

**Shamatha-Vipashyana Meditation**  
**From Jamgon Kongtrul (and Others) to Chogyam Trungpa**  
**A Rime Shedra NYC Course**  
**Tuesdays, January 19 to April 15, 2021, 7-9:15 pm**

**Class Ten: The Stages of Vipashyana Meditation**

**1) Syllabus:**

- a) The Yoga of the Non-Referential Percept
  - i) The nature of the percept is understood to be empty like space;
- b) The Yoga of the Non-Referential Perceiver
  - i) The perceiver is examined as to origin, abiding, shape, etc.;
- c) The Sphere of Not Finding
  - i) Discriminating knowledge itself, like a fire produced by rubbing wood, vanishes in the expanse of "not finding";
- d) Resting without the Enemy of Thief of Conceptuality
  - i) Thus one rests free of grasping.

**1) Classical Readings:**

- a) The Stages and Accomplishment of Vipashyana Meditation, The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana, Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chryssoula Zerbini, two pages
- b) The Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, *The Lankavatara Sutra*, Translated by Karl Brunnholzl, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, pp. 300-301, one page
- c) The Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, From Nagarjuna's *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment*, "The Center of the Sunlit Sky" Translated by Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 296-300, two pages
- d) Chapter 9. Actualizing Special Insight, *From Stages of Meditation: The Stages of Meditation II* by Kamalashila with Commentary by The Dalai Lama, Translated by Ven Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, and Jeremy Russell, Root Text excerpted from pp. 107-158, five pages
- e) Madhyamakopadesha: Madhyamaka Pith Instructions, Atisha, From *Straight from the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions*, Translated and Introduced by Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 89-91, two pages
- f) Absolute Bodhicitta: Samatha and Vipashyana, *To Dispel the Misery of the World Whispered Teachings of the Bodhisattvas* by Ga Rabjampa Kunga Yeshe, Translated by Rigpa Translations, pp. 139-152
- g) Insight and Dismantling Illusion, *Wake Up to Your Life: Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention*, By Ken McLeod, Excerpts from Chapter 9, pages 353-367, 9 pages

**2) Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche Readings:**

- a) Ultimate Bodhicitta Slogans, From *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*, By Chögyam Trungpa, Edited by Judith L. Lief, pp. 29-45, eight pages

# **The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana**

## **The Treasury of Knowledge by Jamgon Kongtrul**

**Chapter Eight: The Progressive Classification of the Training in Superior Samadhi**

**Part One: The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana –**

**The General Basis of All Samadhis**

*Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chryssoula Zerbini*

### **The Stages of Vipashyana Meditation**

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

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

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

Finally, the object examined “and discriminating knowledge itself, just as a fire produced by rubbing wood together, vanish into the sphere of not finding.”

At that point, one rests in a state free of grasping.

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

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

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

# **The Stages of Meditation on Emptiness**

## **From The Lankavatara Sutra**

Translated by Karl Brunnholzl in *The Center of the Sunlit Sky*, pp. 300-301

### **The Sutra of the Arrival in Lanka**

By relying on mere mind,  
One does not imagine outer objects. (1)

By resting in the observed object of suchness,  
One should go beyond mere mind too. (2)

Going beyond mere mind,  
One must even go beyond the nonappearance [of apprehender and  
apprehended]. (3)

The yogic practitioner who rests in nonappearance  
Sees the great vehicle. (4)

This spontaneously present, peaceful resting  
Is completely purified through aspiration prayers. (5)

Genuine identityless wisdom  
Sees by way of nonappearance. (6)

## **The Stages of Meditation on Emptiness**

### **From Nagarjuna's *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment*** **In "*The Center of the Sunlit Sky*" Translated by Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 296-300**

Nagarjuna begins his *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment* by saying that bodhisattvas, after having generated the aspiring mind of enlightenment, should generate the ultimate mind of enlightenment through the power of meditation.

The actual progression of this meditation starts with analyzing for the lack of a real personal identity. Next, Nagarjuna turns to phenomenal identitylessness.

As the entities of apprehender and apprehended,  
The appearances of consciousness  
Do not exist as outer objects  
That are different from consciousness.

Therefore, in the sense of having the nature of entities,  
In any case, outer objects do not exist.  
It is these distinct appearances of consciousness  
That appear as the aspect of form.

Just as people with dull minds  
See illusions, mirages,  
And the cities of scent-eaters,  
So do form and such appear.

The teachings on the aggregates, constituents, and so on  
Are for the purpose of stopping the clinging to a self.  
By settling in mere mind,  
The greatly blessed ones let go of these too.

In the above four verses, Nagarjuna clearly presents the intermediate step of realizing that all appearances occur solely within one's own mind as the expressions of this mind. However, just like all other Centrists, he does not stop at that point but-as the following verses and all his other texts show-negates the real existence of the mind as well.

The teaching of the Sage that  
"All of these are mere mind"  
Is for the sake of removing the fear of naive beings  
And not [meant] in terms of true reality.

The third step in Nagarjuna's analysis is that mind itself is also unarisen, without nature, and empty. He describes what this emptiness means and why the example of space is used to illustrate it.

It is without characteristics and unarisen,  
Not existent, and free from the ways of speech.  
Space, the mind of enlightenment,  
And enlightenment have the characteristic of not being two.

Fourth, Nagarjuna presents the defining characteristics of the proper meditation on emptiness and identifies three ways of misunderstanding emptiness.

The emptiness that is called "nonarising,"  
"Emptiness," and "identitylessness"  
Is what inferior beings meditate on.  
It is not the meditation on the [actual emptiness].

What has the characteristic of the stream  
Of positive and negative thoughts being cut off  
The Buddhas taught to be emptiness.  
The other [emptinesses] *they* did not declare to be emptiness.

To abide without observing the mind  
Is the characteristic of space.  
Their meditation on emptiness  
Is declared to be space meditation.

Fifth, Nagarjuna states that both cyclic existence (ignorance) and liberation (realization of true reality) occur within and depend on our mind. Thus, the meditation and realization of emptiness is not spacelike in the sense of a blank nothingness, but it is an open, nonreferential state of mind that is at the same time profoundly peaceful and blissful.

The seeming comes from afflictions and karma.  
Karma originates from the mind.  
The mind is constituted by latent tendencies.  
Freedom from latent tendencies is bliss.

This blissful mind is peacefulness.  
A peaceful mind will not be ignorant.  
Not to be ignorant is the realization of true reality.  
The realization of true reality is the attainment of liberation.

**Chapter 9. Actualizing Special Insight**  
**From *Stages of Meditation: The Stages of Meditation II* by**  
***Kamalashila with Commentary by The Dalai Lama***  
**Translated by Ven Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, and**  
**Jeremy Russell, Root Text Excerpted from pp. 107-158**  
*(All headings have been added for use in Rime Shedra)*

**The Purpose of this Meditation**

After realizing calm abiding, meditate on special insight, thinking as follows: ‘All the teachings of the Buddha are perfect teachings, and they directly or indirectly reveal and lead to suchness with utmost clarity. If you understand suchness with utmost clarity, you will be free of all the nets of wrong views, just as darkness is dispelled when light appears. Mere calm abiding meditation cannot purify pristine awareness, nor can it eliminate the darkness of obscurations. When I meditate properly on suchness with wisdom, pristine awareness will be purified. Only with wisdom can I realize suchness. Only with wisdom can I effectively eradicate obscurations. Therefore, engaging in calm abiding meditation, I shall then search for suchness with wisdom. And I shall not remain content with calm abiding alone.’

What is suchness like? It is the nature of all phenomena that ultimately they are empty of the self of persons and the self of phenomena. This is realized through the perfection of wisdom and not otherwise. *The Unraveling of the Thought Sutra* reads,

“O Tathagatha, by which perfection do Bodhisattvas apprehend the identitylessness of phenomena?” “Avalokiteshvara, it is apprehended by the perfection of wisdom.”

Therefore, meditate on wisdom while engaging in calm abiding.

**The Actual Stages of Meditation**

**The Selflessness of Persons**

Yogis should analyze in the following manner: a person is not observed as separate from the mental and physical aggregates, the elements and sense powers. Nor is a person of the nature of the aggregates and so forth, because the aggregates and so forth have the entity of being many and impermanent. Others have imputed the person as permanent

and single. The person as a phenomena cannot exist except as one or many, because there is no other way of existing. Therefore, we must conclude that the assertion of the worldly “I” and “mine” is wholly mistaken.

### **The Selflessness of Phenomena**

Meditation on the selflessness of phenomena should also be done in the following manner: phenomena, in short, are included under the five aggregates, the twelve sources of perception, and the eighteen elements. The physical aspects of the aggregates, sources of perception, and elements are, in the ultimate sense, nothing other than aspects of the mind. This is because when they are broken into subtle particles and the nature of the parts of these subtle particles is individually examined, no definite identity can be found.

### **The Emptiness of the Mind**

In the ultimate sense, the mind too cannot be real. How can the mind that apprehends only the false nature of physical form and so forth, and appears in various aspects, be real? Just as physical forms and so forth are false, since the mind does not exist separately from physical forms and so forth, which are false, it too is false. Just as physical forms and so forth possess various aspects, and their identities are neither one nor many, similarly, since the mind is not different from them, its identity too is neither one nor many. Therefore, the mind by nature is like an illusion.

### **The Emptiness of All Phenomena**

Analyze that, just like the mind, the nature of all phenomena, too, is like an illusion. In this way, when the identity of the mind is specifically examined by wisdom, in the ultimate sense it is perceived neither within nor without. It is also not perceived in the absence of both. Neither the mind of the past, nor that of the future, nor that of the present, is perceived. When the mind is born, it comes from nowhere, and when it ceases it goes nowhere because it is inapprehensible, undemonstrable, and non-physical.

If you ask, “What is the entity of that which is inapprehensible, undemonstrable, and non-physical?” *The Heap of Jewels* states:

“O Kashyapa, when the mind is thoroughly sought, it cannot be found. What is not found cannot be perceived. And what is not perceived is neither past nor future nor present.”



Through such analysis, the beginning of the mind is ultimately not seen, the end of the mind is ultimately not seen, and the middle of the mind is ultimately not seen. All phenomena should be understood as lacking an end and a middle, just as the mind does not have an end or a middle. With the knowledge that the mind is without an end or a middle, no identity of the mind is perceived.

### **The Emptiness of Emptiness**

What is thoroughly realized by the mind, too, is realized as being empty. By realizing that, the very identity, which is established as the aspect of the mind, like the identity of physical form, and so forth, is also ultimately not perceived. In this way, when the person does not ultimately see the identity of all phenomena through wisdom, he will not analyze whether physical form is permanent or impermanent, empty or not empty, contaminated or not contaminated, produced or non-produced, and existent or non-existent. Just as physical form is not examined, similarly feeling, recognition, compositional factors, and consciousness are not examined. When the object does not exist, its characteristics also cannot exist. So how can they be examined? In this way, when the person does not firmly apprehend the entity of a thing as ultimately existing, having investigated it with wisdom, the practitioner engages in non-conceptual single-pointed concentration. And thus the identitylessness of all phenomena is realized.

### **The Necessity of this Meditation**

Those who do not meditate with wisdom by analyzing the entity of things specifically, but merely meditate on the elimination of mental activity, cannot avert conceptual thoughts and also cannot realize identitylessness because they lack the light of wisdom. If the fire of consciousness knowing phenomena as they are is produced from individual analysis of suchness, then like the fire produced by rubbing wood it will burn the wood of conceptual thought. The Buddha has spoken in this way.

*The Cloud of Jewels* also states,

“One skilled in discerning the faults engages in the yoga of meditation on emptiness in order to get rid of all conceptual elaborations. Such a person, due to his repeated meditation on emptiness, when he thoroughly searches for the object and the identity of the object, which delights the mind and distracts it, realizes them to be empty. When that very mind is also examined, it is realized to be empty. When the identity of what is realized by this mind is thoroughly sought, this too is realized as empty. Realizing in this way one enters into the

yoga of signlessness.”

This shows that only those who have engaged in complete analysis can enter into the yoga of signlessness.

### **The Way of Meditating**

It has been explained very clearly that through mere elimination of mental activity, without examining the identity of things with wisdom, it is not possible to engage in non-conceptual meditation. Thus, concentration is done after the actual identity of things like physical form and so forth has been perfectly analyzed with wisdom, and not by concentrating on physical forms and so forth. Concentration is also not done by abiding between this world and the world beyond, because physical forms and so forth are not perceived. It is thus called the non-abiding concentration.

[Such a practitioner] is then called a meditator of supreme wisdom, because by specifically examining the identity of all things with wisdom he has perceived nothing. This is as stated in *The Space Treasure Sutra* and *The Jewel in the Crown Sutra*, and so forth.

In this way, by entering into the suchness of the selflessness of persons and phenomena, you are free from concepts and analysis because there is nothing to be thoroughly examined and observed. You are free from expression, and with single-pointed mental engagement you automatically enter into meditation without exertion. Thus, you very clearly meditate on suchness and abide in it.

### **Working with Obstacles to this Meditation**

While abiding in that meditation, the continuity of the mind should not be distracted. When the mind is distracted to external objects due to attachment, and so forth, such distraction should be noted. Quickly pacify the distraction by meditating on the repulsive aspect of such objects and swiftly replace the mind on suchness. If the mind appears to be disinclined to do that, reflecting on the advantages of single pointed concentration, meditate with delight. The disinclination should be pacified by also seeing the defects of distraction.

If the function of the mind becomes unclear and starts sinking, or when there is a risk of it sinking due to being overpowered by mental torpor or sleep, then as before, quickly attempt to overcome such dullness by focusing the mind on supremely delightful things. Then the object suchness should be held in very tight focus. At times when the mind is

observed to be excited or tempted to become distracted by the memory of past events of laughter and play, then as in the earlier cases, pacify the distractions by reflecting on such things as impermanence, and so forth, which will help subdue the mind. Then, again endeavor to engage the mind on suchness without applying counter forces.

### **The Accomplishment of Vipashyana**

If and when the mind spontaneously engages in meditation on suchness, free of sinking and mental agitation, it should be left naturally and your efforts should be relaxed. If effort is applied when the mind is in meditative equipoise, it will distract the mind. But if effort is not applied when the mind becomes dull, it will become like a blind man due to extreme dullness and you will not achieve special insight. So, when the mind becomes dull, apply effort, and when in absorption, effort should be relaxed. When, by meditating on special insight, excessive wisdom is generated and calm abiding is weak, the mind will waver like a butter lamp in the wind and you will not perceive suchness very clearly. Therefore, at that time meditate on calm abiding. When calm abiding meditation becomes excessive, meditate on wisdom.

**Madhyamaka Pith Instructions**  
**Madhyamakopadesha - By Atisha**  
**From *Straight from the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions***  
**Translated and Introduced by Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 89-91**

The Mahayana's pith instructions on the center are as follows. On the level of the seeming, in terms of the perspective of those who only see what is right in front of them, all presentations of cause and effect and so on[explain] all phenomena to be real in just the way they appear. However, ultimately, or actually, when just this seeming [reality] as it appears is scrutinized and done away with through the great [Madhyamaka] reasonings, there is nothing that can be grasped, not even something as tiny as a fragment of the tip of a hair that is split a hundred times. This is what you should internalize with certainty.

Sit on a comfortable seat in the cross-legged position. As a start, [let us say that] entities are of two kinds: what possesses form and what is without form.

1. What possesses form is a collection of infinitesimal particles. When these are analyzed and broken up in terms of their directional parts, not even their minutest [part] remains and they are utterly without appearance.
2. What is without form is the mind. As for that, the past mind has [already] ceased and perished. The future mind has not [yet] arisen or originated. As for the present mind, it is very difficult to examine: it has no color and is without any shape. Since it is just like space, it is not established. In other words, it is free from unity and multiplicity, unarisen, natural luminosity. When analyzed and scrutinized with the weapons of reasoning, such as [those just mentioned], you realize that it is not established.
3. At the point when those two [what possesses form and what is without form] definitely do not exist and are not established as [having] any nature whatsoever, the very knowledge that discriminates them is not established either. For example, if you rub two sticks [against each other], fire comes forth. Through this condition, the two sticks are burned and become nonexistent. Thereafter, the fire that has burned them also subsides by itself. Likewise, once all specific characteristics and general characteristics are established as nonexistent [through discriminating prajna], this prajna itself is without appearance and luminous, not being established as any nature whatsoever. Thus, all flaws, such as dullness and agitation, are eliminated.
4. In this interval [of meditative concentration], consciousness is without any thought, does not apprehend anything, and has left behind all mindfulness and mental

engagement. For as long as the enemies or robbers of characteristics and thoughts do not arise, consciousness should rest in such a [state].

When wishing to rise [from the meditation], slowly open the cross-legged position and stand up. Then, with an illusionlike [frame of] mind, perform as many positive actions with body, speech, and mind as possible. By practicing with devotion, for a long time, and uninterruptedly, those with the proper fortune will see reality in this very lifetime. All phenomena are revealed as effortlessly and spontaneously present of their own accord, just as the middle of space. Through [the wisdom] that is attained subsequent to the [meditative equipoise described], all phenomena are known as illusions and the like. From the time of having manifested the vajralike meditative concentration onwards, these [bodhisattvas] do not even have a [phase of] subsequent attainment, but rest in meditative equipoise at all times.

**Absolute Bodhicitta: Samatha and Vipashyana**  
***To Dispel the Misery of the World Whispered Teachings of the***  
***Bodhisattvas*** by Ga Rabjampa Kunga Yeshe  
*Translated by Rigpa Translations, pp. 139-152*

**A. How to Practice Vipasyana**

This has three parts:

- (I) Eliminating conceptual constructs through the view
- (II) Taking to heart through meditation, and
- (III) Enhancing through conduct.

**(I) Eliminating conceptual constructs through the view**

This has three parts:

- (a) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding outer objects
- (b) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding the mind, and
- (c) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding the antidote of meditation practice.

**(a) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding outer objects**

The root text says:

**1. Consider all things and events as dreamlike.**

The meaning of this is explained in *Stages of Meditation II*:

"Things and events" (or *dharmas*), in short, are comprised of the five aggregates, twelve sense sources (*ayatana*), and eighteen elements (*dhatu*). The physical aspects of the aggregates, sense sources, and elements are, in an ultimate sense, nothing other than aspects of the mind. When they are broken down into subtlemost particles, and these are examined to determine the nature of their parts, no real nature can be definitively identified.

Therefore, through the force of age-old clinging to forms and so on, which are in fact unreal—just like the appearances in a dream—visual forms and the like appear to ordinary beings as if they were external to the mind. Yet we must examine them, because on the ultimate level, these forms and such are nothing other than aspects of mind.

As this says, as a result of our habitual tendencies from waking life and through the contributing circumstance of being asleep, we may experience all manner of things in our dreams, yet nothing that we experience in the dream has even the slightest reality. In just the same way, through the habitual tendency-which has developed throughout beginningless time-of perceiving things as real, and through the contributing circumstance of our own karma, we experience a variety of objects. Although these appear to us to be more than just aspects of mind, it is certain that they do not have even the slightest reality.

### **(b) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding the mind**

The root text says:

#### **2. Examine the nature of unborn awareness.**

*Stages of Meditation II* says:

When you consider how all the three realms are merely the mind, and you realize that this is so and that all imputed phenomena are really nothing other than the mind, then by examining the mind, you are examining the nature of all phenomena. Then analyze along the following lines. On the ultimate level, the mind too cannot truly exist. How can the mind that perceives the aspects of forms and so on-which are essentially unreal-and that appears in these various aspects ever be real? Just as physical forms and so on are false, since the mind is not separate from them, it too is false.

When we examine the nature of mind with wisdom in this way, we find that ultimately mind is perceived neither inside nor outside. Nor is it perceived somewhere else. The mind of the past is not perceived; nor is that of the future. The mind that arises in the present too is not perceived. When the mind is born, it comes from nowhere, and when it ceases, it goes nowhere. Mind is not apprehensible, it cannot be pointed out, and it is not physical.

As this says, when we understand that all appearances are the magical manifestation of mind, and we examine the essence of mind using ultimate analysis, we arrive at the certain conclusion that it is beyond all conceptual constructs, such as outer and inner; past, present, and future; arising and ceasing; and so on.

### **(c) Eliminating conceptual constructs regarding the antidote of meditation practice**

The root text says:

**2. Let even the antidote be freed in its own place.**

*Stages of Meditation II* says:

If, in this way, the fire of the awareness of things as they are can be ignited through precise investigation, then just like flames sparked by rubbing sticks together, it will consume the wood of conceptual thought. This the Buddha himself has said.

In the noble *Cloud of Jewels Sutra*, he said, "In order to be free of all conceptual constructs, the one who is skilled in discerning faults practices the yoga of meditation on emptiness.

Such a person, through repeated meditation on emptiness, when searching thoroughly for the identity and nature of the objects of mind's distraction and delight, realizes them to be empty. When the mind itself is also examined, it is realized to be empty. When you search in every way for the nature of what is realized by the mind, this too is realized to be empty. Through realization such as this, you enter into the yoga of signlessness."

As this explains by drawing upon the Sutras, when we meditate, having analyzed both outer objects and the mind, if we become attached to the meditation that is the antidote, we must thoroughly investigate its essence, cause, and result and become certain that it is, and always has been, empty.

**(II) Taking to Heart through Meditation**

The root text says:

**4. Rest in the alaya, the essence of the path.**

Generally, there are many explanations of the *alaya* (or "universal ground") as one of the eight collections of consciousness, but here, as in the teachings of the Lamdre tradition, it refers to *sunyata*, meaning the nature of awareness and emptiness, inseparably united. It is called the "universal ground" because it is the basis for all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana. Therefore, as Lord Atisa said:



In the nature of things, beyond all conceptual elaboration, consciousness too comes to rest, beyond all concepts.

In other words, when it is directed toward the "object;" the nature of reality beyond the limitations of fixed ideas, the mind that is the "subject" enters a mode of utter simplicity, or freedom from concepts, by cutting through any fixed ideas in the way described above. When we enter this state of simplicity, we simply rest in meditative equipoise without any further analysis or evaluation, projection or absorption, effort and exertion, or the like.

*Stages of Meditation II* says:

When entering in this way into the reality of the selflessness of individuals and phenomena, since there is no further analysis to be done, you gain freedom from concepts and evaluation. Mental activity enters, naturally and spontaneously, into a single experience that is beyond expression.

Without conceptualizing, remain in meditation with exceptional clarity regarding reality itself. And while abiding in that state, do not allow the flow of mind to be distracted.

The way to dispel dullness and agitation has already been described.

### **(III) Enhancing through Action**

The root text says:

#### **5. The seven and their processes are conceptual, so forsake them.**

The seven, meaning the consciousness associated with the six senses, and the rigid idea of "I" and "mine" which is referred to as the emotional mind (Skt. *klistamanas*), together with their accompanying thought processes, are all said to be *false conceptual patterns*, as we find in Maitreya's *Distinguishing the Middle from Extremes (1:8)*:

False conceptual patterns are the mind  
and mental processes of the three realms.

Whenever our minds are like this, and we are caught up in thinking about various things or reacting to objects, we must avoid the tendency to perceive things as real or to cling to their reality. Instead, by thoroughly examining the essence of the objects that mind is

directed toward and the thoughts themselves, we must decide that they are beyond any conceptual constructs. If we can familiarize ourselves with this and with the technique, by practicing it again and again, then all proliferation of conceptual thoughts will become a support for the arising of nonconceptual wisdom. That is why this is referred to as *enhancement*.

## **B. The Measure of Accomplishment**

*Stages of Meditation II* says:

While focused in that state of samatha, to analyze reality is vipasyana.

And:

Once we have achieved physical and mental pliancy, when abiding in that, having eliminated every other mode of thought, whatever is contemplated by the mind within the realm of samadhi is considered to be like a reflection. Within that domain of samadhi meditation, to regard these reflections and discern the meaning of these objects of knowledge, to discern them thoroughly, understand them fully, analyze them fully, endure them, take delight in them, discern their distinctive features, observe them, and understand them is what is known as vipasyana. Thus the bodhisattva is skilled in the practice of vipasyana.

As this says by drawing upon the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*, vipasyana is discerning wisdom that is built upon physical and mental pliancy. It is called *vipashyand* (superior insight) because, with a capacity exceeding that of other states of mind, it sees the nature of objects.

Samatha and vipasyana, which have now been explained, must be practiced as a unity. This is because each of them by itself will not fulfill the purpose of eliminating the destructive emotions, realizing the nature of things, and so on. We must therefore acquire a detailed understanding, including the knowledge of how they are to be combined. This has already been explained elsewhere.

## **C. Practice Between Sessions**

The root text says:

**6. Between sessions, be a conjurer of illusions.**

As this indicates, during all our activities between sessions, having first aroused great compassion, we must work for the benefit of others, while maintaining illusory mindfulness and vigilance. *Stages of Meditation II* says:

Should you suffer from physical harm and the like, regard the whole world as similar to an illusion, a mirage, a dream, a reflection of the moon in water, or an optical illusion. And think: "Since they do not understand the profound teachings, these beings are overwhelmed by their emotions in sarpsara." And by thinking, "However I can, I must help them to understand reality;" arouse great compassion and bodhicitta.

And:

Then slowly rise from the cross-legged position and prostrate yourself before the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Make offerings to them and recite praises. Then make vast prayers of aspiration by reciting *Samantabhadra's Prayer of Good Actions* and so on.

This is the clear advice given by the great pandit Kamalasila through his great compassion in these and other such sacred glimpses of the path to liberation.

*Appearances, in all their variety, are mind's magical manifestation,  
and the nature of mind is and always has been unborn.  
To those with wisdom beyond duality and transcending concepts,  
in whom this is realized genuinely and with certainty, I prostrate.*

# **Insight and Dismantling Illusion**

## ***Wake Up to Your Life: Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention***

**By Ken McLeod, Excerpts from Chapter 9, pages 353-367**

### **Insight and Dying**

Insight practice has two essential components: dying to the world of beliefs, and pointing-out instructions. In the story of the lama at the beginning of this chapter, the direct experience of night with no darkness caused him to die to the world of his beliefs. The explanation of the earth tilted on its axis and orbiting the sun was, in a way, a pointing-out instruction, pointing out how things are seen in a scientific context.

First you die. Then you see. You can't see before you die because patterns cloud seeing. Insight practice is, by its nature, frustrating, challenging, and frightening.

*A man looks for the hat he is wearing. He knows he has a hat, but he can't remember where he put it. A friend says, "It's on your head." "No," he says, "I put it down somewhere." His friend comes up to him, but he pushes his friend away, saying, "Just let me look for it." This is the first stage of dying: denial.*

*He searches the room, opening closets and drawers, overturning furniture, even looking under the rug. Frustrated by his inability to find his hat, he grows more and more irritated. This is the second stage of dying: anger.*

*He looks everywhere, but he still cannot find it. He starts talking to himself. "From now on, I'll always put it in the closet. I'll keep everything tidy and neat." This is the third stage of dying: bargaining.*

*Eventually he collapses in despair. He does not know what to do. He gives up, sits down, and stares into space. This is the fourth stage: depression.*

*His friend asks, "Do you want my help?" "Yes," he says, "I don't know where it is." This is the fifth stage: acceptance.*

*Then his friend taps him on the head and says, "What's this?" This is the pointing-out instruction. "My hat, my hat! I found my hat!" he cries. "Why didn't you tell me before?"*

We don't die willingly. The more invested we are in the worlds projected by patterns, the stronger the denial, anger, and bargaining, and the despair of depression. Insight

practice is inherently frustrating because you are looking to see where, at first, you are unable to see—beyond the world of the patterns.

Another way to look at insight practice is to see that the process has three stages: shock, disorganization, and reorganization.

The first stage starts when you see beyond illusion. You experience a shock. You react by denying that you saw what you saw, saying, in effect, “That makes no sense. I’ll just forget about that.” Unfortunately, or fortunately, your experience of seeing is not so easily denied. It is too vivid, too real, to ignore. Now you become angry because the illusion in which you have lived has been shattered. You know you can’t go back, but you don’t want to go forward. You are still attached to the world of patterns. You feel anxious, and the anxiety gradually matures into grief. You now know that you have to go forward. You experience the pain of separating from what you understood, just as the lama in the example experienced pain at the loss of his worldview.

You then enter a period of disorganization. You withdraw, become apathetic, lose your energy for life, become restless, and routinely reject new possibilities or directions. You surrender to the changes taking place but do nothing to move forward. A major risk at this stage is that you remain in a state of disorganization. You hold on to an aspect of the old world. Parents who have lost a child in an accident or to violence, for example, have great difficulty in letting go. They may keep the child’s bedroom just as it was. Their views and expectations of life have been shattered, and, understandably, they cling to a few of the shards. They may stay in the stage of disorganization for a long time.

The third stage of insight is reorganization. You experience a shift, and you let the old world go, even the shards. You accept the world that you see with your new eyes. What was previously seen as being absolute and real is now seen differently. The old structures, beliefs, and behaviors no longer hold, and you enter a new life.

## **Practice Guidelines**

Initially, insight practice is very confusing. You feel as if you are staring into nothing, and you have no idea what you are doing. You probably have felt the same way in other practices, but insight practice amplifies these feelings considerably. In my retreat training, the whole group of us spent a peaceful and enjoyable month cultivating attention in preparation for insight. Then we received instructions for insight, and we all felt as if bombs had gone off inside us.

A month, by the way, is not a long preparation period. Rangjung Dorje, a Tibetan master, was required to cultivate stable attention day and night for three years before his teacher gave him instruction in insight. Stable attention is very important. Most difficulties in insight come from not having stable, strong attention.

For insight practice, make your formal practice sessions at least forty-five minutes. Spend the first five to ten minutes resting with the breath, letting the surface level of activity and tension dissipate.

Then spend another ten minutes doing the energy transformation practice described in the instructions. Because insight is about seeing beyond the limitations of patterns, you need a level of energy in attention higher than the level of energy in the patterns. The energy transformation practice raises the level of energy in your attention. Where resting with the breath stabilizes attention, energy transformation practice strengthens it.

Then spend twenty to thirty minutes working at insight. A cardinal rule for insight practice is “Work from a base of stable, clear attention.” When you look at the nature of experience or the nature of mind, you will fall into confusion again and again. Thoughts and feelings will erupt in you, or you will fall into thick, dull states of mind. You will feel as if you can’t meditate at all.

You can’t do insight if your mind is either full of thoughts or thick and dull. You might as well try to see your reflection in a pond ruffled by a strong wind or in a pond filled with mud.

Reestablish stable, clear attention by letting go of looking and returning attention to the breath. Then go back to the looking.

Looking involves three steps: exhausting experience, cutting the root, and resting in seeing. Each of the meditation exercises is divided into three sections in order to make clear what is being exhausted, how to direct attention to cut the root, and how to rest. The insight practices given here use questions about the nature of mind such as “What is mind?” You may come up with logical or philosophical answers, but, for the purpose of developing insight, such answers are worse than useless. They reinforce your reliance on intellectual processes. Awareness, not the intellect, sees the nature of mind. You cannot think your way to it.

Use the question to direct attention to mind or experience. Hold the question. Attention forms and begins to penetrate habituated structures of thought and experience. Reactive patterns are triggered. Thoughts, feelings, and confusion arise. Hold the

question in the face of the reactive mechanisms. Attention gradually penetrates the patterns, and you are able to look more deeply and for longer periods. Seeing often arises as soon as the patterns are penetrated. If it does not, then you need to cut the root of experience. How do you know whether you have experienced seeing? Generally, you will know, but you should have your experience examined by your teacher.

Cutting the root means turning attention to what is holding the question. In holding the question, you dissolve the clouding influence of the patterns. The question holds your attention, and reactive patterns are unable to function. Still, the pattern of subject-object fixation remains and prevents you from experiencing mind nature. Turn the attention back on what is looking, what is holding the question. Redirecting the attention breaks the subject-object fixation, and seeing can now arise.

At a certain point, the question and the looking dissolve into nothing. You feel as if the looking just fell to pieces. Now you see. Rest right there. Rest in the seeing. Don't make any more effort. Initially the seeing will last for only a short time, perhaps only a second or two.

Return to holding the question and cutting the root. If you become confused by dullness or busyness, stop making efforts at holding the question, and reestablish a base of attention. Insight practice is best done for short periods of great intensity.

For the last five to ten minutes, just relax and rest. Sit with your mind open and clear. Let the energy and effort disperse. Then go about your day.

Practice transforming energy for short periods throughout your day. At the same time, regard all experience, inside and outside, as a dream. Whenever you can, stop and look at what you are experiencing, posing the question, "What is this?" The effort keeps the practice alive in you and interrupts habituated functioning.

Throughout the practice of insight, regular interaction with a teacher is very important. The pitfalls are numerous. Very still or very clear states of mind are easily mistaken for experiences of seeing mind nature. Inconsequential experiences are commonly taken as important insights. You can also become fixated on certain states of mind and lose the intention to see. A capable and experienced teacher is often the only safeguard against these pitfalls.

In insight, you are trying to see what you cannot see. A teacher shows you how and where to look. Because you have to die to how you currently look at things, you need someone to hold the possibility of moving through death. To die, you have to let go, so

you need someone who inspires the trust and confidence you need to stand in the fear and to let go.

Insight practice is based entirely on the arising of direct experience. You are not instilling an understanding, as in many of the previous meditations. Some people progress very quickly in insight and then turn to the practice of presence (see chapter 10). Others work long and hard before they see mind nature. If you are unable to connect with insight practice, then you need to work on the earlier meditations in greater depth. Once you have a direct experience of mind nature, you also return to the earlier meditations but in a different way, as described in the next chapter.

## **Insight: The Main Practice**

### ***Appearances Are Mind—Life Is but a Dream***

#### ***Exhaust the Experience***

Take a simple object—a book, a flower, or a stone—and look at it. What is your experience? You say, “I see a book.” True, but what do you experience? *Book* is a label you apply to your experience. What is your experience? A red rectangle. True, but again you are labeling your experience. The book may appear as a rectangle, a square, or a parallelogram depending on where you are positioned. The color likewise depends on available light, how it filters into the room, and whether you are wearing sunglasses. Again, what is your experience? Seeing is also a label. What is that?

Every time you answer the question, note the labeling and return to your experience. Keep looking past the labels to the actual experience of seeing the book—an appearance of shape, form, and color.

Where does this bare experience of shape, form, and color take place? Does it take place in the book? Probably not, because you are having the experience. Does it take place in you? Well, no, the shape, form, and color seem to appear outside you. In between? That doesn’t seem right, either. Keep looking at the experience, asking again and again, “What is it?”

You can do this meditation with sound—a dripping tap, the noise of traffic, or music. Clear polyphonic music (such as Bach’s *Brandenburg Concertos*) listened to with headphones is very effective.



Where is the sound? Use the question to direct attention. Reasoning, deduction, and inference are all distracting thoughts. Look with your mind to see where the sound is. With a good headset, you have the impression that some instruments are to your left and others to your right. Where is the sound, actually? Where is it experienced? Keep asking questions to direct your attention to the experience itself. What is it?

You come to a place where there are no words. With the book, you come to place where the appearance of red shape arises, not in you, not outside you, just there. With the music, you come to a place where sound, music, is just there.

Practice cutting through labeling until you can hold attention in sensory experience itself.

### ***Cut the Root***

Now pose the question “What is experiencing this?” Keep the experience, the color and shape of the book, and the seeing in attention and look at what is experiencing it. If you start thinking or wondering about what experiences, you have fallen out of attention. Relax, go back to the pure experience, and again ask, “What is experiencing this?” At some point you experience a strange shift. The usual framework of subject-object perception collapses for a moment. You *see* that what arises as experience is your mind! You are clear, awake, and present, and perhaps a little awed and puzzled. The shift is to a different seeing, in which appearances, that is, what arises in experience, and mind, that is, experiencing itself, are not separate.

### ***Rest***

Rest in this seeing. At first, it will last for only a moment. When it fades, don't try to recover it. Instead, repeat the whole process. Look at the object, go through all the labels until the experience of the object arises as pure experience, cut the root by asking, “What is experiencing this?” and, again, rest in the seeing.

When your seeing shifts, rest in seeing. Don't do anything more. If you keep asking questions at this point, you spin meaninglessly in confusion, like a dog chasing its own tail.

Gradually, you will rest for longer periods in seeing, shattering the illusion that subject and object are independent and separate.

Recall the instruction “Regard everything as a dream.” Now, perhaps, the instruction makes more sense. Appearances arise in experience. What arises in experience is not

separate from what experiences, which we call “your mind,” just as in a dream, what arises in the dream is not separate from the mind that is dreaming.

### ***Mind Is Empty—Examine the Nature of Unborn Awareness***

#### ***Exhaust the Experience***

Rest with your mind open and clear. Let your mind rest, and look at the resting mind. What is the resting mind? You start thinking, “What is mind?—Well, it’s the source of experience, it’s what I am, it controls everything.” Such thoughts are distractions that take you away from looking. Just ask the question, “What is this, the mind that rests?” and look. Look and rest in the looking. You see nothing. You fall into confusion, and you wonder if you are doing the practice correctly. Your mind becomes thick and dull. Wake up! Go back to the clear, open, resting mind. Reestablish a base of attention. Then ask again, “What is this resting mind?” Look, and rest in the looking.

How is the resting mind? Does it have a color, shape, or form? Does it have a location? You may well think such questions make no sense, but look anyway. Even though we know intellectually that mind doesn’t have shape or color, we still hold emotionally to the notion that mind is a thing. The question directs your attention to mind, and though you see no thing, the looking is what is important. Keep looking.

Now look at an object, a flower or a book. Look at your mind as sensory experience arises. Does anything change? What changes? How is the mind that experiences a flower different from the mind at rest? Again you see nothing. No matter, keep looking.

Let a thought or a feeling float up. Now your mind is moving. What is the moving mind? What moves? The same reactions of speculation and bewilderment arise. Let them go, return to a base of attention, let another thought or feeling float up, pose the question, and look again.

#### ***Cut the Root***

Awareness operates in both the resting mind and the moving mind. You know when your mind is resting, you know when your mind is moving. You know when you are experiencing a flower and when you are not.

What knows? Look at that. Again you fall into thinking or confusion. Many ideas will occur to you: nothing is born, nothing dies; everything is empty; there is no one home. Don’t confuse these ideas with direct understanding.

Again establish a base of attention, and then start the whole process over again.

Look again and again at what is aware. You don't see anything. Keep looking. Whenever any idea of the mind being this or that arises, look again. You don't see anything. Keep looking.

At some point, you again feel a shift and you *see* nothing.

### ***Rest***

Rest in the seeing. Practice this stage until you can rest awake and clear in seeing nothing. This stage is particularly frustrating because you keep coming back to no thing. You want to say, "Okay, I get the point," but that's not good enough. You have to keep coming back and looking until everything in you is exhausted, all the old habituations, all the desires for a definite reality, all the subtle ways you cling to a sense of self.

## ***Emptiness Is Natural Presence—Let Go of Understanding, Too***

### ***Exhaust the Experience***

Mind nature has three qualities. It is empty, clear, and unceasing. Look at each of these and their relationship with one another.

The emptiness of mind is the "being nothing there" quality. You look at mind and see nothing, so you say, "Mind is empty." What says, "Mind is empty"? Look at that.

The clarity of mind is the ability to be aware. Mind is not just blank emptiness, like the space inside a box. You are aware, so you say, "I'm aware." Look at what is aware. What is that?

Experience-awareness arises unceasingly. It is always arising, whether as the thick torpor of sleep, the brilliant awake mind of insight, the confusion of reaction, the richness of emotional and sensory experience, the intricacy of the intellect, or the quiet and peace of an evening at home. What experiences everything? Look at that.

Look at the clarity and emptiness. Are they the same or different? What about the clarity and unceasing, the emptiness and unceasing?

### ***Cut the Root***

As you practice, ideas will arise: “mind is empty” or “in emptiness nothing is harmful or helpful” or “mind is total clarity.” Look right at the idea, concept, or thought, and cut it with attention.

Cut through any concept of even the qualities of mind nature as existing in their own right. Cut through any concept that you have such and such understanding. Both tendencies reestablish the subjectobject framework and pull you back into habituation.

### ***Rest***

As before, as soon as you have cut, rest. Relax and open, allowing the quality of presence to unfold in you, as a flower unfolds in the warm rays of the sun.

### ***Natural Presence Is Natural Freedom— Rest in the Nature of Things***

This is the culmination of practice, the practice of presence—resting in the nature of things.

### ***Exhaust the Experience***

When you sit down to meditate, let everything go. Don't fall into distraction. Don't try to make anything happen. Don't try to cultivate anything. Relax and rest, vivid, awake, and open.

### ***Cut the Root***

Whenever you fall into distraction or the vivid clarity fades, relax and look directly at what experienced the disturbance. Whatever arises—whether thoughts, reactive emotions such as anger or greed, higher emotions such as equanimity or compassion, meditation experiences such as bliss, clarity, or non-thought, even visions or hallucinations—just recognize it and rest in clarity.

### ***Rest***

Rest in the state of just recognizing the nature of whatever arises. When left to itself, ordinary mind is utterly empty, vividly clear, and totally open. When left to itself, experience just arises and subsides on its own.

**Ultimate Bodhicitta Slogans**  
**From *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness***  
**By Chögyam Trungpa, Edited by Judith L. Lief, pp. 29-45**

**Slogan 2: Regard all Dharmas as Dreams.**

This slogan is an expression of compassion and openness. It means that whatever you experience in your life—pain, pleasure, happiness, sadness, grossness, refinement, sophistication, crudeness, heat, cold, or whatever—is purely memory. The actual discipline or practice of the bodhisattva tradition is to regard whatever occurs as a phantom. Nothing ever happens. But because nothing happens, everything happens. When we want to be entertained, nothing seems to happen. But in this case, although everything is just a thought in your mind, a lot of underlying percolation takes place. That “nothing happening” is the experience of openness, and that percolation is the experience of compassion.

You can experience that dreamlike quality by relating with sitting meditation practice. When you are reflecting on your breath, suddenly discursive thoughts begin to arise: you begin to see things, to hear things, and to feel things. But all those perceptions are none other than your own mental creation. In the same way, you can see that your hate for your enemy, your love for your friends, and your attitudes toward money, food, and wealth are all a part of discursive thought.

Regarding things as dreams does not mean that you become fuzzy and woolly, that everything has an edge of sleepiness about it. You might actually have a good dream, vivid and graphic. Regarding dharmas as dreams means that although you might think that things are very solid, the way you perceive them is soft and dreamlike. For instance, if you have participated in group meditation practice, your memory of your meditation cushion and the person who sat in front of you is very vivid, as is your memory of your food and the sound of the gong and the bed that you sleep in. But none of those situations is regarded as completely invincible and solid and tough. Everything is shifty.

Things have a dreamlike quality. But at the same time the production of your mind is quite vivid. If you didn't have a mind, you wouldn't be able to perceive anything at all. Because you have a mind, you perceive things. Therefore, what you perceive is a product of your mind, using your sense organs as channels for the sense perceptions.

**Slogan 3: Examine the Nature of Unborn Awareness**

Look at your basic mind, just simple awareness which is not divided into sections, the thinking process that exists within you. Just look at that, see that. Examining does not mean analyzing. It is just viewing things as they are, in the ordinary sense.

The reason our mind is known as *unborn* awareness is that we have no idea of its history. We have no idea where this mind, our crazy mind, began in the beginning. It has no shape, no color, no particular portrait or characteristics. It usually flickers on and off, off and on, all the time. Sometimes it is hibernating, sometimes it is all over the place. Look at your mind. That is a part of ultimate bodhichitta training or discipline. Our mind fluctuates constantly, back and forth, forth and back. Look at that, just *look at that!*

You could get caught up in the fascination of regarding all dharmas as dreams and perpetuate unnecessary visions and fantasies of all kinds. Therefore it is very important to get to this next slogan, “Examine the nature of unborn awareness.” When you look beyond the perceptual level alone, when you look at your own mind (which you cannot actually do, but you pretend to do), you find that there is nothing there. You begin to realize that there is nothing to hold on to. Mind is *unborn*. But at the same time, it is *awareness*, because you still perceive things. There is awareness and clarity. Therefore, you should contemplate that by seeing *who* is actually perceiving dharmas as dreams.

If you look further and further, at your mind’s root, its base, you will find that it has no color and no shape. Your mind is, basically speaking, somewhat blank. There is nothing to it. We are beginning to cultivate a kind of shunyata possibility; although in this case that possibility is quite primitive, in the sense of simplicity and workability. When we look at the root, when we try to find out why we see things, why we hear sounds, why we feel, and why we smell—if we look beyond that and beyond that—we find a kind of blankness.

That blankness is connected with mindfulness. To begin with, you are mindful of some *thing*: you are mindful of yourself, you are mindful of your atmosphere, and you are mindful of your breath. But if you look at *why* you are mindful, beyond *what* you are mindful of, you begin to find that there is no root. Everything begins to dissolve. That is the idea of examining the nature of unborn awareness.

#### **Slogan 4: Self-liberate Even the Antidote.**

Looking at our basic mind, we begin to develop a twist of logic. We say, “Well, if nothing has any root, why bother? What’s the point of doing this at all? Why don’t we just believe that there is no root behind the whole thing?” At that point the next slogan, “Self-liberate even the antidote,” is very helpful. The antidote is the realization that our

discursive thoughts have no origin. That realization helps a lot; it becomes an antidote or a helpful suggestion. But we need to go beyond that antidote. We should not hang on to the so-whatness of it, the naiveté of it.

The idea of antidote is that everything is empty, so you have nothing to care about. You have an occasional glimpse in your mind that nothing is existent. And because of the nature of that shunyata experience, whether anything great or small comes up, nothing really matters very much. It is like a backslapping joke in which everything is going to be hoo-ha, yuk-yuk-yuk. Nothing is going to matter very much, so let it go. All is shunyata, so who cares? You can murder, you can meditate, you can perform art, you can do all kinds of things—everything is meditation, whatever you do. But there is something very tricky about the whole approach. That dwelling on emptiness is a misinterpretation, called the “poison of shunyata.”

Some people say that they do not have to sit and meditate, because they always “understood.” But that is very tricky. I have been trying very hard to fight such people. I never trust them at all—unless they actually sit and practice. You cannot split hairs by saying that you might be fishing in a Rocky Mountain spring and still meditating away; you might be driving your Porsche and meditating away; you might be washing dishes (which is more legitimate in some sense) and meditating away. That may be a genuine way of doing things, but it still feels very suspicious.

Antidotes are any notion that we can do what we want and that as long as we are meditative, everything is going to be fine. The text says to self-liberate even the antidote, the seeming antidote. We may regard going to the movies every minute, every day, every evening as our meditation, or watching television, or grooming our horse, feeding our dog, taking a long walk in the woods. There are endless possibilities like that in the Occidental tradition, or for that matter in the theistic tradition.

The theistic tradition talks about meditation and contemplation as a fantastic thing to do. The popular notion of God is that he created the world: the woods were made by God, the castle ruins were created by God, and the ocean was made by God. So we could swim and meditate or we could lie on the beach made by God and have a fantastic time. Such theistic nature worship has become a problem. We have so many holiday makers, nature worshipers, so many hunters.

In Scotland, at the Samye Ling meditation center, where I was teaching, there was a very friendly neighbor from Birmingham, an industrial town, who always came up there on weekends to have a nice time. Occasionally he would drop into our meditation hall and sit with us, and he would say: “Well, it’s nice you people are meditating, but I feel much

better if I walk out in the woods with my gun and shoot animals. I feel very meditative walking through the woods and listening to the sharp, subtle sounds of animals jumping forth, and I can shoot at them. I feel I am doing something worthwhile at the same time. I can bring back venison, cook it, and feed my family. I feel good about that.”

The whole point of this slogan is that antidotes of any kind, or for that matter occupational therapies of any kind, are not regarded as appropriate things to do. We are not particularly seeking enlightenment or the simple experience of tranquillity—we are trying to get over our deception.

### **Slogan 5: Rest in the Nature of Alaya, the Essence.**

The idea of this slogan is that in the sitting practice of meditation and with an understanding of ultimate bodhichitta, you actually transcend the seven types of consciousness, and rest in the eighth consciousness, alaya. The first six types of consciousness are the sensory perceptions: [1] visual consciousness, [2] hearing consciousness, [3] smelling consciousness, [4] taste consciousness, [5] feeling or touch consciousness, and [6] mind consciousness, or the basic coordinating factor governing the other five. [Customarily: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness.] The seventh type of consciousness, [7] nuisance mind, is a kind of conglomeration which puts energy into all of that. In Tibetan it is called *nyön-yi*: *nyön* is short for *nyönmong* [*klesha* in Sanskrit], which literally means “nuisance,” “defilements,” “neurosis,” and *yi* means “mind.”

The idea of resting one’s mind in the basic alaya is to free oneself from that sevenfold mind and rest in simplicity and in clear and nondiscriminating mind. You begin to feel that sight, smell, sound, and everything else that happens is a production of home ground, or headquarters. You recognize them and then come back to headquarters, where those productions began to manifest. You just rest in the needlessness of those productions.

The idea is that there is a resting place of some kind, which could be called primitive shamatha. There is a starting point, a returning point. You can look at me and as you look at me you might check yourself—but you might check *beyond* yourself and find that some homing device is already taking place. So the idea is to rest in alaya, to be with the homing device, to rest where the orders and information come from.

This whole logic or process is based on taking it for granted that you trust yourself already, to begin with. You have some kind of relaxation with yourself. That is the idea of ultimate bodhichitta. You don’t have to run away from yourself all the time in order



to get something outside. You can just come home and relax. The idea is to return to home-sweet-home.

You try to give yourself good treatment. You do not follow fixed logic or fixed conceptual ideas of any kind, including discursive thought. Resting in the nature of alaya means going beyond the six sense consciousnesses, and even beyond the seventh consciousness, the fundamental discursive thought process which brings about the other six. The basic alaya principle goes beyond all that. Even in ordinary situations, if you actually trace back to find out where everything came from, you will find some primitive resting level. You could rest in that primitive basic existence, that existential level.

Starting from the basic alaya principle, we then develop *alaya-vijnana*, or alaya consciousness, which makes distinctions. We begin to create a separation between this and that, who and whom, what and what. That is the notion of consciousness, or we could even call it *self*-consciousness—who is on our side and who is on their side, so to speak. The basic alaya principle does not have any bias. That is why the basic alaya principle is called natural virtue. It is neutral. It is neither male nor female, therefore it is not on either side, and the question of courting is not involved. *Alaya consciousness* is biased. It is either male or female, because the courting concept is involved.

Basic wakefulness, *sugatagarbha*, is beyond alaya, but it goes along with alaya at the same time. It is pre-alaya, but it encompasses the alaya state. Alaya has basic goodness, but *sugatagarbha* has greater goodness. It is wakefulness in itself. From that point of view, even basic alaya could be said to be consciousness of some kind. Although it is not an official category of consciousness as such, it is a kind of awareness, or maybe even a kind of samsaric mind. But *sugatagarbha* is beyond that. It is indestructible—the ancestor, or parent, of alaya.

The process of perception, when you first perceive a sense object, has several components. You have the actual mechanisms which perceive things, your physical faculties such as eyes, ears, and so forth. Beyond that are the mental faculties which use those particular instruments to reflect on certain objects. If you go beyond that, there is the intention of doing that, the fascination or inquisitiveness that wants to know how to relate with those objects. And if you go back beyond that altogether, you find there is a basic experience underlying all of that, which is known as the alaya principle.

According to this text on lojong, that experience is known as basic goodness. So this slogan refers to an experience, not simply to the structural, mechanical process of projection. We could describe that process with the analogy of a film projector. We have

the screen, the phenomenal world; then we project ourselves onto that phenomenal world; and we have the film, which is the fickleness of mind, constantly changing frames. So we have a moving object projected onto the screen. That moving object is mechanically produced by the machinery of the projector which has lots of teeth to catch the film and mechanical devices to make sure that the projection is continuous—which is precisely the same situation as the sense organs. We look and we listen, therefore when we listen, we look. We connect things together by means of time, although things are shifting completely every moment. And behind the whole thing is the bulb, which projects everything onto the screen. That bulb is the cause of the whole thing. So resting in the nature of alaya is like resting in the nature of that bulb, which is behind the machinery of the film projector. Like the bulb, alaya is brilliant and shining. The bulb does not give in to the fickleness of the rest of the machine. It has no concern with how the screen is coming along or how the image is coming through.

Resting in alaya is the actual practice of ultimate bodhichitta, what happens during sitting practice. You experience ultimate bodhichitta at that level. Ultimate bodhichitta is purely the realization that phenomena cannot be regarded as solid, but at the same time they are self-luminous. In the analogy of the film projector, you have to work with the lamp. You take the lamp out of the projector—there's no monkey business with your projector—and you just screw that lamp onto your regular old-fashioned fixture and look at it. That is the self-liberating alaya.

It may be an embarrassing subject to discuss, but this book is designed for the ordinary practitioner. We are not believing in or cultivating alaya, but we are using it as a stepping stone. It would be dangerous if you cultivated it as an end in itself. In this case it is just another step in the ladder. We are talking very simply about alaya as just a clear mind, a basic clear mind. It is simplicity and clarity and nondiscursive thought—very basic alaya. It may not be completely free from all the consciousnesses, including the eighth consciousness itself, but it is the alaya of basic potentiality.

We have to be very clear on this, generally speaking. We are not trying to grasp the buddha nature immediately, at this point. This instruction on resting in alaya is given to somebody who is at the very beginning level. A lot of us have problems, we have no idea whether we are sitting or not sitting. We have struggles about that. So we are trying to work on our basic premises. It is a slowing-down process. For the first time we learn to slow down.

### **Slogan 6: In Postmeditation, Be a Child of Illusion.**

Being a child of illusion means that in the postmeditation experience there is a sense

that everything is based on creating one's basic perceptions out of one's preconceptions. If you can cut through that and inject some basic understanding or awareness, you begin to see that the games going on are not even big games but simply illusory ones. To realize that requires a lot of mindfulness and awareness working together. Here we are talking about meditation in action, actually, or postmeditation discipline.

Illusion does not mean haziness, confusion, or mirage. Being a child of illusion means that you continue what you have experienced in your sitting practice [resting in the nature of alaya] into postmeditation experience. Continuing with the analogy of the projector, during postmeditation you take the bulb out. You might not have the screen or the film at this point, but you transfer the bulb into your flashlight and carry it with you all the time.

You realize that after you finish sitting practice, you do not have to solidify phenomena. Instead, you can continue your practice and develop some kind of ongoing awareness. If things become heavy and solid, you flash mindfulness and awareness into them. In that way you begin to see that everything is pliable and workable. Your attitude is that the phenomenal world is not evil, that "they" are not going to attack you or destroy you or kill you. Everything is workable and soothing.

It is like swimming: you swim along in your phenomenal world. You can't just float, you have to swim; you have to use your limbs. That process of using your limbs is the basic stroke of mindfulness and awareness. It is the "flash" quality of it—you flash on to things. So you are swimming constantly in postmeditation. And during meditation, you just sit and rest in the nature of your alaya, very simply. That is how we could develop ultimate bodhichitta. It is very basic and ordinary. You can actually do it. That's the whole idea.

It is not abstract, you simply look at phenomena and see their padded-wall quality, if you like. That's the illusion: padded walls everywhere. You think you are just about to strike against something very sharp, while having a cup of tea, or whatever, and you find that things bounce back on you. There is not so much sharp contrast—everything is part of your mindfulness and awareness. Everything bounces back, like the ball in one of those little television Ping-Pong games. When it returns, you might throw it out again by not being a child of illusion, but it comes back again with a beep, so you become a child of illusion. It is "first thought, best thought." When you look at things, you find that they are soft and that they bounce back on you all the time. It's not particularly intellectual.

This slogan is about learning how to nurture ultimate bodhichitta in terms of

mindfulness and awareness. We have to learn how we can actually experience that things in the postmeditation situation are still workable, that there is room, lots of space. The basic idea of being a child of illusion is that we don't feel claustrophobic. After your sitting practice, you might think, "Oh boy, now I have to do the postmeditation practices." But you don't have to feel that you are closed in. Instead you can feel that you are a child of illusion, that you are dancing around and clicking with those little beeps, all the time. It is fresh and simple and very effective. The point is to treat yourself better. If you want to take a vacation from your practice, you can do so and still remain a child of illusion. Things just keep on beeping at you all the time. It's very lucid. It's almost whimsical.

Being a child of illusion is very simple. It is being willing to realize the simplicity of phenomenal play and to use that simplicity as a part of awareness and mindfulness practice. It's a very strong phrase, "child of illusion." Think about it. Try to be one. You have plenty of opportunities.