is more workable on a gomden.

Shamatha and vipashyana work together. The Kagyü lineage often speaks of the indivisibility of shamatha and vipashyana. Likewise, the Japanese tradition talks about shikantaza, which means shamatha and vipashyana put together. You do not graduate from shamatha to vipashyana. You do not get better or worse. You do not go from anywhere to anywhere! Shamatha and vipashyana are two different situations, and each is helpful to the other.

ENJOYING THE GAP

It is important to spend time doing strict shamatha practice. However, in vipashyana the emphasis should be more on the gaps than on the sitting practice alone. But then once you have had a gap, you no longer have a gap, because by then you have analyzed your gap. You have closed your gap by realizing that you had a gap. So you have to be careful. You have to leave your gap alone. Just have a gap and relax! You can relax when

you realize that you are not all that bad and not all that trapped. You are on the right path; therefore, you could relax a little bit. You could protect your gaps by not emphasizing them and by not jumping on them. If you begin to jump on your gaps, you begin to close them. Just enjoy your gap!

Usually we regard all the little things we do as incidental. As Buddhists, however, we regard everything that we do as very important—not a big deal, but important. You should practice vipashyana discipline when you walk out of the shrine hall. You should practice vipashyana when you pick up your laundry, fold your clothes, make your bed, or talk to your friends; when you write a letter to your friend, lick your postage stamp, place it on your envelope, and mail it; when you cut a slice of bread, chip off a piece of butter and smooth it on your slice of bread, break your bread, and lift it to your mouth; when you begin to open your mouth and chew it up; when you use your tongue to circulate the food in your mouth; when you swallow it and have a conversation at the same time.

SACRED ACTION AND NATURAL ORDER

Whatever you do is sacred action. By sacred action we do not mean magical or God-ridden, but shamatha-vipashyana-ridden. There is always room for precision, and there are always vipashyana possibilities in whatever you do. Nothing is regarded as unsuitable. That approach is very helpful. So please pay attention to everything!

Doing things properly has an intrinsic logic of its own, which is already established. Beyond that, we have the idea that something is good or bad; we have our personal likes and dislikes. That is what we are trying to overcome. The way things should be done, the way things work, is simply in accordance with the natural order. For instance, you don't wash your hands with coal, which makes them more black, but you wash your hands with soap, which makes them clean. In the winter there should be snow and ice; in the spring there should be rain; in the summertime the flowers should blossom. Things take place properly. It is very basic and very simple. Beyond that, there are one's likes and dislikes, and one's ideas of how things should be or how one wants things to be. We tend to jumble together doing things properly and our personal likes and dislikes. However, liking and disliking are purely the result of our passion and aggression. There is no intrinsic logic to liking and disliking beyond that.

Through vipashyana, you can experience the vastness of the world. It does not help to be self-centered in your own world; you won't be able to expand very much. You have to experience the vastness of the world you are expanding into, the world that you are about to deal with. If you were dumped in the middle of the black hole of Calcutta, for instance, how would you handle yourself? You would probably feel sorry for yourself once you were there. Curiosity would be quite good, although it might not last all that long—but having a glimpse of vipashyana provides another reference point altogether.

The merit of vipashyana discipline is that we begin to work with the neutral areas. We have the perfect opportunity for realizing awareness when we don't let hope or fear, liking or disliking, come into the picture—when we actually taste the bread and butter in our mouth without letting passion and aggression enter into it. Then eating a good piece of bread with nice butter on it does not produce any karmic seeds or debts. That is how, even as beginners, we can actually reduce samsaric possibilities and free ourselves from future karma.

We have to be very methodical. It is not all that easy to cut through karmic debts and the possibility of being born in the lower realms. We could end up in one of those realms. However, if we are able to work with situations properly and effectively, we can block the possibility of being born in the lower realms. Having done so, we can begin to prevent the possibility of being born in the higher realms as well. Finally, we can be born in Sukhavati, the pure land of Amitabha, the buddha of boundless light. We might even attain enlightenment; that's always possible.

But we have to start at the beginning, at the bread-and-butter level. We really have to earn it. We have to accomplish it. We *ourselves* have to do it. That is what is meant by nontheism: nobody is going to save you. If you are in trouble, you can't pay twenty-five pesos to somebody and say, "Father, please save me." In this tradition, nobody will say, "Yes." Instead, the Father probably will say, "Have you saved *yourself* yet?" If you can do that, then you are saved already.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA



VOLUME ONE

Born in Tibet
Meditation in Action
Mudra
Selected Writings

EDITED BY
Carolyn Rose Gimian



SHAMBHALA • Boston & London • 2003

The Way of Maha Ati

BY CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA AND RIGDZIN SHIKPO

THE ALAYA

THE GROUND of samsara and nirvana, the beginning and end of both confusion and realization, the nature of universal shunyata and of all apparent phenomena, more fundamental even than the trikaya because it is free from bias toward enlightenment, is the alaya, sometimes called the pure or original mind.

Although prajna sees in it no basis for such concepts as different aspects, yet three fundamental aspects of complete openness, natural perfection, and absolute spontaneity are distinguished by upaya as useful devices.

COMPLETE OPENNESS

All aspects of every phenomenon are completely clear and lucid.

The whole universe is open and unobstructed, everything mutually interpenetrating.

Since all things are naked, clear, and free from obscurations, there is nothing to attain or to realize. The nature of things naturally appears and is naturally present in time-transcending awareness.

The everyday practice is simply to develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions and to all people, experiencing

everything totally without mental reservations and blockages, so that one never withdraws or centralizes onto oneself.

This produces a tremendous energy which is usually locked up in the processes of mental evasion and generally running away from life experiences.

Clarity of awareness may in its initial stages be unpleasant or fear inspiring. If so, then one should open oneself completely to the pain or the fear and welcome it. In this way the barriers created by one's own habitual emotional reactions and prejudices are broken down.

When performing the meditation practice one should get the feeling of opening oneself out completely to the whole universe with absolute simplicity and nakedness of mind, ridding oneself of all "protecting" barriers.

Don't mentally split in two when meditating, one part of the mind watching the other like a cat watching a mouse.

One should realize that one does not meditate in order to go deeply into oneself and withdraw from the world.

Even when meditating on chakras in Buddhist yoga there is no introspective concentration—complete openness of mind is still the keynote.

NATURAL PERFECTION

Everything is naturally perfect just as it is, completely pure and undefiled.

All phenomena naturally appear in their uniquely correct modes and situations, forming ever-changing patterns full of meaning and significance, like participants in a great dance.

Everything is symbol, yet there is no difference between the symbol and the truth symbolized.

With no effort or practice whatsoever liberation, enlightenment, and buddhahood are already fully developed and perfected.

The everyday practice is just ordinary life itself. Since the underdeveloped state does not exist, there is no need to behave in any special way or to try to attain or practice anything.

There should be no feeling of striving to reach some exalted goal or higher state, since this simply produces something conditioned and artificial that will act as an obstruction to the free flow of the mind.

One should never think of oneself as "sinful" or worthless, but as naturally pure and perfect, lacking nothing.

When performing meditation practice one should think of it as just a natural function of everyday life, like eating or breathing, not as a special, formal event to be undertaken with great seriousness and solemnity. One must realize that to meditate is to pass beyond effort, beyond practice, beyond aims and goals, and beyond the dualism of bondage and liberation.

Meditation is always perfect, so there is no need to correct anything. Since everything that arises is simply the play of the mind, there are no bad meditation sessions and no need to judge thoughts as good or evil. Therefore one should not sit down to meditate with various hopes and fears about the outcome—one just does it, with no self-conscious feeling of "I am meditating," without effort, without strain, without attempting to control or force the mind, without trying to become peaceful.

If one finds one is going astray in any of these ways, stop meditating and simply rest and relax for a while before resuming.

If one has experiences that one interprets as "results," either during or after meditation, do not make anything special of them, but just observe them as phenomena. Above all, do not attempt to repeat them, since this opposes the natural spontaneity of the mind.

ABSOLUTE SPONTANEITY

All phenomena are completely new and fresh, absolutely unique at the instant of their appearance and entirely free from all concepts of past, present, and future, as if experienced in another dimension of time.

The continual stream of new discovery and fresh revelation and inspiration which arises at every moment is the manifestation of the eternal youth of the living dharma and its wonder, splendor, and spontaneity are the play or dance aspect of the universe as guru.

Learn to see everyday life as a mandala in which one is at the center, and be free of the bias and prejudice of past conditioning, present desires, and future hopes and expectations.

The figures of the mandala are the day-to-day objects of one's life experience, moving in the great dance or play of the universe, the symbolism by which the guru reveals profound and ultimate meaning and significance. Therefore be natural and spontaneous, accept and learn from everything.

See the ironic, amusing side of irritating situations.

In meditation see through the illusion of past, present, and future. The past is but a present memory or condition, the future a present projection, and the present itself vanishes before it can be grasped.

Free oneself from past memories of, and conceptions about, meditation. Each moment of meditation is completely unique and full of the potentiality of new discovery, so one is incapable of judging meditation by past sessions or by theory.

Just plunge straight into meditation at this very moment with one's whole mind and be free from hesitation, boredom, or excitement.

THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

It is traditional, and best if possible, to sit cross-legged when meditating, with the back erect but not rigid. However, it is most important to feel comfortable, so it is better to sit in a chair if sitting cross-legged proves painful.

One's attitude of mind should be inspired by the three fundamental aspects, whether the meditation is with or without form, although in the latter case the three aspects constitute the whole meditation itself, with particular emphasis on complete openness.

Meditations with form are preceded by, followed by, and contain periods without form and similarly it may often prove desirable, if not essential, to precede a period of formless meditation by a period with form.

To provide for this eventuality many preliminary meditations have been developed over the centuries of Buddhist practice, the most important classes being meditations on breathing, mantra repetitions, and visualizations.

The second and third of these classes need personal instruction from

one's guru before they can be attempted, but a few words on the first would not be out of place here, since the method used varies little from person to person.

First, let the mind follow the in-and-out rhythm of the breath until it becomes calm and tranquil; then rest the mind more and more on the breath until one's whole being seems to be identified with it.

Finally, become aware of the breath leaving the body and going out into space and gradually transfer the attention away from the breath and toward the sensation of spaciousness and expansion.

By letting this final sensation merge into complete openness, one moves into the sphere of formless meditation proper.

In all probability the above descriptions of the three fundamental aspects and the meditation practices involved will seem very vague and inadequate.

This is inevitable since they attempt to describe what is not only beyond words but beyond thought, and invite practice of what is essentially a state of being.

The words are simply a form of upaya (i.e., skill in means), a hint, which if acted upon may enable the innate natural wisdom and the naturally perfect action to arise spontaneously.

Sometimes in meditation there is a gap in normal consciousness, a sudden complete openness.

This only arises when one has ceased to think in terms of meditator, meditation, and the object of meditation. It is a glimpse of reality, a sudden flash which occurs at first infrequently and then gradually more and more often. It may not be a particularly shattering or explosive experience at all, just a moment of great simplicity.

Do not make the mistake of deliberately trying to force these experiences to recur, for this is to betray the naturalness and spontaneity of reality.