



# Shenpen Ösel

*The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings*

Volume 4, Number 3

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**B**efore meditating, before recognizing things to be as they are, one will have seen the radiance of this mind as solid external things that are sources of pleasure and pain. But through practicing meditation, and through coming to recognize things as they are, you will come to see that all of these appearances are merely the display or radiance or light of the mind which experiences them.



**U**sually we regard compassion as a state of misery, because you see the sufferings of others and you cannot do anything about it, and that makes you miserable. But the compassion that arises through the recognition or realization of mahamudra is not a state of misery; it is actually a state of great bliss.

As is said in *The Aspiration of Mahamudra*, "At the moment of kindness, emptiness arises nakedly." The compassion that arises out of mahamudra ensues upon the recognition of emptiness, but at the very moment at which compassion arises, there is also further experience of emptiness itself. In particular, because of the realization from which this compassion ensues you see exactly how beings could, can, and will be liberated. You see exactly how you could help beings and exactly how beings can come to the same realization. Therefore it is not a compassion of hopelessness; it is a compassion of great optimism.

While from one point of view we would consider compassion a type of sadness or characterized by sadness, in the case of the compassion of mahamudra, because of the tremendous confidence that your realization gives you, confidence not only in your own realization, but in the possibility of realization on the part of all beings, then compassion is also regarded as bliss.

—*Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche*

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Volume 4

Number 3

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This issue of Shenpen Ösel is devoted to a commentary on *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya* given by the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche at Loon Lake Retreat Center in British Columbia in October of 1997. Copyright © 2000 Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche.

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Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscriptions and donations are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.

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# Introduction

HAVING ACQUIRED THIS precious human existence with its freedoms and resources, and on the basis of that, having entered into the practice of buddhadharma and having received teachings on mahamudra and being able to meditate upon them, you are extraordinarily fortunate. I know that, in a sense, it sounds inappropriate for me to make this remark. It sounds as if I am saying that you are very fortunate to receive my teachings. But I have no choice but to say this, because these teachings on mahamudra are very profound, and the more you treasure and value them, and therefore the more you practice them, the more good they will do you. If you value them highly they will do you a great deal of good. If you place little value on them, then they will not do you much good. Therefore, it is my responsibility to stress, again and again, the value of mahamudra as a meditation practice, and it is my sincere hope that you will practice it a great deal.

. . . these teachings are not something that I have come up with myself. These are the teachings of all the Indian and Tibetan siddhas of our lineage, and it is in reliance upon these teachings and these practices that they attained supreme siddhi. Therefore, I am completely confident that what I am explaining to you in this context is in no way deceptive or misleading and is completely authentic and worthwhile. Therefore, please practice these teachings as much as you can.



Through receiving these instructions and practicing this meditation, some of you may have recognized this practice and [the nature of] your mind. By this I do not mean that I have any particular blessing to bestow, but that these instructions are profound. If you have recognized or you do recognize mind's nature through this practice, do not become arrogant about it; just keep on practicing, keep on meditating. It is possible that some of you are still unsure of how to rest the mind, still unsure how this actually works, and you may not have recognized your mind's nature. In such a case do not become despondent. Do not think, "Oh, I do not understand, I cannot understand, it is hopeless." Simply continue meditating and you will definitely be able to recognize your mind's nature. Even if you have not yet recognized it while receiving these instructions, you certainly can recognize it through doing the practice. It is worthwhile pursuing this, because up to now we have never entered the path that will lead to buddhahood. We have simply wandered around in samsara restlessly and pointlessly. Now you are entering the path that leads to full buddhahood, which once begun will never be lost. Depending upon your diligence, the habit of this path will increase quickly or slowly, and you will attain buddhahood quickly or slowly, but you will definitely attain it, and therefore you are very fortunate.

—*Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche*

**T**hese words of Thrangu Rinpoche were spoken during the final days of his teaching on the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's mahamudra instruction, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*. What is contained in this issue of *Shenpen Ösel* is the third and final installment

of Rinpoche's commentary, which concerns principally the teachings on insight meditation (Sanskrit: *vipashyana*, Tibetan: *hlak tong*) from the mahamudra tradition. However, it also includes a summation of the teachings Rinpoche gave in the previous installment concerning both tranquillity (Sanskrit: *shamatha*, Tibetan: *shinay*) and insight meditation from the perspective of mahamudra. What this issue does not contain are the introductory teachings on the general preliminaries to mahamudra: the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma, sometimes called the four reminders, that include the contemplations on precious human birth, death and impermanence, the karmic law of cause and effect, and the disadvantages and viciousness of samsaric existence. And it does not include the special preliminaries: the ngöndro practices of taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta (prostrations), the purification of mental and emotional obscurations of mind through the practice of Vajrasattva, the rapid accumulation of virtue through the practice of mandala, and the means of generating devotion and merging one's mind with the guru's mind and the lineages of enlightenment through the practice of guru yoga. This issue of *Shenpen Ösel* also does not include introductory instructions on meditation posture or breathing meditation. Since these practices are generally familiar to practitioners of vajrayana and have been described in numerous books, we have not included them here.

What is contained here is a remarkably extensive and detailed approach to looking at the mind, which represents the teachings on insight meditation as presented in the tradition of mahamudra. Students who have received over the course of years rather short and pithy introductions to the nature of mind, and introductions to how to look at the mind, will find in this extraordinary set of instructions systematic and comprehensive approaches to ascertaining the mind's true nature, to checking one's experience, and to refining and extending one's insight.

In order to make use of these instructions—in order for these instructions to become something other than a passing academic curiosity—one must first develop the experience of shamatha or tranquillity meditation, the essence of which, from the perspective of mahamudra, is described by Thrangu Rinpoche in the following paragraphs:

The second aspect of tranquillity meditation\* is the mental technique, which has two aspects: the basic technique and the particular techniques. The general or basic technique is as follows. First of all, our mind is utterly insubstantial and yet, at the same time, has the ability to know, to experience, and so on. Fundamentally, tranquillity meditation consists of allowing this mind that is insubstantial, and yet

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\***Editor's note:** The first aspect is the physical posture of meditation, which one can find described by Thrangu Rinpoche in *Shenpen Ösel*, Vol. 1, No. 2, on pages 11-13.

can know or experience, to relax naturally. Most of the thoughts that run through our minds are concerned with either the past or the future. We often think of the past, thinking, "I met so and so, I said such and such, I did this and that; last year I did this, last month I did that." In short, a lot of our thoughts are memories. We think a lot, as well, about the future. We plan and fantasize and think, "Next year I will do this, next month I will do that, for the rest of my life I will do such and such." Of course, we need to plan for the future, but we do not need to do so constantly. So the first part of the technique is simply not to prolong the past or beckon the future. In other words, do not think about the past and do not think about the future. Instead, simply relax in a direct experience of the present moment.

With regard to this awareness of the present moment your mind is utterly insubstantial and yet has the characteristic of clarity. "Clarity" here simply means the cognitive capacity of the mind, the fact that your mind can know, experience, feel, and so on. This awareness always occurs in the present. When we are not thinking of the past or thinking of the future, when we are letting our mind simply rest in the direct experience of the present moment, then this awareness or lucidity emerges as an unfabricated intelligence. Initially we do this very briefly, for one moment, two moments, and so on, but as we work with this, it starts to take on a momentum. However, it is important not to interfere with the naturalness of this awareness by appraising what is occurring, which means that we should not think, "Well, this is happening; that's happening; I'm aware of this, I'm aware of that." Nor should we judge what is happening by thinking, "Well, this is good; this is what's supposed to be happening," or, "This is bad; this isn't what's supposed to be happening."

On the other hand we do need to plant the watchman or watchperson of mindfulness and alertness, which means that we do need to maintain some intentional awareness of what is occurring. Here, mindfulness means a simple, direct recollection of what we are trying to do. In other words, mindfulness is recollecting that we are trying to rest in a direct experience of the present moment. Alertness then is that faculty of mind that becomes aware when we become distracted from this present experience. However, this watchfulness, this watchman, has to be very relaxed and gentle. It can't be too heavy-handed, otherwise the whole thing becomes a conceptual judgment. The technique of mind is to rest in this awareness of the present moment with a gentle watchman of mindfulness and alertness.

In addition to the general technique there are a number of particular techniques, involving a variety of supports that are appropriate to use when we find that our mind simply cannot come to rest. In particular, we use the support or aid of following the breath, which can be very helpful in tranquillity practice.

While practicing meditation, thoughts will continue to arise from time to time. Simply recognize the arising of a thought in your mind, and pay very little attention to the content of that thought. All you need to recognize is that the

thought has arisen. Whether you consider it a bad thought or a good thought is irrelevant in this context. If a thought arises that is shockingly bad, do not entertain any guilt about it, and if it is a magnificent, virtuous, heroic thought, do not become excited about it. Sometimes thoughts present themselves as special; for example, you might think of something that you believe you really need to think about, such as what you're going to do about such and such later in the day. This can be very seductive. The way to deal with these attractive thoughts is to say to yourself, "Okay, I'll think about that later because right now I'm meditating." Then simply return to the technique, having acknowledged the importance of the thought and given it an appointment for later.

If one can rest undistractedly in an awareness of the present moment, then the vipashyana instructions contained in this issue of *Shenpen Ösel*, when accompanied by the appropriate direct transmission, will not only be of great interest and great benefit but can become the one sufficient path that will lead the practitioner to the understanding, direct experience, and full realization of selflessness, the emptiness of phenomena, and the emptiness of consciousness. If one is still having difficulty resting undistractedly in an awareness of the present moment, one needs to practice shamatha until one can. If one has difficulty practicing shamatha in the rather formless way of not following after thoughts of the past or inviting thoughts about the future, then one should practice shamatha with a support. The most common support, as Rinpoche mentions, is to follow the breath. There are five additional supports for the practice of shamatha contained in this issue.

If one is still having difficulty achieving the experience of shamatha, then one needs to practice ngöndro to remove karmic obstacles to meditation; to create openness, surrender to the teachings, and proper motivation; to accumulate virtue and positive spiritual energy; and to induce the merging of one's own mind with the enlightened aspect of the guru's mind, thereby drawing into one's mental continuum the blessings of the enlightened state transmitted by the root and lineage gurus.

If one is having difficulty in motivating oneself to practice, one needs to think long and hard about the fundamental truths of samsaric existence as embodied in the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma mentioned above. These are presented in great detail in all books that give a systematic presentation of the path, such as Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* or Jamgon Kongtrul's *Torch of Certainty*. In particular, one needs to evaluate and reevaluate one's own

personal samsaric agendas in light of their inevitable consequences as illuminated by these teachings. Just as bodhicitta is the heart of dharma, these four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma are the adrenaline.

If one finds oneself so emotionally conflicted that one dislikes meditation or dislikes what one sees when one meditates, one needs to adopt a policy of meditating at first only for very short periods of time—thirty seconds, forty-five seconds, two minutes, five minutes—and one needs to evaluate one's conduct and one's relationship with others in light of the seven points of mind training as presented, for example, in Jamgon Kongtrul's *Great Path to Awakening*, and in light of the teachings of Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, sometimes rendered *Bodhicharyavatara*, in English, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* or *The Way of the Bodhisattva*.



**T**he teachings of mahamudra are the essence of all the buddhas' teachings. Together with the teachings of dzogchen they comprise what is known as the path of liberation. Traditionally these teachings are practiced in tandem with deity meditation and the various tantric yogas which comprise the stages of generation and completion of the path of means, the path of method. This was not overly difficult to do in the highly spacious and open conditions of Tibet and other Himalayan countries. But in the very busy, highly stimulated, and stressful conditions of Western life it is often difficult to find the time, the opportunity, the motivation and even the willingness to practice the path of method. Practiced without the proper foundation and preparation in shamatha and vipashyana, without proper motivation and training in the practice of bodhicitta, without a substantial accumulation of merit and wisdom, and outside of an appropriate environment, some of the advanced practices of the completion stage can actually lead to even greater stress and, as it states clearly in tantric literature, can endanger one's health and sanity.

But the teachings of mahamudra are much gentler, and their practice leads to further and further relaxation and openness, to the gradual resolution and elimination of all personal mental and emotional problems, to increasing mental clarity and intelligence, and to the general well-being and uplifting of sentient existence—and one can still get enlightened practicing them.




We would like to point out again that, since vajrayana regards the enlightened state as the path and not simply as the goal, for these teachings to be truly effective one must receive or have received some introduction to the nature of mind from the tantric tradition, whether that occurs or has occurred in a totally informal situation, in a teaching on mahamudra, or in a tantric ritual such as an empowerment. And it is important that such an introduction be received in the very presence of the lama.



Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya* was given during the course of three periods of teaching in British Columbia. The first segment was given over the course of several days in Vancouver in 1995, while the second two segments were given in two separate retreats at Loon Lake Retreat Center in May of 1996 and October of 1997, all sponsored by the Karme Kagyu Center of Vancouver.

We would like to offer our special thanks to Thrangu Rinpoche and to all the root and lineage gurus who have made it possible for these extraordinary teachings of mahamudra—teachings that our Western world had never seen before—to become part of our global cultural heritage. We would also like to thank all of the lamas, monks, nuns, and lay practitioners who support Rinpoche's efforts to spread the dharma and especially to thank the members of Karme Tekchen Chöling of Vancouver, the dharma center that sponsored and recorded these teachings. It goes without saying that we thank Lama Yeshe Gyamtso for his oral translations.

The first two installments of this teaching are available under the title *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, and may be obtained from Namu Buddha Publications, 1390 Kalmia Avenue, Boulder, CO 80304.

May there be benefit and auspiciousness! 

—Lama Tashi Namgyal



## Supplication to the Takpo Kagyus

Great Vajradhara, Tilo, Naro,  
Marpa, Mila, Lord of Dharma Gampopa,  
Knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa,  
Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages—  
Drikung, Taklung, Tsalpa—these three, glorious Drukpa and so on,  
Masters of the profound path of mahamudra,  
Incomparable protectors of beings, the Takpo Kagyu,  
I supplicate you, the Kagyu gurus.  
I hold your lineage; grant your blessings so that I will follow your example.

Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.  
To this meditator who is not attached to food and wealth,  
Who cuts the ties to this life,  
Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor and gain.

Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.  
The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral instructions.  
To this meditator who continually supplicates the guru,  
Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion is born in me.

Awareness is the body of meditation, as is taught.  
Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.  
To this meditator who rests simply without altering it,  
Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from conception.

The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.  
Nothing whatever but everything arises from it.  
To this meditator who arises in unceasing play,  
Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.

Through all my births may I not be separated from the perfect guru  
And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.  
Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhumis,  
May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.

This supplication was written by Pengar Jampal Zangpo. The last stanza is a traditional verse of aspiration.  
Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee, slightly amended by the KSOC Translation Committee.



The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

### Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## **A Remarkably Extensive and Detailed Approach to Looking at the Mind**

*At Loon Lake Retreat Center in British Columbia in October of 1997, the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave a commentary on the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa's mahamudra instruction, Pointing Out the Dharmakaya. Rinpoche gave his commentary in Tibetan; it was orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso. The following is an edited transcript.*

**I**would like to begin by thanking all of you for coming here out of your great interest in the dharma in general, and in the practice of meditation in particular, and by expressing my gratitude for your having done so.

We are going to begin by reciting the lineage supplication. The reason why we begin in this way is that according to the precursors of

the Kagyu lineage—the Kagyu forebears—the primary condition for the generation of good meditation experience is the generation of devotion. Therefore, while we are reciting the lineage supplication, please generate strong faith in and devotion for the teachers of the lineage.

The [meditation] instructions of the Kagyu tradition present basically two types of practice.

One is called the path of liberation, which is mahamudra, and the other is called the path of method or upaya, which refers to the Six Dharmas of Naropa. If you practice the mahamudra path of liberation diligently, then through that you can attain the ultimate result. If you practice the path of upaya, the Six Dharmas of Naropa, with diligence, through that as well you can attain the ultimate result. Some people combine the practice of both.

However, between these two aspects of our tradition, that on which we place primary emphasis is mahamudra, the path of liberation.

Whether one is practicing dharma—meditating or listening to dharma—it is important that one’s motivation for doing so be unlimited. While practicing and studying mahamudra, one is concerned with the practice of meditation. If in this study and practice one’s concern is for one’s own benefit alone, the result will not be complete or perfect, because the motivation is insufficient. In order to study and practice properly you need to have as your motivation the thought that in order to be able to liberate all beings you will attain buddhahood. And in order to attain buddhahood you will practice the path of meditation. “All beings” means all beings, without exception, who fill space. If with that motivation of bodhicitta you meditate or listen to the dharma, then great benefit will ensue. On the other hand, if you practice or study without the altruistic motivation of bodhicitta, then because of the limited quality or pettiness of your motivation, the practice will not function properly.

If you practice the mahamudra path of liberation diligently, then through that you can attain the ultimate result

Therefore, when you set about practicing or studying any aspect of vajrayana, such as mahamudra, or dzogchen, it is necessary that your motivation be bodhicitta.

While we generally think of bodhicitta as being an attitude of love or compassion, in fact, to be authentic bodhicitta, it must have two aspects or characteristics. The first is the aspect of compassion, which is altruism, and this altruism, which is being concerned for the benefit of others, must be unlimited, in that it must be directed to all beings equally. After all, one has had intimate family connections—as mother, father, and as children—throughout innumerable previous lives with all beings. The basic attitude of the compassion aspect of bodhicitta is that, recognizing that all beings wish to be free from the sufferings of samsara but do not know how to free

themselves from these sufferings, one must oneself protect and free them.

The second aspect or characteristic of bodhicitta is prajna or knowledge that is focused on perfect awakening. This means that your intention to free all beings is not limited to the idea of freeing them merely from their present sufferings, but from all of the sufferings of samsara. Therefore, through prajna, your wish to benefit beings is focused on bringing all beings to the state of complete awakening of buddhahood. So, whenever you practice or study mahamudra, and when you receive teachings on it, please do so with this special intention. Please think, “I am studying and practicing this in order to bring all beings to a state of complete freedom from samsara.” I am not going to be reminding you of this in the subsequent days [of this retreat] because I have spoken of it now. But please try to remember this [two-fold motivation of bodhicitta] yourselves in every session and also when you practice, because it will cause your practice and study to be of much greater benefit.

Many of you will remember that last year,

from among the teachings contained in the two sections concerned with the vipashyana\* of mahamudra in this text, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, we studied the five ways of viewing the mind. This year we come to the next section, which contains the five corresponding ways to point out or identify the mind's nature. Strictly speaking, going in sequence, we should begin right away with the five ways to point out the mind's nature. However, since I see that there are some people here who were not here last year, and since I have no doubt that many of the rest of you would like a little review, we are going to back-track a bit. I am first going to talk again briefly about the shamatha\*\* aspect of mahamudra, and then about the teachings concerned with viewing the mind from the vipashyana aspect of mahamudra. And I am going to talk about the mahamudra preliminaries, which we did not discuss very much last year.

The preliminaries to mahamudra include the usual preliminaries, which we refer to as ngöndro, and also some extraordinary preliminaries. You no doubt have all received instruction on the usual preliminaries in the traditions of Kalu Rinpoche, Trungpa Rinpoche, or His Holiness the Karmapa. And so I have nothing really to add to the instructions you have already received on those practices. I am going to

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**\*Editor's note:** All meditation can be divided into the two categories of tranquillity meditation (shamatha) and insight meditation (vipashyana). Vipashyana in turn can be divided into the vipashyana of the sutra tradition and the vipashyana of the mahamudra tradition. In the sutra tradition there are analytical vipashyana and placement meditation. In the mahamudra or tantric tradition, vipashyana is based on the direct pointing out of the nature of mind and the nature of things by a fully qualified and experienced holder of the mahamudra tradition.

**\*\*Editor's note:** For beginning teachings on shamatha and vipashyana meditation, see the teachings of Thrangu Rinpoche in *Shenpen Ösel, Vol. 1, No. 1*.

begin by talking about the four special preliminaries, which are called the four conditions.

Revulsion here is called the causal condition, because it is the fundamental condition that must be present for meditation to occur

These four special preliminaries are unique to mahamudra practice. They are unlike the ngöndro, in that they are not separate practices that need to be done separately. They are four things you need to understand and keep in mind about the environment or circumstances surrounding the practice of meditation. If you understand these four things, which are called the four conditions for practice, then you will greatly enhance your practice of both the shamatha and the vipashyana aspects of mahamudra.

The first of the four conditions is revulsion. Revulsion here is called the causal condition, because it is the fundamental condition that must be present for meditation to occur. Essentially, revulsion here means the recollection of the fact that, having been born as human beings, we must make some appropriate use of this opportunity that we possess.\*\*\* Ideally of course, we would like to completely relinquish with our mind the things of this life and this world. But that may be an unrealistic ambition. We can, however, at least lessen our fixation on and our obsession with the things of this life by recognizing that, while indeed we have mundane responsibilities that we need to fulfill, nevertheless, the practice of dharma is of the greatest importance. Through recognizing the importance of the practice of dharma and the relative unimportance of the things of this life, one begins to cultivate revulsion. In general, of

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**\*\*\*Editor's note:** Traditionally the notion of revulsion is the aversion to samsaric existence that arises with the growing perception of the inevitable sufferings of conditioned existence. When one's understanding of impermanence leads one to conclude that even the transitory happiness and pleasures of conditioned existence inevitably deteriorate and disappear—and that because of our clinging to them, this process is of the nature of suffering—then one's mind develops deep aversion to and revulsion for conditioned existence and begins to seek liberation from it.

course, one cultivates revulsion through the meditations on what are called the four common preliminaries. The rarity of obtaining the opportunities and resources of human existence, impermanence, the defects of samsara, and the results of actions. Among these four, that which is especially important in this context is the recollection of impermanence. The recollection of impermanence, which encourages one to practice to begin with, and the resulting revulsion it generates, are the causal condition, the first of the four conditions.

If, from the beginning, you can recollect impermanence easily, of course this is excellent. But when people start to meditate upon impermanence, they often find that it saddens them so much that they regard it as an unpleasant thing to think about. Nevertheless, impermanence and even the sadness that it inspires are of great benefit. According to the Buddha, there are three principal benefits to meditation on impermanence. The initial benefit is that impermanence, or the recollection of impermanence, is the condition that inspires one to practice dharma in the first place. It is through some understanding of impermanence that one is initially inspired to begin to practice, to enter the door of dharma. You might ask, "Having entered the door of dharma, does one then abandon the recollection of impermanence?" One does not, because subsequently, impermanence is that which encourages diligence. If one does not continue to recollect impermanence, then in spite of one's initial inspiration, one might lose heart, or one might lose interest in dharma. For example, people often come to me and say, "I like dharma, but I cannot make myself practice. What can I do to remedy this?" I always reply, "Meditate on impermanence!"

And finally, impermanence is said to be the companion that leads to fruition, which means that the continued recollection of impermanence during the path is what actually causes one to continue along the path and causes one to attain

the result. At best, of course, the result is the supreme siddhi, but at least, through practice, one will generate a state of contentment with the way one has lived one's life through having used it in the practice of dharma. In these ways, the recollection of impermanence is absolutely essential and is therefore called the causal condition for the practice of meditation. Therefore, continue to think about impermanence. Do not neglect the contemplation of impermanence, thinking that, because it is so depressing to think about, it is best to avoid it.

The second of the four conditions is called the principal condition. The principal condition refers to reliance upon the guru. The guru here refers to four different aspects of the guru. The first is the guru of the lineage, who is an individual or a person. The reason one needs to rely upon another person who can function as a teacher or guru, and who holds an authentic lineage, is that, whereas in the case of mundane activities there are no doubt some things that one can figure out on one's own, in the case of the samadhis of shamatha and vipashyana, which are beyond the conventions of this world, one definitely needs the authoritative instruction of an individual with experience of these things. Therefore, one needs to rely upon a personal teacher or root guru. This root guru must hold an unbroken lineage of practical experience passed from one experienced individual to another. In short, the basic instructions of meditation cannot be gained simply through reading books, or [by figuring it out by oneself, or from unqualified teachers without authentic lineage.]

However, while relying upon the root guru, the personal guru who holds the lineage, one comes also to rely upon the second guru, which is the dictates of the sugatas, or the teachings of the Buddha [and other realized beings]. While one bases one's practice upon the oral instructions of one's root guru, one augments this by studying the teachings of the Buddha, the commentaries on his teachings by the great

Impermanence  
and even the  
sadness it  
inspires are of  
great benefit

mahasiddhas, and the texts of instruction of the lineage of practice and accomplishment.

Through augmenting the oral instructions of one's guru in this way, one clarifies and reinforces them by relying upon the written teachings of other buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is therefore important to actively pursue the study of dharma texts. In this connection, people often ask, "Which of the many books that there are should we read?" You should principally study texts that talk about the practice of meditation, especially those that come from a lineage of experiential instruction and unbroken transmission of experience.

Through doing this you will both clarify the instructions that you have previously received, so that things that you may not have understood will become clear to you, and also you will remind yourself of aspects of the teachings or instructions that you may have forgotten. Therefore, the second type of guru is the dictates of the sugatas.

With regard to this type of study, which is reliance upon the second aspect of the guru, if one studies out of mere curiosity, the desire to know more and more about dharma, then this is, in general, okay, but it is not really the appropriate approach to study for a meditator. In general, the way in which a practitioner should study is to search for instructions that will remedy specific problems one is experiencing with meditation. If one's meditation is afflicted by lack of clarity, one should look for and study that which will enhance the clarity of one's meditation. If one's meditation is afflicted by lack of stability, one should look for and study that which will enhance the stability of one's meditation. If one feels that one lacks faith and devotion, one should look for and study methods that will help to generate further faith and devotion. If one

feels that one lacks adequate revulsion, one should look for and study that which will generate further revulsion. You study in order to improve your practice, not in order to acquire knowledge that you can then repeat to others, or use as a basis for debate with others. In short, if you study in order to learn more about how to practice properly, then there will be great benefit in it. That is the proper reliance upon the second aspect of the guru, which is the dictates of the sugatas.

The third aspect of the guru is the guru of dharmata or absolute truth. This is what one comes to realize through relying upon the first two aspects of the guru. Through the oral instructions of one's personal guru and the information one acquires from the guru, which are the teachings of buddhas and bodhisattvas, one comes to be able to realize the nature of things or dharmata. This nature of things, which can be realized and which is to be realized, is this third aspect of the guru. In general, it can be called dharmata, the nature of all things, or in the specific context of mahamudra, the nature of the mind itself. In any case, this which is to be realized is the third aspect of the guru, the absolute guru of dharmata.

The fourth guru is the sign guru of appearances or experiences, which is the arising of what appears to you as signs or indications of dharma. By appearances or experiences we mean, first of all, those things which appear to us as external objects—visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations—all of which are, in absolute truth, emptiness, but which nevertheless appear unimpededly as relative truths. By appearances and experiences we also mean the thoughts that arise in your mind: thoughts of pleasure and displeasure, of suffering and joy, and so on. This unimpeded

You should principally study texts that talk about the practice of meditation, especially those that come from a lineage of experiential instruction and unbroken transmission of experience

variety of internal thoughts and external appearances is what is referred to as appearances or experience. Appearances in themselves, because they demonstrate the nature of things, are always a sign or an indication of that nature, and are therefore called the sign guru of appearances. Of course, if you fixate on appearances, then these appearances become a condition that casts you further into samsara. But if you look at them in a different way, without fixation, then appearances themselves become the guru, because the impermanence of appearances is a reminder of impermanence. And the emptiness of appearances is an indication of emptiness. Appearances and their change and their variety can inspire devotion and so on. It is not the case that appearances in and of themselves teach you dharma per se; they rather demonstrate it, or embody it. Therefore, if you understand appearances, if you recognize them to be as they are, then they are always signs of dharma, signs of the illusory nature of appearances, signs of the dreamlike nature of things, and so on. Therefore, the recognition of appearances is the fourth guru, the sign guru of appearances.

The reliance upon these four aspects of the guru is the second condition, the principal condition.

The third condition is called the focal condition and refers to that on which you are focusing, to that which you are attempting to realize through your practice of meditation. It refers to the object of the shamatha and vipashyana meditations of mahamudra. Here, however, the object of meditation is not something that is produced through speculative analysis, or [through] any other kind of philosophical system, and it is completely divorced from any kind of adherence to any kind of intellectual stance or position. Here the object of meditation is the direct recognition of the nature of things, just as they are, which is therefore far superior to and very different in characteristics from the ascer-

The object of meditation is the direct recognition of the nature of things, just as they are

tainment of things through analysis. That nature of things is the focal condition, or the object of the mahamudra meditations of shamatha and vipashyana.

With regard to this focal condition, the nature of things is presented differently in the various vehicles or aspects of dharma. For example, in the common vehicle it is basically presented as selflessness, in particular the selflessness of persons, the lack of inherent existence of persons. The benefit of this presentation is obvious. Since the root of all kleshas is fixation on a personal self, then the discovery, through rigorous analysis, that there is no personal self produces some liberation from this fixation, because one has recognized that this fixation is based upon a fundamental mistake and is therefore unnecessary. For that reason then, the selflessness of persons is presented. In other contexts and other vehicles it is presented that the nature of things is the emptiness of all things without exception, and through coming to understand that emptiness, one comes to gradually free oneself from fixation, not only on this falsely imputed personal self, but also on falsely imputed external things as well. Here, however, in this uncommon or special tradition of practical instruction, we concern ourselves only with the nature of the mind. We do so, first, because the root of all of our pleasure and pain is not external things in and of themselves, but the mind that generates these attitudes or experiences. Therefore, resolution—coming to a definitive understanding—of the nature of one's mind is of foremost importance. We concern ourselves only with the nature of mind, secondly, because the nature of the mind is very easy to view and can be viewed directly by anyone. It does not need to be speculated upon or figured out through analysis. There is no need to generate expectations about what the nature of the mind is, based upon an adherence to a specific tradition, and there is no need to fabricate some kind of understanding

of the mind's nature through analysis. The nature of mind can be directly recognized. Therefore, the focal condition in this context of mahamudra is the direct recognition of the mind's nature, just as it is, without any kind of adherence to any intellectually contrived view.

The focal condition is essentially the object or concern or focus of the meditation itself, which one focuses on through the methods of both shamatha and vipashyana. Initially, one uses the shamatha technique to calm the mind to the point where its nature can be easily viewed or discerned. Then one uses the two aspects of vipashyana—viewing the mind, and identifying or pointing out the mind's nature—in order to gradually come to a decisive recognition of that nature.

The fourth condition is called the immediate or direct condition. This is the direct circumstance that is the immediate or direct cause of, or condition for, meditation. This is the absence of fixation on meditation and the contents of meditation experience, which means being without great hope for or anxiety about progress in one's meditation, the clarity of one's meditative state, and so on. It is to apply oneself in a stable way with continuous exertion to the practice of meditation without any specific hope for acquiring a certain result. It is being without the thought, "I am meditating. This meditative state is unclear. I must make it clear. Oh, this is not empty. I must somehow cause it to appear to be empty, because I expect it to be empty," and so on. Being without such fabrication, such kinds of hope and anxiety, is this fourth condition.

The attitude that one's meditation must become good and that one must have pleasant experiences will tend to corrupt one's practice of meditation. You need to take the attitude

that, if meditation experiences of whatever kind occur, that is fine; if they do not, that is also fine. If you do not take that kind of uncompromising attitude towards experiences that arise, then whenever a particularly pleasant or particularly lucid experience of meditation occurs, you will make a big deal out of it. In fact, you will, in your memory of it, exaggerate it. Therefore, fixating on this exaggerated memory of that pleasant or lucid meditation experience, naturally, in your next session, you will be disappointed, because what you are fixating on is, in fact, an exaggeration of what occurred. That disappointment will have repercussions that will gradually corrupt your practice. Therefore, in your practice you simply need to rest in the nature of whatever arises; whether your meditation experience is pleasant or unpleasant, is lucid or torpid—it makes no difference. In any case, simply observe the nature of whatever arises. That is the fourth condition, the immediate or direct condition.

In your practice you simply need to rest in the nature of whatever arises; whether your meditation experience is pleasant, or unpleasant, is lucid or torpid—it makes no difference

These four conditions are not separate meditation practices. It is not the case that you begin a session thinking, "I am now going to meditate on the focal condition," or "I am now going to meditate on the principal condition," and so on. These are things about the basic environment or circumstances of meditation practice in general, however, that need to be understood and kept in mind. Through an understanding and recollection of these four conditions, then if you lack exertion, you will develop exertion; if your meditation lacks lucidity, it will develop lucidity; if it lacks stability, it will develop stability. These four conditions are equally important for somebody beginning the practice of meditation and for someone who is already experienced with the practice of meditation. All practitioners really need to rely upon and recollect these four conditions. However, while these four conditions need to be kept in



mind, they are not separate practices that are cultivated separately from the main practice.

I am going to stop there for this morning, and, as this is the first session, I am not going to ask for questions. However, as people are always saying that it would be nice to be able to meditate in the company of the teacher, now we will give you the chance and we will meditate for a few minutes. [Students meditate.]

It has been said by all of the great teachers of the past that any practice one does needs to embody what is called the threefold excellence. The first aspect of this is the excellence in the beginning, or the excellence as a preliminary, which is the generation of bodhicitta as your intention or

These four conditions are equally important for somebody beginning the practice of meditation and for someone who is already experienced with the practice of meditation

motivation for doing the practice. The second excellence is called the excellence in between, which is maintaining a degree of nonconceptuality and being without much fixation on the contents of meditation during the entire practice. Finally, the conclusion is called the excellent conclusion, which is the dedication of all the merit or virtue of the practice to all sentient beings, which is a further extension of being without attachment to the practice itself. Therefore, in order that we conform to this format of threefold excellence, we will now dedicate the merit. While doing so please think that you give away all of the virtue you have accumulated through this session to all beings without exception. ⑤

Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## Vipashyana Must Be Grounded in Shamatha to Lead to Fruition



*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**F**ollowing the instruction in the four special preliminaries are first the instruction in shamatha and then the instruction in vipashyana. Of these two aspects of meditation, it is vipashyana that leads to the ultimate result or fruition. But for vipashyana to be both stable and lucid it must be thoroughly grounded in shamatha. The reason for this is that our minds are actually very agitated and move about a great deal. So for vipashyana to be stable, it is necessary that we initially calm our minds through the practice of shamatha. If you have received the pointing-out of vipashyana, then the subsequent practice of shamatha will only increase and stabilize the lucidity of your recognition. If you have not yet received that pointing-out, then the practice of

shamatha is essential in order to enable you to receive it in the future.

With regard to the technique of shamatha practice, most teachers have emphasized using the breath. This is a very good way to practice shamatha, because, as was said by the Buddha, “If you are afflicted by a great many thoughts, or a great deal of conceptuality, then follow the breath.” Therefore, most teachers of the theravada, mahayana and vajrayana traditions emphasize following the breath as the fundamental technique of shamatha meditation. However, in the specific context of mahamudra as presented in this specific text, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, a number of different shamatha methods are given, and I will attempt to go through these briefly this afternoon.

The first group of techniques uses the sense consciousnesses as a basis for establishing shamatha. One can use the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, or the tactile consciousness, and so on. First presented is how to use the eye consciousness. The eye consciousness, of course, is the medium through which we see form. Usually when we observe form, we generate a thought or concept on the basis of what we observe, and we become distracted. Here the technique or discipline, is to allow one’s gaze to rest on one specific form and then rest in that without becoming distracted.

There are a variety of ways one could use the eyes as the basis for shamatha meditation. Because some of them might produce more enthusiasm in the practitioner and therefore more benefit than others, six techniques are presented. The first of these uses a pebble as a support for the practice. One places a pebble on a surface in front of one and simply looks at it, or gazes at it. This does not involve analysis of the pebble’s characteristics; one does not think about the shape, size, or color of the pebble. One simply allows one’s gaze to rest on the pebble, and one remains in that state in which one is physi-

cally seeing the pebble and does not lose track of the presence of it. But one does not engage in conceptualization about it.

The second technique uses a statue or image of the Buddha as a support for the practice. This is called a pure or sacred support. In general, we use statues of the Buddha in order to inculcate faith and devotion, and here that is fine. But faith and devotion are not the most essential point of the practice. One simply uses the image of the Buddha as a support for one’s bare attention, as one did with the pebble. The superiority of this technique lies in the fact that the blessing of the Buddha’s form somehow empowers or enhances the shamatha that is developed. As in the previous technique one simply places the image in the line of one’s gaze and observes it

without losing track of its presence, but without analyzing it. While one is practicing, if one’s mind becomes torpid or agitated, there are remedies in connection with this technique that may be applied. If your mind becomes torpid then you should raise your gaze so that, rather than looking at the center of the body of the image, you are looking at the head, and in particular, at the *ushnishna* or crown protuberance. If, on the other hand, your mind

becomes agitated or excited, then you should lower your gaze to the feet or the lotus and moon seat on which the Buddha is sitting. If your mind is neither agitated nor torpid, and has a natural clarity that is not conceptual, then you can either direct your attention all at once to the whole form of the image, or to the heart in particular.

When you have gained the facility to rest your mind on the image of the Buddha, then you move on to the third technique. The difference between the first two and the third technique is that, whereas the first two supports—the mundane support of the pebble and the sacred support of the image of the Buddha—were both very solid, hard objects, now, in the third technique—

For vipashyana to be stable, it is necessary that we initially calm our minds down through the practice of shamatha

in order to gradually refine the attention based on refining the object—you use the flame of a lamp, such as a butter lamp. Of course, a flame is still form, but it is less solid, and therefore is getting closer, in a sense, to resting your mind in emptiness. In other respects however, the quality of the attention you bring to gazing at the flame is the same as in the first two techniques.

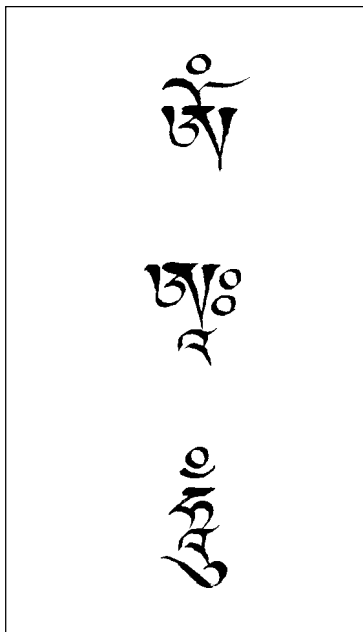
The fourth technique, which is taken up when the third is mastered, is even more subtle, because here you look at a space. The particular type of space that you look at is a hole or an aperture, as the hole in a wall, or in a piece of paper, or something like that. The hole should not be larger than the palm of your hand and can be any convenient amount smaller than that. In any case, you direct your attention to the space in the aperture, and not to the material surrounding it.

Once you have practiced the fourth technique, then you move on to the fifth, which uses the three syllables, OM AH HUM, which represent or embody, the body, speech, and mind respectively of all buddhas and bodhisattvas. You begin by actually having in front of you a written or drawn white syllable OM, which represents the body of all buddhas and bodhisattvas; a red AH, which represents their speech; and a blue HUM, which represents their mind. Once you have gained facility in resting your mind on this actually present image, then you dispense with the physical support and visualize the three syllables, resting your mind on that visualization.

Once you have mastered that, then you move on to the sixth technique in which, instead of visualizing the three syllables, you simply visualize three spheres of light of those corresponding colors: a white sphere of light, which represents the body of all buddhas and bodhisattvas; a red sphere, which represents their speech; and a blue sphere, which represents their mind.\*

Again, you can begin by drawing a depiction of this and once your mind is able to rest on that, then you can simply visualize them. All of these six techniques are basically working with visually perceived form, and therefore, with the eye consciousness.

In all six techniques, you maintain a bare attention directed at the object so that you remain with a bare awareness of it, from which you never depart. As for the use of these six techniques, while there is a gradual refinement observable in their sequence, it is not necessarily the case that any one practitioner needs to practice all six. You can use any of these techniques, or any number among them, as you see fit. In any case, when using such a support, whichever one it is, you should not conceptualize or evaluate the support. You should not speculate upon its substantiality or insubstantiality, and so on. As begin-



ners, of course, we are still prey to hope and anxiety with regard to the results and quality of meditation. So, you should not allow yourself to get involved in the thought, “I need good meditation, I must have good meditation,” or the thought, “I am afraid that such and such defects may arise in my meditation.” Simply relax in an undistracted, bare mindfulness that is conjoined with alertness, based upon the use of the particular support, whichever one it is.

Although in these six techniques you are using the visual consciousness and, therefore, the eyes, you should not attempt to focus your eyes too harshly or tightly upon the support. If you do, you may start to have visual hallucinations, such as the visual support’s seeming to shake, and your eyes may come to hurt. If these things start to happen, then you should stop and

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\***Editor’s note:** As with the syllables, these three spheres of light are meant to be visualized simultaneously directly in front of one, one below the other, with the white sphere on top.

learn to use the eyes in a much more relaxed way. In fact, not only the eyes but also the mind should be allowed to come to rest on the object in a very relaxed way.

The most common defect that arises when using this type of technique is torpor or mental obscurity. One should not allow these defects to continue uncorrected. As soon as you recognize the presence of torpor or mental obscurity, you should make efforts to introduce more clarity into the meditative state. That concludes the presentation of the first technique, which uses the eye consciousness.

Following this presentation are four similar techniques which make use of the other four sense consciousnesses. You can use the ear consciousness, the smell consciousness, the taste or tongue consciousness, and the tactile or physical consciousness. For example, using the ear consciousness, you simply direct your attention, not to what you see, but to what you hear. You may or may not be hearing something in particular, but by directing your attention to what you hear, you become aware of sound in general, and you rest your mind on that. In the same way, you can use the nose or olfactory consciousness, and simply direct your attention to what you are smelling. You may be smelling something pleasant or unpleasant, or a mixture of the two, or you may not be aware of smelling anything in particular. But in the same way, by directing your attention to this you become aware of smell in general. Then you can direct your attention to the tongue and in the same way become aware of tastes, and to the body in general, and in that way become aware of tactile sensations. In all of these four techniques you rest your mind on these particular sensations just as you did with the visual forms in the first technique.

It often happens when you rest your mind

using a specific technique of shamatha, that a thought arises and pulls your attention away from the technique, or distracts you from it. When thoughts arise, then do not get involved with the content of the thought. Do not attempt to appraise the thought as a worthy or unworthy thought, but, being aware of the arising of the thought, simply return to resting your mind using the particular technique.

**W**hat we have just discussed concerns the actual meditation practice of shamatha. Next comes the presentation of post-meditation practice. The principal problem that is addressed in the discussion of post-meditation is that we might tend to regard a meditation as a time of hard work and post-meditation as a time of relaxation or vacation. The problem with that attitude is that we then try to relax so much in the post-meditation that our minds become sloppy and, therefore, we lose the benefit of the meditation session. The remedy for this is to maintain an undistracted mindfulness that is appropriate to post-meditation activities, that is therefore distinct from the mindfulness of the meditation session, but that is nevertheless maintained and therefore brings post-meditation into the practice of meditation. Specifically, when one is practicing shamatha, one has to be careful in one's conduct of body, speech, and mind in order not to become so agitated that one loses the shamatha meditative state.

The principal problem that is addressed in the discussion of post-meditation is that we might tend to regard meditation as a time of hard work and post-meditation as a time of relaxation or vacation

For example, with your body you should be careful with the use of your eyes and not gaze off in a distracted way into the distance, but look precisely, look close to yourself, even look at the point of the nose if necessary, and in that way remain mindful. Move slowly and decisively, be careful in all your movements. And also with your speech, be careful about what you say and

do not rush into speaking carelessly, or speaking too fast and endlessly. And also with your mind, in post-meditation you need to be careful with the thoughts that arise. You should not allow coarse thoughts to take control of the mind, so therefore, you should not give in to coarse and wild thoughts, but try to maintain a relaxed state of mind in which, at least to some extent, the process of thinking is slowed down, or cooled down.

All of these techniques, called the external placement of the mind, use some external support or perception as a basis for the mind's coming to rest. Presented next is the internal placement of the mind, which is principally concerned with specific remedies for the two defects of torpor and excitement. First of all, the basis for any remedy for torpor and excitement to be applied is the maintenance of a degree of mindfulness and alertness that will enable you to detect the presence of either of these defects. A shamatha practitioner needs constantly to maintain a kind of tough clarity of mindfulness and alertness, so that no matter what arises in the mind, it will be recognized. Then on the basis of that, one can apply the remedies.

Excitement really consists of two varieties, but in either case, excitement is the presence of thoughts that are of sufficient coarseness or force to disturb or unseat your meditation and thereby distract you from the technique. Excitement can be excitement per se—which is a thought that is basically pleasurable or pleasant—or it can be agitation, which is a thought that is basically unpleasant and disturbing. Torpor is an absence of clarity in the mind. The internal placement of the mind consists of using the appropriate remedies for these two defects of excitement and torpor.\*

A further aspect of meditation, beyond the

external and internal placement of the mind, is called placement of the mind without support whatsoever. This refers to using the elements and the dissolution of the elements, one into another, as a basis for the mind's coming to rest. This technique involves visualizing the elements in their essential form. So, earth is visualized as a square—not an entirely flat square, but not really a cube, a square, with some thickness—of yellow light. Then, behind that you visualize water in the form of a disk, again with some thickness, of white light. Behind that, fire in the form of a triangle of red light, pointing downwards. Behind that, wind or air, in the form of a semi-circle of green light [with the flat side up], and behind that, space, as a tetrahedron of blue light. This is like an upside down three-sided pyramid. Following that, you then visualize that they dissolve one into another. Having clearly visualized these, you think that then the earth dissolves into the water, the water dissolves into the fire, the fire dissolves into the air, the air dissolves into the space, and the space subsides into emptiness.

When you use this technique, then eventually your mind will come to rest in a state without thought, and then you maintain that state, using an appropriate

degree of force to your mindfulness and alertness. Sometimes your mindfulness will need to be quite relaxed and at other times quite exerted. When it is relaxed, the mindfulness needs to be just bare enough attention so that you do not become distracted, so that you do not forget. When your mind is afflicted by either the tendency toward torpor or the tendency toward excitement, then you need to increase the exertion or power of your mindfulness. You need to exert the amount of force or energy of mindful-

A shamatha practitioner needs constantly to maintain a kind of tough clarity of mindfulness and alertness so that no matter what arises in the mind, it will be recognized

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\***Editor's note:** See *Shenpen Ösel*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pages 18-20.

ness necessary to keep yourself from becoming distracted by either torpor or excitement. It is taught that, in fact, no thought will arise in your mind at this point until you become distracted.

So, when a thought arises, that is the beginning of distraction.

However, if when a thought arises, you do not become involved in the content of the thought—which means neither following the thought, nor examining the thought, nor evaluating whether it is a good or bad thought, and so on—but merely recognize the arising of the thought, then the thought itself becomes the next object of your attention in this technique. In that way, you practice the technique that is called resting the mind on emptiness.

The next technique of shamatha given here is resting the mind on the breath, but this is different from the common technique of resting the mind on the breath, because here it uses the specific approach to breathing that is called vase breathing. Here, however, vase breathing is somewhat different from the way it is practiced when you are doing *chandali*, or *tummo*, practice. Here it begins with the dispelling of the stale air, which is done in a nine-fold sequence. First of all, you block one of your nostrils with the hand on that side. So for example, you could block your left nostril with your left hand, or your right nostril with your right hand; it does not matter which. Then, through the other nostril that is left open, you exhale the stale air three times. The first time you exhale very, very gently; the second time somewhat more vigorously; and the third time quite forcefully. Then you repeat the same process of three-fold exhalation on the other side. So, if you began by blocking the left nostril when breathing out through the right, then, during the second set of breaths, you block the right nostril and again breathe out three times, first very gently, then more vigorously and

When your mind is afflicted by either the tendency toward torpor or the tendency toward excitement, then you need to increase the exertion or power of your mindfulness

finally forcefully through the left nostril. Having done six exhalations, you then place your hands on top of your knees and you breathe out this time through both nostrils, again gently the first time, vigorously the second, and forcefully the third.

The difference between this process of nine-fold exhalation and the way it is practiced as a preliminary for *chandali* is that in this case as you do it you simply block off the nostrils any way that is comfortable or convenient. Whereas if you are doing it as part of the *chandali* or *tummo* practice, then there are elaborate gestures, such as lotus wheels and so forth, which accompany all of this.

Following those nine exhalations, when you breathe in the next time, you do so particularly slowly and gently, and as you breathe the air in you think that you are bringing it in and down to below the navel. Then you actually press it down gently so that the air that you breathe is all contained as low down in your body as possible, thinking that it is below the navel, and you rest your mind on that part of the body below the navel where the wind is felt to be held. You conceive of this as an empty space that is now filled with this air or wind you have breathed in. You hold the breath for a short time and when it becomes uncomfortable, then you breathe out, and so forth. You should not attempt to hold the breath in this way when you are particularly full, or your stomach is particularly empty. This technique is especially advised for the early morning; it is supposed to be very beneficial. The most important thing about this technique is that the wind not be held or retained in the upper chest. When you have breathed in and are holding the breath by pushing it down into the lower part of your body, then it becomes a basis, not only for the mind naturally coming to rest, but also the holding of the breath will not cause

any negative side effects physically.\*

When one is practicing shamatha in these ways, for some people it happens relatively quickly that their minds come to rest, for other people it takes a long time and seems to be very difficult. If the latter is the case, do not become discouraged at how long it takes to develop a state of stable shamatha. In most cases, the initial experience that one has of one's mind starting to come to rest is what is called the waterfall experience, where it actually seems to the practitioner that there are more thoughts than before. One's thoughts seem to flow through one's mind with the speed and agitation of water flowing over a waterfall. In fact, it is not true that there are more thoughts than there were before. What is happening is that for the first time you are starting to recognize how many thoughts are arising in your mind all the time. Previously, when you had not practiced meditation, you were not aware of this, so there seemed in fact to be fewer thoughts running through your mind. Because this is the beginning of recognition and stability, it is considered to be a good experience and should not cause you to be discouraged, although it is, of course, the experience of a beginner.

If you continue, then gradually this waterfall-like experience will become an experience of the presence or movement of thoughts in your mind that is like a slowly flowing river. In the end, one experiences stable tranquillity which is like a still ocean without waves.\*\*

As one passes gradually through these various shamatha experiences, there are three

In most cases, the initial experience that one has of one's mind starting to come to rest is what is called the waterfall experience, where it actually seems to the practitioner that there are more thoughts than before

approaches one needs to integrate or use as appropriate in order to progress. These are tension, relaxation, and reversal. The first of these is tension, and tension here means to

tighten both your body and your mind so that you produce a sensitivity in your attention or awareness that will prevent you from becoming distracted. This technique of tightening up your body and your mind should be practiced for very short intervals.

The second technique, which is sometimes used in alternation with the first, is relaxation. In this technique you consciously relax both your body and your mind and allow your mind to come to rest naturally on the object of meditation. However, here too you still need the faculty of alertness, so therefore, as was said, you plant the watchperson of mindfulness; you establish the faculty of mindfulness such that even though you are relaxed and are relaxing the mind, you do not become distracted. This second technique, relaxation, should be practiced for somewhat longer sessions or intervals than the first.

The third technique is reversal. Reversal is to take an approach that is the opposite of one's usual one. In the context of the mahamudra practice of working with thought, normally, of course, we want somehow to avoid the arising of thoughts and therefore we are constantly trying to pacify thoughts, and we are always hoping for a state in which there will be no thought. The technique of reversal is to reverse the process. Instead of attempting to stop thoughts, you almost want to instigate thoughts. You take great delight in the arising of thoughts and allow yourself to become very disappointed when

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\***Editor's note:** This technique should not be practiced without the guidance of a qualified instructor who has practiced this technique successfully him or herself.

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\*\***Editor's note:** Sometimes these stages are enumerated as four: waterfall, fast moving river in a narrow ravine, slowly flowing river, still ocean without waves.



thoughts do not arise. You maintain the degree of mindfulness and alertness necessary to recognize the arising of thoughts, but when thoughts arise you take delight in them. You think, the more the better, and when they do not arise you experience some disappointment. Ironically, this will cause thoughts not to arise and will allow you to arrest your mind in a very natural and relaxed way.

Next in the text, the distinction is made between the near experience of stillness in the mind and the actual development of the state of shamatha. It is possible from time to time, of course, that one's mind will simply, for whatever reason or under whatever circumstance, be at rest. This is similar to the state of shamatha, but is not itself the achievement of stable shamatha. The state of shamatha that one is attempting to achieve through practice is one in which, while there are no thoughts arising in the mind, nevertheless there is unimpeded lucidity or clarity of the mind's cognitive capacity. In that state, the mind is so relaxed that the placement of one's mind on any chosen object is easy and very, very workable. That kind of state, which can definitely be attained but does have to be cultivated, and which specifically has the characteristic of clarity, is really what is meant by shamatha.

I am going to stop here and if you have any questions please ask them.

**Question:** In the practice of contemplating the three syllables, or later, the three spheres, are they to be visualized simultaneously, or consecutively? And a question just for the translator, could you repeat the elements, shapes, and colors slowly?

The state of shamatha that one is attempting to achieve through practice is one in which, while there are no thoughts arising in the mind, nevertheless there is unimpeded lucidity or clarity of the mind's cognitive capacity

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** With regard to the first question, if you cannot visualize them all at once, then [in the beginning] you can visualize them one at a time. The basic idea of the technique is that you visualize the white OM, and below that a red AH, and below that a blue HUNG. In the case of the spheres, the white one, and below that the red one, and below that the blue one—all at the same time.

**Translator:** Earth is a yellow square, water is a white circle, fire is a red triangle, wind is a green semi-circle, and space is a blue tetrahedron. I am sorry, I do not know any other word for tetrahedron, other than tetrahedron. It is a three-sided pyramid, which is upside down with the point facing downward. The shapes get bigger, so space is the biggest, and wind is slightly smaller, fire smaller than that, and so, the smallest would be earth. In this context, they are not visualized stacked one on top of the other; they are visualized one behind the other, so that you are looking at earth and then that dissolves into water etc. Earth is the smallest and space is the

biggest. Aside from their proportional increase in size, from earth up to space, there are no specific dimensions given to them. So, you can visualize them as any size you wish. You start out with all five and then when earth dissolves into water, you only have four, and so on.

**Question:** Rinpoche, we cultivate shamatha in our formal practice, but is it consistent with daily activity as well? I am not sure whether or not you are talking about mahamudra as something we can work with in our daily lives. Is that something we can do in the chaos, in all the things we have to deal with on an ordinary

working basis?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** You can, in the sense of not entirely losing the momentum of mindfulness and alertness that is established in meditation sessions, which consists of simply not letting your mind be completely overpowered by whatever is happening; not just letting your mind run wild. Post-meditation, of course, is not true shamatha meditation, as a session of meditation can be, but there is a continuity or a momentum of the mindfulness and alertness which is cultivated in shamatha meditation.

**Question:** Rinpoche, my question concerns all these techniques of shamatha. Should we master all of them? Should you find one that works great and stick with that? At what point do you move on? Is it good to know them all, etc.?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** There is no strict requirement of either inclusiveness or sequence in your use of these techniques. In fact, this is made clear in the commentary itself. The idea of giving a variety of techniques is that through regularly using one technique of shamatha it is possible that your mind can become stale, in which case it may be appropriate to introduce another technique in order to refresh the mind. But there is

no strict sequence about the order in which you use these techniques in that way, nor how much of a given technique you should use until you use another one, and so on. The deciding factor is how the technique affects your mind. It is possible that one or more of these techniques will be more beneficial for you in your own experience than the others, in which case you should concentrate on the ones that work the best.

**Question:** Rinpoche, could you say a little bit more about the first of the three approaches—the one that's referred to as tension. What is meant by tightening awareness and body?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Tension in this context means, with regard to the body, that you actually tighten your muscles, you actually exert some vigor so that your body becomes tight.\* And while you are doing that you toughen or tighten your attitude. You strengthen the resolve not to become distracted

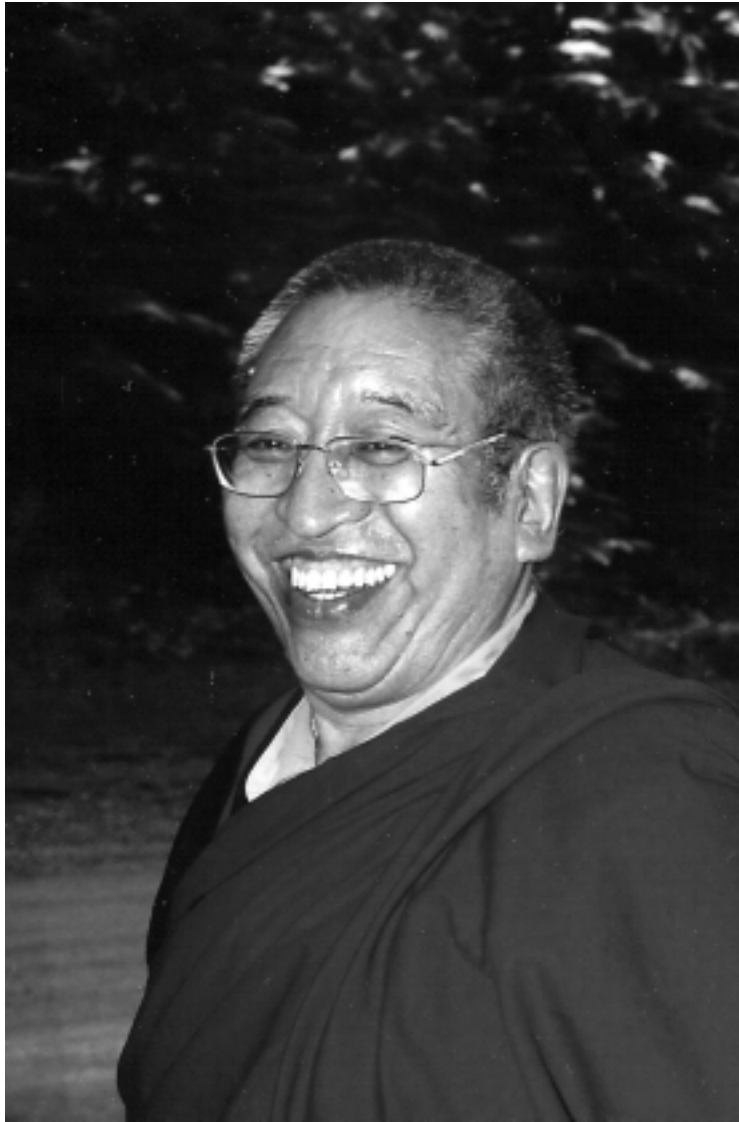
no matter what happens. And then alternatively, relaxation consists of a corresponding relaxation of the muscles, and so on of the body, and allowing the mind to rest naturally on the technique, rather than through the force of your intention.

So now we can dedicate the merit. 

It is possible that one or more of these techniques will be more beneficial for you in your own experience than the others, in which case you should concentrate on the ones that work the best

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\***Editor's note:** It is quite useful, for instance, to tighten your muscles by using force to straighten your posture.



Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## Vipashyana Leads to Freedom From Kleshas and Attainment of Supreme Siddhi

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**T**oday I am going to start to talk about vipashyana. It is important to remember, however, that until someone has gained a state of stable shamatha, it is necessary to continue to emphasize the development of shamatha as the basis for vipashyana realization. Even after you have developed a stable attainment of shamatha, it is necessary to maintain the continuity of that shamatha state as a basis for the practice of vipashyana. Vipashyana is the path that leads to the recognition of the mind's nature and, therefore, to freedom from the kleshas and to the attainment of supreme siddhi. Nevertheless, vipashyana, practiced in the

absence of shamatha, is not very powerful.

In general, the practice of buddhadharma always has three aspects: view, meditation, and conduct.\* The first of these, view, is very important, because it is the ground or basis of practice. There are two types of view. One is the view that comes from learning, contemplation, and study. This view is gained by thinking about the nature of things and attempting to come to an approximate understanding of it through analysis. This type of view is very hard to apply in meditation practice. The other type of view, which is characteristic of the vajrayana, is called the view of direct experience, because it is the view that is generated through the prajna of meditation that, arising as meditation experience, is able to recognize directly the [true] nature.

The view with which we are concerned here is not the conceptual view, but the view that comes through direct experience. In the training in this view, which is the focus of vipashyana, there are two aspects: viewing or looking at the mind, and a corresponding introduction to or pointing-out of the nature of mind. Each of these has five sections. Last year we went through the five ways of looking at the mind, but we should review them again briefly this year.

The first of the five ways of looking at the mind is looking at the mind within stillness, which begins with the practice of shamatha. Through the practice of shamatha you come to experience the cessation of coarse thoughts and a peaceful and calm state of mind. The practice of looking at the mind within stillness consists of looking at the nature of that experience of stillness or shamatha.

The first prerequisite for this technique is taking a physical posture appropriate for the meditation, which is usually the meditation

## The first of the five ways of looking at the mind is looking at the mind within stillness

posture known as the seven dharmas of Vairocana.\*\* In the specific context of vipashyana, the gaze is particularly important. Here the gaze is not the same as the usual gaze for shamatha, which is lowered. Here the gaze is somewhat upraised. You look straight forward, but slightly upward, neither looking to the left nor to the right. Then, taking that posture and adopting that gaze, you relax your mind into the state of shamatha, retaining the faculties of mindfulness and alertness so that you are not overpowered by thoughts. Allowing your mind to relax and rest naturally in shamatha in this way, you are then free from the defects of torpor and excitement. Because you are not distracted by the presence of thoughts, your mind is not scattered, distracted, or excited. Although your mind is at peace there is no blankness or obscurity to it. Your mind is not torpid or sunken. In order to maintain that state of shamatha, in which your mind is neither torpid nor agitated, you need to maintain some degree of mindfulness.

When your mind is at rest in that way, you will have an experience of what it is like when your mind is in a state of tranquillity. There will be an actual experience of that tranquillity. Within that experience, try to see or look directly at the nature of that mind which is generating that tranquillity or stillness. Now here, looking at or viewing the mind's nature does not mean thinking about it or attempting to analyze it, or attempting to speculate about what it might be. It does not mean entertaining questions such as, "What is the nature of mind like?" It does not mean attempting to tell yourself what it should be like. You should not, in this practice, generate the idea that there is nothing to see, and that therefore the mind must be utterly insubstantial, and so on. In the context of this practice you are simply trying to directly

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\***Editor's note:** What is here being translated as "conduct," in many of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings and translations is translated as "action."

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\*\***Editor's note:** See *Shenpen Ösel, Vol. 1, No. 2*, pages 11-13 for detailed instruction on *The Seven Dharmas of Vairocana*.

experience your mind as it is without the overlay of conceptual expectations or ideas.

With regard to our experience, in the traditional vocabulary of dharma we would call what we experience a relative truth, produced through interdependence, and we would call the nature itself an absolute truth. In our ordinary experience of the mind, it seems to us that the mind does exist. We have a distinct experience of stillness, and therefore we tend to think that stillness exists as a state. And when the mind is not still, but is agitated and thoughts are arising, we tend to think that thoughts—since we seem to experience them—actually do exist. This is so because, not having looked at the mind, we are generating assumptions based upon what seems to be the case in our experience. There is a certain validity to the evidence of experience, because we do experience whatever we do experience. Nevertheless, the state of stillness that we experience in shamatha is produced by the causes and conditions of our cultivation of shamatha itself. In order to determine, however, what the true nature of that state is, we need to look at that which is still, at that which is at rest, which is to say, at our mind. When you look at that which is still or at rest—does it have a form or not? That is to say, does it have substantial characteristics or not? If it has a form, then it must have some kind of shape. If it has a shape, what shape does it have? If it does not have a form and therefore has no shape, what characteristics does it have? Now, do not say that you cannot see it or cannot detect it, because after all this is just your mind. It is right there. If it has a form, if it has a shape, if it has any substantial characteristic, you will see it.

We experience something. Therefore, if there is something, something must have started it at some point. And it must abide somehow and somewhere, and, if it comes to an end, it must

come to an end in some particular way, in some particular place. Well then, since you have an experience of your mind, which seems to be something, look to see: Does the mind start anywhere? Does it abide anywhere? Does it end anywhere? If the mind starts somewhere, then where does it start? How does it start? By mind here, we mean what you can call mind or thought. So when we are talking about the starting of mind we mean the arising of thought. We have the experience of the presence of thoughts. Well, at a certain point these thoughts come into presence or arise. How do they arise?

Does the mind start anywhere?  
Does it abide anywhere? Does it end anywhere?  
If the mind starts somewhere, then where does it start? How does it start?

Do they arise somewhere? And what do they arise from? And then while thoughts are present, while they abide, where do they abide? How do they abide? What does it mean that they abide? When thoughts disappear, do they actually end or cease? If so, where and how? What exactly does this disappearance of thoughts consist of? In particular, when you are looking at the mind you can look at it both in a state of stillness or rest, and in the presence or emergence of thoughts. In both cases you look for, and see if you can see, an origin, a location, and a destination. For example, when

the mind is still or at rest, is it inside or outside of your body? What is it like? And when thoughts arise, do they arise inside your body and, if so, where? Or do they arise outside your body and, if so, where? And exactly what is it that arises when we say, thoughts arise?

If you keep on looking at your mind in this way, without being satisfied by a mere idea or estimation of how you think the mind is, if you keep on looking at it until you have a decisive and direct experience of it, that is the first part of looking at the mind within stillness.

The second part, still within the same section, is, when the mind is within stillness, look directly at it and see if it has any kind of substantial characteristics whatsoever, such as

location, such as shape,\* and so forth.

People can have different kinds of experiences when they are looking at the mind. Some people have the kind of experience where they think that there is nothing there whatsoever, where the mind in a state of stillness is like the horns of a rabbit. It does not exist anywhere, neither inside nor outside the body, and therefore it has no substantial characteristics: no color, no shape, no location, and so on. You should look to see if this really is what you experience. That looking to see if you find nothing whatsoever is the third question.

The fourth question or the fourth way of looking is concerned with another type of experience that people sometimes have, which is that, when they are practicing shamatha, and within that shamatha, when they are looking at the mind that is still or at rest, they look for it and they do not have the experience of there being nothing whatsoever. The fact that there is a state of cognitive lucidity or mere clarity that is definitely present in the sense that there is a capacity to know, but that, on the other hand, cannot be said to be something or nothing, should cause you to look to see if that is what you experience.

While in the experience described in the fourth way of looking there is a predominance of cognitive lucidity, here, in the fifth way of looking, you actually experience an absence of any kind of conceptually classifiable things, such as anything good or bad, or even the presence or absence of clarity. In fact, you experience an absence of awareness altogether. What you experience is an obscurity, somewhat like darkness, except that it is not a visual experience, but an experience of utter bewilderment. You should look to see if this is what you experience.

The sixth way of looking is that some people,

A conceptual understanding of these ideas is good, not bad, but it is called a dry understanding because it cannot grow into or lead to any result

when they are looking at their mind in this way, experience the presence of something definite, something that they can see and clearly detect. You should look to see if you experience that.

The seventh question is concerned with yet another type of experience that you might have when looking at the mind, which is an instance of what Gampopa called, “confusing understanding and experience.” This is a situation in which, while you are meditating, the ideas you have absorbed about the mind in your study arise as thoughts, and you confuse these ideas or concepts with *experience* of the mind. For example, you might have heard that the mind transcends existence and nonexistence, and so on, and that arises in your mind and you think that that conceptual understanding is an actual experience. The conceptual

understanding of these ideas is good, not bad, but it is called a dry understanding, because it cannot grow into or lead to any result. Such a dry understanding cannot produce the increasing of experience, cannot produce the attainment of wisdom or the eradication of the kleshas.

A related situation is when you have absorbed various ideas and terminology of dharma, such as the exalted notion of emptiness, and so on, and you use these concepts to fabricate experience, when you try to talk yourself into the experience of the mind as emptiness, or as lucidity,\*\* or as the unity of lucidity and emptiness, or as inexpressible, and so on, which are all things which you have heard or learned. But even though you may convince yourself that you have experienced things you have not, and then may recount these experiences to others in exalted technical jargon, this will be of no ben-

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\*\*Editor's note: Lucidity, clarity, cognitive clarity, cognitive capacity, and luminosity are used as interchangeable translations of *selwa* in this text.

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\*Editor's note: size, color, etc.

efit to you or to others, and will really only deceive you. Rather than doing that, you should simply look directly at the mind and see it as it is without any kind of presupposition based upon learning.

The essence of buddhadharma, the special feature of the Buddha's teaching, which is particularly emphasized in the common vehicle\* but runs through all his teachings, is the selflessness of persons. As is taught, it is through the recognition of the selflessness of persons that one can attain the state of an arhat or arhati.\*\* Therefore, this remains the essence of our meditation practice. With regard to the basis on which we impute the existence of this supposed but spurious self of persons, while sometimes it is our bodies, more commonly or usually it is our mind. We impute the existence of a self of persons on the basis of our misperception of the mind as being real and substantial, and therefore, fit to be regarded as a self. But when you do this practice and look at the mind, even though we may have the habit of regarding the mind as substantial, you will see that the mind is without any substantial characteristics whatsoever, which means that, through recognizing the insubstantiality of the basis for the imputation of the self of persons, you therefore recognize the selflessness of persons automatically.

Although we regard the realization of the selflessness of persons as something particularly exalted and therefore difficult to achieve, in fact, if you look directly at your mind and see its nature, you will realize this selflessness. This is not a matter of trying to convince yourself that

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\***Editor's note:** The teachings carried in the Pali Canon which are relied upon by the theravadan school, referred to from the perspective of the mahayana and vajrayana schools as the teachings of the hinayana.

\*\***Editor's note:** One who, according to the hinayana teachings, has attained individual salvation or individual liberation from suffering.

there is no self in the mind. It is simply a matter of looking. And when you look, you will see that there is no mind, and that therefore there is no self that could be imputed on the basis of the mind.

In the specific context of the mahayana, both in the mahayana sutras in general and, in particular, in the prajnaparamita sutras, the Buddha principally taught that all dharmas, all things without exception, are empty. We normally determine this emptiness of all things

through the reasonings of the madhyamaka school, through which we can come to a conceptual understanding that everything is emptiness. But this understanding is really just a thought or an idea that we come upon at the end of a period of analysis. It is still not a direct experience of emptiness at all. In contrast, the instruction of the siddhas of the past has been simply to look directly at your mind. While we tend to think that the mind exists and is something

When you look,  
you will see that  
there is no mind,  
and that  
therefore there is  
no self that could  
be imputed on  
the basis of mind

substantial, when you look at it, you discover it is nowhere inside or outside your body, or anywhere in between. By simply looking directly at your mind without any kind of presuppositions, you will discover emptiness as the mind's nature, and discovering it directly in that way, not having to look at things outside of yourself, not having to resort to analysis or logical reasoning, you will wonder, "Why have I not realized this before?"

Through meditation, when you look directly at the mind's nature, you can come to have direct experience of the mind's nature, which is, in a sense, easy. But in order to do this, you need to avoid what is called, "sewing on the patch of concepts," which is the attempt to control or alter what you are experiencing in your meditation through the application of various concepts such as emptiness, and so forth. You might say that the mind must be empty, so I am going to discover emptiness, or it must be lucid, so I am

going to discover cognitive lucidity, and so on. In general, of course, these ideas are not bad, but they are not appropriate in the context of meditation, simply because they do not lead to realization, since they themselves are divorced from direct experience. Far more profitable is to look directly at the mind without any kind of ideas about it, within the state of stillness produced by shamatha practice. In that way, viewing the mind directly, you have no need to imagine anything about it or to fabricate any kind of state or experience. You have no need to pretend that that which does not seem empty to you is empty, that that which does not seem clear to you is clear, or that that which does not seem to be a union of lucidity and emptiness is such a union. In short, if you look directly at the mind, you will experience its nature directly without conceptual overlay.

Some people are discouraged when, contrary to their expectation, they initially have no decisive determination of the mind's nature. But when you are looking at the mind directly, you are seeing its nature, which you can call emptiness or selflessness or whatever. You simply need to keep on looking at it. There is nothing else that needs to be done. It is best to look at it, and then, when your mind starts to become fatigued, to rest, and then to go back to looking at the mind and then to rest, and so on. If you keep on looking in this way until you actually gain a decisive and direct experience of the mind's nature, you will gain it. In short, avoid the situation of becoming discouraged—thinking, “I will never be able to recognize this”—and avoid the situation of attempting to fabricate experience through the application of concepts and theories, and continue to look directly at the mind very simply and without presuppositions. Then protect that experience by simply allowing whatever experience arises to continue. This way of looking at the mind, or viewing the mind

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kind of state or  
experience

directly without concepts, is called the direct view, or the view of direct experience. I am going to stop here for this morning. If you have any questions you are welcome to ask them.

**Question:** Rinpoche, those who watch the forest in the summertime know that smoke is often evidence of fire, and further, those who study the phenomenon of electricity comprehend that light in a light bulb is evidence of electricity. So, my question is: Maybe that which looks at the nature of the mind isn't really powerful enough or insightful enough. Modern science, when it has use of very sophisticated technology, can see that someone with Alzheimer's mind is different from a person who does not have Alzheimer's. So, there are differences between qualities of mind. So, I am curious; does this scientific evidence somehow contradict what you are saying?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** There seem to be two questions here, so we will treat them separately. The first is about the use of reasoning from results to causes, as in determining the existence of a fire through the presence of smoke, which is its result. Reasoning from results to causes is one of the varieties of reasonings used in inferential valid cognition. In general, there are two types of valid cognition that we might use in determining the nature of mind. One is inferential valid cognition and the other is direct valid cognition. The choice you make in determining which type of valid cognition to apply depends on the thing to which you are applying it. It is appropriate, and indeed necessary, to use inferential valid cognition if investigating what is called a hidden thing. A hidden thing is something that you cannot know directly, like a fire that you cannot physically see, so you must determine its existence by the presence of smoke, which can be seen. In the case of something that is hidden, you need inferential valid



cognition to determine its existence or absence. But in the case of the opposite type of thing, called an evident thing, you have no need to apply inference, since you can use direct valid cognition or direct experience. For example, I do not need to infer the presence of a bell on the table in front of me, since I can see it. I do not need to speculate about what possible evidence the bell might have left of its presence since it is right in front of me. I do not need to use reasoning at all. Now, with regard to meditation on the mind's nature, the mind is not a hidden thing; it is an evident thing. It is your mind. Therefore, you can know it directly and experience its nature directly, and for that reason it is not necessary to use inferential valid cognition in determining the mind's nature.

The second question is about the difference in the minds of those whose brains have been damaged by illness, as opposed to those whose brains have not been damaged in that way. Of course, damage to the brain will change the way your mind manifests. We do not even need to look as far in as the brain. If you have a defect in your eyes, the organ of vision, then there will naturally be a reduction in your ability to see form, since the organ of the eye is the principal condition for the physical perception of form. In fact, we could even say that if you merely press your eyes, you will see double, so therefore, any change in the physical body that connects with your six consciousnesses or six groups, will affect their functioning. However, while a change in someone's brain may affect the clarity of their cognition or the manifestation of their mind, it does not affect the nature of their mind, which remains the same.

**Question:** You mentioned, Rinpoche, that one can use either direct cognition or inferential valid cognition as two ways of reasoning, and

that it is unnecessary to use inferential valid cognition with those things that one obviously can see, like the bell in front of you. And it is only valid to use inferential valid cognition for those things which are hidden. Where does the supposition come from that the nature of the mind is self-evident, as is the bell in front of you? Are there not qualities of the mind that perhaps are hidden to that which watches the mind or observes the mind, and should one not, therefore, use inferential valid cognition?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The reason why your mind is an evident thing and not hidden is that it is

your mind. Therefore, it is right where you are. A hidden thing is by definition hidden by something in between the viewer and the thing itself. For example, a sound that cannot be directly heard because it is too low, or something that cannot be seen because it is too small or too far away, or because there is something in between you and it. Your mind is right where you are; there is nothing in between your mind and your mind. With regard to the appropriateness of the bell as an example, in fact, the mind is just as evident as the bell. The bell is right there and we can all see it, but we have to look at it. The mind is right there and everyone

can see it, but they have to look at it. The reason that we do not see our mind is that we avoid looking at it. We look outwards away from the mind. We go to great lengths not to look at the mind. So, just as if I were to turn myself away from the bell so that it were not in my line of vision and therefore I could not see it, in the same way, until we are brought to the point where we look at the mind, the mind is, so to speak, out of our line of vision.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I think it was your sixth or seventh point; it was after the lucidity. I think

you said, “At this point you will see something, you will see a thing, or you will see something.” Could you explain that, or elaborate on that. I didn’t quite understand that.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The sixth point is about one of the types of experiences that you might have as you are looking at the mind. You get the idea that there is something really there. There seems to be something to apprehend, something to get hold of, and it is in contrast to the previous point, which was describing a related but somewhat opposite experience, where you get the idea that there is nothing there. These are describing different sorts of experiences that one might have while looking at the mind. And the description of the experiences themselves is a description of what you experience, in the beginning, as you look. You need to go further in order to have an actual realization of it. This is basically just a sense of there being something there, it is obviously not something physical or something you could get hold of with your hand. But it is a feeling or an experience that there is something—that the mind is something, a thing.

What is your experience?

**Same questioner:** Well, it shifts back and forth.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Between what and what?

**Same questioner:** There is a sense of having a slight experience of most of these.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Then keep on looking and that will help.

**Question:** Rinpoche, there are some people who believe that many of the tantric practices and

the practice of looking at your mind and developing insight and clarity will lead to psychic abilities, the development of psychic abilities. Could you address that? What is the general view on seeking out advice from psychics, or the Buddhist view of that whole thing of developing psychic abilities, and the ability to channel

vidams, and all that? Is this to be encouraged? Is it beneficial, and in general, what is the Buddhist view on it?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** I do not know how to answer that question. [laughter]

**Question:** Rinpoche, for someone like me, who has an enormous amount of obscurations, I find it very difficult to visualize, and usually by the time a sadhana like Guru Rinpoche is finished, I am still on the protection circle. I am wondering if there is a subtle difference between, or a major difference, maybe, between visualization and imagination?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Essentially, visualization and imagination are similar. The basic idea is that one of the ways we think is in imagery. So, if you think about someone or something intensely enough, then your thoughts will not only appear as linguistic thoughts, but actually as images. This happens to us naturally all the time. Whenever we think with some intensity about a place, or about people, friends, or enemies, then we get visual images of them in our mind, and this is, in fact, a visualization. The key is to understand that if you try too hard to visualize something or someone it will not work. On the other hand, if you relax, then when you are meditating upon Guru Rinpoche, for example, the image will definitely appear over time. In order to understand how relaxation and the intensity of thought function together to produce the image of the visualiza-

If you try too hard to visualize something or someone, it will not work. On the other hand, if you relax, then when you are meditating upon Guru Rinpoche, for example, the image will definitely appear over time

tion, you might actually try thinking about your home, or thinking about people you know, and see how it happens that these images arise in your mind. Then use the same approach to generate the iconographic images in visualization practice.

**Question:** Rinpoche, recently I've been having an experience of there being something just in the back of my mind, just out of reach, something that seems to be quite significant, quite immense, even brightness involved or whatever. But it is something that's just beyond my reach, just outside of my perception. I am wondering how I should approach this? Should I approach it as an illusion and ignore it? Or should I pursue it as an object of meditation and try to perceive what is just my consciousness, or what?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** You are probably better off just letting it alone, because often those things that seem to be at the back of our mind, that we just cannot quite grasp, are the emergence of very, very old, or long-standing habits. And if you succeed in bringing them into consciousness, they are usually not of much use anyway. So you are probably better off just leaving it alone.

**Question:** Rinpoche, when I observe my own mind, I notice that it is indeed without form, without color, without location inside or outside my body. I accept that as true, I've looked, and that is a fact. But what I am trying to reconcile is the Buddhist theory of mind with various other theories of mind that are emerging in the scientific age. And these are the kinds of questions I am posing to you. Your statement that because it is your mind, it cannot be hidden, is a supposition, and it is based on a supposition that because it is yours it cannot be hidden. And that's not necessarily true. There are many things that are mine, my blood vessels, my genes that are

Often those things that seem to be at the back of our mind, that we just cannot quite grasp, are the emergence of very, very old, or long-standing habits

mine, but they're hidden to me, they're hidden to my powers of mental capacity. My question is this then: There is a Buddhist theory with respect to the nature of mind, and then there is cognitive science which is trying to study the mind as an object. Scientists are using various sophisticated machinery, and they look at the

mind as an object, and they see color, and they see magnetic resonance. They see that there are other qualities, because they are looking with a more powerful tool of observation. So this is the question I am asking Rinpoche: How do you reconcile, in a sense, the Buddhist theory of the nature of mind, not just the samsaric mind, with other kinds of theories that are looking at the mind as object with scientific tools, to determine what its nature is?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The contents and parts of your body that are within your body cannot be seen by you directly for two reasons: one is that on a coarse level they are within your body, they are covered by your skin; so unless you actually rip open your chest, and so on, you will not see your own intestines. In that case, the body is hidden from you because there is something in between your viewing organ, which is the eye, and what you are looking at. But there is nothing in between the object, which is the mind's nature, and the organ which views it, which is that mind itself. The mind's nature is not covered by any layer of skin or covering that impedes itself from seeing itself. It is, itself, looking at itself, and therefore it can see itself. The other reason which you brought up, why you cannot see various things in your body—such as the DNA and so on—is their subtlety, or how small they are. Because there are many things in our bodies that are extremely tiny, then we need, as you say, various machines in order to be able to see them. But the mind is not tiny like that. The mind is not a tiny subtle particle that needs to be viewed with electron


microscopes, or whatever. The only reason we do not see the mind is that the mind itself is turned outward away from itself, looks outside and therefore sees everything but itself. We could not, by attempting to look outward in that way, see the mind. Therefore, no machine, no matter how sophisticated it might be, could ever see the mind itself. When you are looking at the mind you are not trying to see something as nothing, or nothing as something. You are just trying to see it as it is.

**Question:** Rinpoche, this is a question related to techniques that we were given yesterday

The only reason we do not see the mind is that the mind itself is turned outward away from itself, looks outside and therefore sees everything but itself

concerning the supports. I just had a question concerning the sixth one, which is the three spheres of light. Do we imagine those or visualize those within the body, within our own body and the three places?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Well, if you were doing this in the context of deity meditation, of course you would visualize them inside your three places. But in this context of shamatha you are working with the capacity and the tendency of your mind to look at external objects. Therefore, you visualize them in front of you.

So, now we can dedicate the merit. 

Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

# The Viewing of the Mind Within Stillness Must Be Practiced Many Times



*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**T**his morning I talked about looking at the mind within stillness, which essentially consists of looking at the nature of the mind which is at rest in the experience of shamatha. Just as time is composed of a series of moments or instants, in the same way mind is composed of a series or a continuum of instants. Mind is generated in an instant, ceases, and is generated again in a subsequent instant, and so on. One of the impli-

cations of this is that the mind that exists at a given instant is no longer present at the second, or subsequent, instant. Therefore, if, when you are looking at the mind, you attempt to use the mind of the second instant to look at the mind of the first instant, you are looking at the past. And what you will

be doing will be looking at something that is no longer present, and therefore cannot be directly seen. You cannot use the minds of the second, third, or fourth instant to look at the mind of the first instant. You must look at the mind of the first instant with the mind of the first instant,

and at the mind of the second instant with the mind of the second instant, and so on. In short, only if the looking at the mind is simultaneous with the mind that is being looked at will the viewing of the mind be direct.

That is how you look at the mind. What will you experience when you are looking at the mind? When you are looking at your mind, will you actually see a thing? Is there a thing to discover about which you can then say, "This is the mind that I have seen?" No, there is nothing like that. Because there is no thing that we can call the mind, the Buddha talked of emptiness and selflessness. If in fact the mind did consist of some concrete thing that we could point to and call mind, then the Buddha would not have characterized it as empty and selfless. In the terminology of philosophy, we would say that this is the absence of true existence of the mind. The point of this is that no matter how much you look at the mind, and no matter what you may expect to find, you will not find a thing of any kind. And your not finding such a thing is not because you do not know how to look at the mind, or because you are not looking hard enough; it is simply because that is how it is. There is no thing, no substantial existence within the mind. It was therefore said by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa, "It does not exist and therefore has not been seen by any of the victors."\* Because there is no substantial existence within or to the mind, then no buddha of the past, present, or future has, does, or will see such a thing in it.

There is nothing to see when you look at the mind, but on the other hand, there is not an absolute absence of anything either. Normally, when we talk about emptiness we generate a concept of absolute nothingness, absolute nonexistence, as for example, the horns of a rabbit or the emptiness of empty space. The emptiness that is the mind's nature is not like that either.

There is nothing to see when you look at the mind, but on the other hand, there is not an absolute absence of anything either

It is not an absolute nothingness. For example, when you look at the mind within the context of shamatha practice, then you do not see color, shape, or any kind of substantial characteristic in that way. But that is not the discovery of an absolute nothingness, because this emptiness that is the mind's nature is not insentient. It is at the same time a cognition and a cognitive capacity, because it is, in fact, that which can and does know experience.

When you look at the nature of your mind, you see that its essential nature is emptiness. But this does not make your mind nonexistent, and make your body, therefore, a corpse. For while the nature of your mind is emptiness, it also has a natural characteristic of cognitive lucidity, and in fact, this cognitive lucidity which characterizes the mind is inseparable from the emptiness which is its fundamental nature. Therefore, after saying, "it does not exist and has not been seen by any of the victors," the Third Karmapa goes on to say, "it does not *not exist*, because it is the ground of samsara and nirvana." Although the mind is empty in the sense of being devoid of any kind of substantial existence, it nevertheless is the ground for all of the qualities of buddhahood and for all of the confusion of samsara. So, we would have to say, finally, that it is beyond being something or nothing. We cannot say the mind is something because it has no substantial characteristics that make it meaningful to view it that way. Nor can we say that it is nothing, because it is the ground for all qualities and the ground of experience. Therefore, the mind is said to be beyond being something or nothing, beyond existence and nonexistence. One of the implications of this is that when looking at the mind you have no need to pretend that that which exists does not exist, or that that which does not exist, does exist. You simply see the mind as it is.

When you rest in this experience of the mind, which is beyond extremes or elaborations, what

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\*Editor's note: Victor is an epithet for a buddha.

is the experience of that like? It is characterized by a profound state of ease, which means an absence of agitation or discomfort. Therefore the experience is comfortable and pleasant. On the other hand, it is indescribable; you could never describe the experience of the mind's nature to anyone saying, "It is like this, or like that," and therefore it was characterized by Marpa the Translator as being like the situation of a mute person tasting sugar. The person would taste the sugar and would be aware of the sweetness, but if asked to describe it, would be unable to do so. In the same way, since you are viewing your own mind, you can experience what it is like, but you could never really relate it to anyone else.

If through looking at the mind, you come to experience that the nature of the mind is what has been described—if you experience it as such through your seeing it as such when looking—then this is probably a correct experience. The only possible source of mistake here is that you might be reinforcing or adulterating your experience with conceptual understanding. For example, through study, and so forth, you might have come to the conclusion intellectually that the mind must be insubstantial and therefore beyond existence, and that it must not be an absolute nothingness and must therefore be beyond nonexistence. In that way, you might have an intellectual understanding that is similar to what is experienced directly. Because of that, while this intellectual understanding itself is a good understanding, it tends to prevent progress, because an understanding itself cannot lead to the qualities [of the awakened state] as experience can—and is therefore really no help. When you look at the mind, you need to look at it without such

When you look at the mind, you need to look at it without such presuppositions so that the understanding can arise on the basis of experience, internally and spontaneously. If it does, then that is the acquisition or attainment of vipashyana on the basis of stillness

presuppositions so that the understanding can arise on the basis of experience, internally and spontaneously. If it does, then that is the acquisition or attainment of vipashyana on the basis of stillness, which is pointed out in that way.

If you continue to practice meditation, then your experience will gradually increase and there will be greater and greater stability and greater and greater lucidity. However, the experiences that can arise in meditation can take various different forms. Sometimes you may feel that you have amazing, tremendous meditation, and at other times you may feel that you have no meditation at all. This characterizes meditation experience, which fluctuates a great deal. Realization, which is distinct from experience, does not change, but experiences can fluctuate a great deal or alternate between good and bad. Whatever meditation experience arises, you should recognize that it is transitory. As is said, "meditation experience is like mist, it will surely vanish." If you have a good meditation experience, do not be attached to it, because it will disappear. If you have a bad meditation experience, do not be alarmed, because it too will vanish. If you have good meditation experience, you need to continue; if you have bad meditation experience, you need to continue. In

either case, you simply need to continue to rest in this recognition of the mind's nature.

This viewing of the mind within stillness needs to be practiced, not merely for one session, but many times continually. It begins with allowing your mind to come to rest in the state of shamatha. Then look at the mind in that state while continuing to rest in the mind or while looking at the mind. One thing that needs to be addressed is that the state of stillness, which is

the basis for the viewing of the mind, could be one of two types of stillness. There is a type of stillness or tranquillity that consists of an obscurity of mind, or mental darkness, and there is another type of stillness that consists of a nonconceptual lucidity. The state of nonconceptual lucidity is considered to be faultless stillness, and the state of mental obscurity is considered to be defective stillness. In order to engage in the vipashyana practice of looking at the mind within stillness, the stillness must be the lucid or clear kind. Essentially, this clear stillness consists of a mind that is placed in one-pointedness with the faculties of mindfulness and alertness. With the presence of mindfulness and alertness this one-pointedness of mind becomes what is called a virtuous one-pointedness, rather than a neutral or obscure one-pointedness.

Whether it is the time of your initial recognition of the mind's nature, or your subsequent cultivation of that recognition, you are viewing something that has no substantial characteristics such as shape or color, origination, cessation, and so on. You are viewing the mind's nature, which is emptiness, but which nevertheless can be experienced by you directly. When you are looking at this nature, then that which is looking at the nature and that nature which is being viewed should not be experienced as separate. If they are, then there is still some fixation on an apprehending subject and an apprehended object. In fact, such fixation is unnecessary, because that which is looking and that which is being viewed are insubstantial, are free from origination and cessation; whereas something that is substantial could be said, relatively, to have a beginning and an end. That which is insubstantial does not. Therefore, there really is no separation between that which is viewing the mind and that mind

which is viewed.

It is important first to recognize this nature, and then to foster or cultivate the recognition of it. Why is this so significant? In the sutras it was said by the Buddha that the recognition of the dharmata and the subsequent attainment of buddhahood are both far from easy. According to the sutras, in order to obtain buddhahood, one

In this one lifetime one can attain the state of unity, the state of Vajradhara. And this is not just a saying or a tradition. It is something that is actually possible, and it is possible because of the profundity of the instructions

has to gather the accumulations for three periods of innumerable kalpas. And in order to realize dharmata one needs to gather the accumulations through the two paths of accumulation and juncture for one of these three periods of innumerable kalpas. In short, according to the sutras, it takes a very long time and a great deal of considerable austerity in order to realize dharmata and attain awakening. But according to the oral instructions of the siddhas of our lineage, this can be done in one lifetime and in one body. In this one lifetime one can attain the state of unity, the state of Vajradhara. And this is not just a saying or a tradition. It is something that is actually possible, and it is possible because of the profundity of the instructions.

Because of the profundity of these instructions it is important to have trust and faith in them, and devotion for them. When one understands their profundity, one will meditate upon them. However, sometimes, and for some individuals, because these instructions are so profound and yet so simple and seem so easy, one's mind is unsatisfied by them. It may be difficult to trust the fact that something that is so relatively simple could actually bring one all the way to awakening. In order to accommodate this anxiety, a variety of different methods have been taught. For example, there are the practices of the six dharmas of Naropa, which involve many elaborate visualizations, physical exercises, and a variety of other methods, and therefore, for



individuals who suspect the simplicity of mahamudra, are far more trustworthy. [laughter] In addition, there are also the many sadhanas of the generation stage connected with various yidams. And for those people who find mahamudra too simple, then these inspire greater faith and devotion and therefore are more effective. But the reason that these elaborate practices are more effective for those individuals is simply because those individuals have greater trust in them. It is not that there is anything lacking in the practice of mahamudra per se. If one has equal trust in it, then simply this mahamudra path of liberation itself is enough to complete the whole path.

Therefore, the practice of vipashyana or *lhak tong* meditation is very important. With regard to this, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye said that, although we all seem to think that the realization of the mind's nature is very difficult and hard to understand, why should it be? It is not the case at all that it is something far away from us, for which we need to search avidly. If anything, it is too close to us, because it is right here, right in our midst. And second, it is not because it is too subtle or too profound or too difficult to understand, that we do not realize it. We do not see it because it is too easy and too simple and too obvious. It is not the case that there is anything we need to do to this mind's nature in order to realize it. Even if we were to accept that the mind's nature is within us and is right here all the time, if we think that we have to somehow alter it or improve it or get it into fit shape in order to be able to see it directly, then of course that could be difficult. But we do not have to do anything to the mind's nature. We do not have to change anything bad into anything good; we do not have to get rid of anything that exists, or create anything that does not exist. If you simply see your mind as it is, just as it is right now, that in

If you simply see your mind as it is, just as it is right now, that in itself will generate great meditation. This is therefore both easy and profound

itself will generate great meditation. This is therefore both easy and profound.

For the practice of vajrayana in general, and especially for the meditations of mahamudra or dzogchen, it is of the utmost importance for the practitioner to have trust, faith, and devotion. In particular, with regard to devotion, which consists of enthusiasm and respect, this enthusiasm for the recognition of the nature of the mind is essential. Sometimes it is possible while one is practicing that one might come to the idea,

“Well, there is nothing to see, so this is quite pointless.” At such times you need to remember that while there is nothing particular to see, there is definitely something that can be experienced and realized. So this is anything but pointless. Sometimes it may happen that while you are practicing you may wonder, “Am I really just wasting my life by doing this?” It is important at those times to remember that this is not a waste of time, because by doing this practice you can actually realize the ultimate nature and attain libera-

tion. In short, by trusting the validity of the practice and instructions, and therefore having enthusiasm and respect for the practice, your practice will go well and you will attain the result.

Sometimes when you are practicing and you are not having great experiences, it is possible that you might lose heart. It is at those times that you need especially to generate greater faith and devotion, and in order to do that, to supplicate.\* Through supplication the blessings will definitely enter your heart, which will automatically lead to excellent meditation experience. So from time to time while you are

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\***Editor's note:** One supplicates principally the lama as the source of all blessing, the transmitter of the enlightened awareness and energy of the lineage, the embodiment of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times and ten directions, and the embodiment of the three roots—lama, yidam, and dakas, dakinis, and dharma protectors.

practicing mahamudra, you should continue to supplicate both the root and lineage gurus, and sometimes augment your practice with the practices of the generation and completion stages.

The practices of mahamudra and dzogchen are distinct in the sense that the methods of the teaching and the methods of practice vary slightly, and of course, the lineages are to some extent distinct. However, they both essentially come down to the single one point of the identification of the mind's nature, which in both mahamudra and dzogchen teaching is pointed out directly, and in both cases leads to a recognition of the nature of all things. While one can make distinctions between the methods of teaching and the methods of practice in very subtle ways, essentially the practice and the teaching consist of pointing out and identifying this same one thing.

Now, I would like to tell you exactly what parts of the text I have gone over today, so for your study and review you can understand what parts to study. In general, of course, when we are using a text of instruction like this, we are relying upon that second type of guru that I mentioned yesterday, the guru who is the dictates of the sugata, which is to say the teachings of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In particular, here we are concerned with the text, *Pointing Out The Dharmakaya*, by the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje. Up to the time of the Ninth Karmapa, these teachings on mahamudra practice were basically oral and not written down. But the Ninth Karmapa wrote three texts of instruction on mahamudra practice: elaborate, condensed, and abbreviated. This is the shortest and most concise of the three. He organized his text into meditation topics, or meditation sessions, as he calls them. What I have explained this morning is from among the five ways to view the mind taught in

Although it is easy to recognize the mind's nature, because we have a long-standing or beginningless habit of not looking at it, then we can also get confused

the vipashyana section. The first, viewing the mind within stillness, is the sixteenth topic, or sixteenth session in the text. And this afternoon, I went through, from among the five introductions or the five ways to point out the mind's nature, the one that corresponds to this morning's topic, which is the twenty-first topic, or the twenty-first session of pointing out the mind's nature within stillness.


Please study the text and please do these meditations frequently. If you practice and if you are fortunate, then authentic meditation experience and recognition of the mind's nature may arise for you fairly quickly. On the other hand, although it is easy to recognize the mind's nature, because we have a long-standing or beginningless habit of not looking at it, then we can also get confused. We can be misled by our conceptual understanding, or we can be misled by various experiences, or we can simply get involved in other things that prevent us from seeing the mind's nature. In those situations, although it is best if there has been an authentic recognition,

even if you have not recognized the mind's nature, to have put some effort into doing so is still very good. It was said by the Buddha that if someone goes to a place of practice and meditates, that is excellent. But if someone even takes one step towards a place of practice and for some reason gets interrupted and does not get there, there is still great benefit. There is still great merit and they are still very fortunate.

The Buddha did not say this without reason. There is a very specific reason why this is true. In order to attain the ultimate result of practice, of course we need to accomplish an extraordinary samadhi. And if we can do that, then that is excellent. But even to think that the accomplishment of such meditation is great, and that it is something necessary that we wish to do, creates

a very subtle but definite habit in our minds for its cultivation. Of course, the simple wish to cultivate it does not immediately cause this meditative state and its attendant awakening to arise. Nevertheless, the inculcation of this subtle habit will cause the habit to increase and grow, and gradually one will come to have more faith, devotion, and diligence, and so on, and eventually from this seed of interest will grow this great tree of awakening. Therefore, there is a reason for the Buddha's statement that there is

great merit and good fortune in even attempting to meditate. We really are fortunate in having this opportunity to practice and study mahamudra. I am going to stop here for this afternoon. Please remember that today we completed these two topics, the sixteenth and the twenty-first. Please study them and use them as a basis for meditation practice. Now we will meditate together briefly. [Students meditate.]

Now we will chant the dedication of merit. 



### Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## Looking at the Mind Within Occurrence Means Looking at the Nature of Thoughts as They Arise

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**Y**esterday we looked at looking at the mind within stillness, which means looking at the nature of the mind within the experience of the stability of shamatha, and also at pointing out or identifying the nature of the mind in that context of stillness. Today I am going to talk about looking at the mind within occurrence. Occurrence here refers to the arising of thought, so this technique consists of looking at the nature of thoughts as they arise. A distinction needs to be made between the nature of how things are, and appearances, which is how things appear. The nature of how things actually are is experienced by an unconfused mind, and appearances, how things appear to be, is experienced by a confused mind or a confused cognition. Some-

times these are also referred to as absolute truth and relative truth, respectively. Through the confusion that generates the appearances or the projections of confusion, we come to suffer and to experience impediments and upheavals of all kinds. Because all of this suffering, these upheavals, and so forth, result from confusion, and therefore result from a mistaken view of how things are, all of these things can be removed.

They are removed by coming to correctly recognize how things are or by coming to recognize the nature of all things, and it is for this reason that we devote ourselves to looking at the nature of our mind.

The reason why there are these two techniques—looking at the mind within stillness and looking at the mind within occurrence—is that, from the point of view of how things appear, stillness and occurrence are quite distinct. The one, stillness, is a state where there are no thoughts arising in the mind, and the other, occurrence, is one in which there are thoughts, possibly very coarse and disturbing thoughts, arising in the mind; but from the point of view of the nature of things, these two states are not different at all. When you look at the mind within stillness you do not find anything substantial whatsoever. And when you look at the mind within occurrence, no matter how coarse or vivid the thoughts may be, when you look at the nature of those thoughts, their nature seems to be without any substance or substantiality and to be that same emptiness that was the nature of the mind in stillness. It is in order to make this clear to us that we practice both of these as separate techniques.

According to the commentaries, one begins the practice of looking at the mind within occurrence by cultivating a state of shamatha, as in the previous technique. You allow your mind to rest relaxed in the stillness of shamatha and then, having experienced that stillness, one of

two things will happen: either a thought will arise suddenly of itself without your intentionally generating it, in which case, that thought could be any kind of thought—a thought of pleasure or of misery, a virtuous thought, an unvirtuous thought, and so on. In any case, a thought will arise, or if a thought does not arise by itself, you can intentionally generate a thought. In either case you now have a thought

as the focus or support for the meditation, the nature of which thought you will look at. While the focus of this technique is different from the focus of the previous one—in that here you are looking at the nature of a thought that has arisen, whereas in the previous one you were looking at the nature of that mind which experiences stillness—the mode of meditation is exactly the same. Here, looking at the thought, you look to see where it is, where it came from, what its substance or nature is, what it is that has generated the thought, what it is or who it is that is thinking, and so forth.

When a thought arises in your mind in that way, then of course you are aware that the thought has arisen and you cannot argue with the fact that there is the appearance of a thought having arisen. A thought did arise or has arisen in your mind. The thought could have any of a vast number of forms. It could be a pleasant or an unpleasant thought, a virtuous or an unvirtuous thought, and so on. In any case, this appearance of a thought arising in your mind is a relative truth, or *kun rdzop*, it is how things appear.\* Having recognized that the thought has arisen, you then look at its nature, at how things

Because all of this suffering, these upheavals, result from confusion, and therefore result from a mistaken view of how things are, all of these things can be removed

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\***Editor's note:** The "truth" or correctness of the thought from the standpoint of conventional understanding is not the point here. Whether Mary is really a Democrat is not the point; in this technical sense of the term relative truth, the thought, whether correct or incorrect, is still a relative truth. In either case, it is a conceptual imputation.

are, through looking at the thought. This does not involve searching for anything particularly difficult to find or anything particularly subtle, for that matter. You simply look directly at the thought to observe its nature. For example, does this thought that is present in your mind have a shape? Does it have a color? If it has a shape or a color, what shape or what color? As you look you will find that you do not discover a shape, you do not discover a color. Well, if it does not have a shape or color, then what substantial characteristics does it possess? If it truly exists it must possess some kind of observable characteristic. As in the previous technique, you need to look at the thought directly, which is to say that you look at the thought of the present with the mind of the present. You do not look at the thought of the past with the mind of the present. In other words, you look at the thought of the first instant with the mind of the first instant, and the thought of the second instant with the mind of the second instant. You do not look at the thought of the first instant with the mind of the second instant, and so on. In any case, as you look at the thought which definitely has arisen, while you are aware that the thought is present, there is nothing that you can see or detect directly.

In particular, as with the previous techniques, there are several specific ways to look at the object, which, in the case of this technique, is the thought that has arisen. In the way things appear, there is the appearance of a thought arising, abiding, and ceasing. The first part of the technique, the first way to look at the thought, is to look at these three aspects of the thought's presence. With regard to its arising, how does it arise? How does the thought come into experience or come into being? From where does it arise? Then with regard to its abiding, how does it abide? What does it actually mean that a thought is present or is abiding, and where exactly does it abide? And then with

regard to its cessation, how does it cease? How does the thought cease to be present and where does it go? Where does it end up when it ceases? This is the first part of looking at thought.

The second part of the technique is working with a variety or succession of thoughts, rather than one thought, allowing or causing a series of thoughts to arise, and looking at their nature in sequence. This part of the technique is especially used to work with the kleshas. You can use any of the three predominant kleshas—thoughts that are primarily characterized by ignorance, attachment, or aggression—and you can use whatever arises; or, if necessary, you can intentionally generate a klesha. The way of looking at kleshas here is quite distinct and particular. Normally, for example, when we want to deal with the klesha of anger, then we distance ourselves from it, and we look at it as though it were an object separate from ourselves, and we say, “This anger has arisen in me, I am now angry. The object of my anger is so and so, whom I regard as my enemy,” and so forth.

We distance ourselves from the thought of anger, and also, we concern ourselves primarily with how the thought appears, with the contents of the anger. Here, when you look at the klesha, you look at it in a very different way. You look at it directly, as is said in the texts, “nakedly,” without anything in between you and it, so that you look to try to find the anger itself, the very essence of this thought, rather than merely the contents or form of the thought. You look to see exactly, where is this anger that appears to be present and what exactly is it? What substantial characteristics does it truly have? Through looking for the anger in that way, you come to see that its nature is emptiness. This does not mean that the anger vanishes; the anger is still present, but once its nature has been seen, it is without any kind of fixated apprehension. Then you can apply the same technique to other

How does it arise? How does the thought come into experience or into being? From where does it arise?

kleshas, to various thoughts of pleasure and pain, and virtuous thoughts, such as love, compassion, and so on.\* And you will discover in the same way, that all of these thoughts have emptiness as their basic nature. The Buddha taught that all thoughts are empty, and he never said that something that was not empty was empty.

Next comes the third way of looking at thoughts. The idea of having so many different techniques is that if one does not help, then the next one will, and also, that each of them will generate a slightly different experience of looking at the nature of thought. This third technique is concerned with the distinction between the thought itself and the object of that thought—for example, a thought of pleasure or pain, or a thought of a specific klesha and the object that appears to be the basis for the arising of that specific thought. This does not mean that you investigate the thought to try and determine why that thought has arisen; it is not a question of thinking about the thought, like determining, “I am angry at so and so, because of such and such.” It means to actually look in order to try to find the presence of that object in your mind. The reason for this is that when, for example, you become angry, part of becoming angry is the arising of an image of the object of your anger as a focus for that klesha in your mind. Here,

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\***Editor’s note:** There is, of course, a great incentive for beginners to look at thoughts of anger, because anger is so vexatious and causes so much trouble in one’s life. It is much more difficult to remember to look at the mind when it is experiencing feelings of attachment, happiness, love, pleasure, etc., because these emotions are not generally experienced as vexatious. Nevertheless, the attachment associated with these experiences sooner or later, when they change or are disrupted, becomes the basis of suffering. Therefore, it is very important to develop one’s mindfulness and train one’s mind to look directly and nakedly at thoughts that we experience as happiness as well.

The idea of having so many different techniques is that if one does not help, then the next one will, and also, that each of them will generate a slightly different experience of looking at the nature of thought

rather than looking at the anger itself, you look at the image of the object of focus and try to see where it is, this image or concept: Where is it in your mind? How does it arise, and from where does it arise, and so on? Also in connection with this third technique, try to detect the difference between thoughts when their nature has been looked at, and thoughts when their nature has not been looked at.

**T**hese first three ways of looking at thought are actually distinct techniques, or distinct ways, to view the nature of thought. The next set of techniques are more descriptions of experiences you might have while looking at the thoughts. The fourth is as follows: Sometimes when people look at the nature of thought, they have the experience that there is nothing whatsoever to be apprehended in a fixated way, that the thoughts have emptiness beyond elaboration as their nature. In particular, when looking for a place of origin, a place of abiding, and a place of cessation or disappearance for the thought, they find nothing whatsoever. You should regard your experience, or view your experience, to see if this is what you are experiencing. Another experience that might occur is that you become aware of the thought’s arising, and then you look at the thought and, through looking at its nature, the thought disappears.

The next experience is when, from the moment of the thought’s arising, there is nothing whatsoever in it to be apprehended, and in that way the thought is self-liberated—in the sense that simultaneous with its arising is its absence of substantiality, which is clearly experienced by the meditator. The distinction between the foregoing one, the fifth one, and this, the sixth one, is that in the fifth one the thought appears to be somewhat substantial as it arises, but then

disappears upon being looked at. In this one, from the moment of its arising it seemed to be insubstantial.

Following the sixth experience, where the thought is experienced to be insubstantial or nothing whatsoever from the moment of its inception, comes the description of the seventh. If you have had the sixth experience, then you should look at the difference between the experience of insubstantiality or emptiness in stillness, and the experience of it within thought or occurrence. You should look to see, is there any difference between what is experienced when you look at the mind within stillness, and what is experienced when you look at the mind in occurrence, when you look at the thoughts that arise. From a conceptual point of view, of course, we would say there is a difference, because these two states are distinct. In one state, stillness, no thoughts are present, in the other state, occurrence, thoughts, possibly coarse or vivid thoughts, are evident in the mind. But this is a difference in how things appear, this does not necessarily mean there is a difference in how they are. If you look at these two states and compare them, you will discover that, just as when looking at the mind within stillness, you do not discover any place of stillness in which the mind is at rest or any resting mind; then, in the same way, when you look at the mind within occurrence, you do not discover any place where this movement—this arising, dwelling, and ceasing—of thoughts is occurring. Nor do you discover any substantial thought that is arising and ceasing, and so forth.

Next described is the eighth experience, which occurs when some conceptual effort is made to apprehend the thought's arising and, as a result, you tend to label the thought, based on some concept about its nature. So you affix the labels of emptiness, cognitive lucidity, and so forth, to the thought, which is distinct from

actually seeing its nature without any kind of conceptual overlay.

The ninth type of experience described is when the thought arises as though of itself, and its arising is recognized without effort and without any kind of conceptual overlay. And from the moment of its arising the thought is without any kind of effort on your part to see it in this way, and is experienced as liberated simply through having arisen—[experienced] as being in its nature the expression or embodiment of the emptiness which is its nature. You should look to see if this kind of experience arises as well.

These nine ways of looking at thought make up the technique of viewing the mind within occurrence. This technique, viewing the mind within occurrence, is very important because we begin our practice with shamatha. Through the

Through the practice of shamatha we develop a relationship with our thoughts that has some preference and attachment to it

practice of shamatha we develop a relationship with our thoughts that has some preference and attachment to it. Because we are attempting to cultivate a state of nondistractedness, then we develop an attitude that is pleased when the mind is still, and disappointed or unhappy when thoughts arise. We become attached to stillness, and we become averse to occurrence. We often get to the point where we view thoughts as enemies or obstructors and view stillness as a friend and as a boon.

There is nothing really wrong with that attitude in the context of shamatha practice, because indeed one is attempting to develop a state of tranquillity; but it eventually has to be transcended, and it is transcended by this technique where you come to view the dharmata, the nature of things, which is itself ultimate peace and tranquillity, within thoughts, because this is the nature of thoughts as well.

It is for this reason that in our common lineage supplication we recite the line, "as is taught, the nature of thoughts is the



dharmakaya.” This very famous quotation has become an object of disputation for certain scholars, who have said that the Kagyu view that thoughts are dharmakaya is incorrect, because thoughts are characteristic of confusion, thoughts are themselves confusion, and the dharmakaya is unconfused. Therefore, thoughts could not possibly be

dharmakaya. However, as valid as their point may be, we do not say that thoughts are dharmakaya; we say that the nature of thoughts is dharmakaya, which is quite distinct. Our point is not that thoughts in themselves may not be the messengers of confusion, but that the nature of thought need not be fought, need not be viewed as threatening or as something that we need to get rid of. While thoughts, indeed, may be confusion, the nature of any thought, regardless of how confused it may appear to be, is always the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness, and therefore it is the dharmakaya.

In the next line of the lineage supplication it says, “nothing whatsoever, they nevertheless arise as anything, or can arise as anything.” This means that there is no limit to the variety of vivid appearances which thoughts can present. Thoughts can be extremely virtuous or unvirtuous, can be very pleasant or unpleasant; thoughts can be of the nature of joy or the nature of misery, and so on. Yet no matter how vivid and how varied their appearance may be, the nature of each and every thought is nothing whatsoever, it has no substantial existence at all. In that sense, thoughts are somewhat like the wind, which blows and affects things but can never be grasped and is in a sense insubstantial. This nature of thought is discovered in direct experience and not by thinking about it. When you look at your mind directly and you look at the thoughts that arise, you discover that they have

no nature in the sense of substantial characteristics. They have no place from which they proceed, no place of origin, no place of abiding, no place of cessation. They do not go anywhere when they disappear. In short, when you look for any of these things—for substantial characteristics, for an origin, location or destination of

thoughts, and so on—you do not find anything whatsoever, and this not finding of any of these things is the discovery of the nature of thought.

When you look directly at thoughts you find nothing whatsoever. It is not the case that the thoughts had some kind of coarse substantiality which was destroyed by your viewing them, nor is it case that there is a defect in the nature of thoughts which is corrected by your viewing them. From the very beginning all thoughts have always been liberated in their nature simultaneously with their arising. From the very beginning all thoughts have been empty in their nature all along. Therefore, when the Buddha taught emptiness, he taught not only the emptiness of

the mind of stillness, but the emptiness of thoughts, the emptiness of the mind of occurrence. Both of these, in their nature, are equally emptiness or dharmata. Both of these are equally beyond the extremes of being something or nothing, beyond the extremes of existence and nonexistence. It is not the case that by coming to recognize this or by coming to view this nature of thoughts, we change or improve the nature. It is not the case that we are creating something by seeing the nature of thoughts directly. It is simply that through seeing the nature of thoughts as they are, through recognizing thoughts to be what they are, we attain liberation, and the recognition of the nature of thoughts is sufficient for this.

Upon receiving this kind of instruction about

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the nature of thoughts, when you actually go on to look at the nature of thoughts directly, you may be able quite quickly to recognize the nature of thoughts and thereby resolve once and for all their nature to be emptiness. On the other hand, it is possible that you might not be able to recognize the nature of thoughts because you are still overwhelmed by the vivid content of the appearance of thoughts—vivid appearances of thoughts of aggression and passion and so on—which seem so substantial and real to you that you cannot see through them and see their nature.

You should not be discouraged if you have this experience, because it is by no means an impossible or difficult task to recognize the nature of thoughts; you may simply have to keep at it for a while.

This presentation of viewing the mind within occurrence is the second of the five ways to view the mind taught in this text, and is the seventeenth topic of instruction in the text as a whole. Yesterday morning, we presented the instruction on viewing the mind within stillness, which as you will remember, was the sixteenth topic of instruction. Having received this instruction, please apply it in your experience. Essentially it consists of generating a state of shamatha, and then within that shamatha, allowing a thought to arise and then looking directly at that thought. This technique is of immeasurable importance because it is the actual remedy to all the confusion of thoughts and kleshas.

I am going to stop here for this morning, but if you have any questions, please ask them.

**Question:** Rinpoche, a couple of difficulties that I'd like to ask you about; one is the feeling that the arising of thoughts does come from somewhere. I think from my point of view it is easier to see that they're not abiding and not going anywhere, but there is a feeling that they are coming from somewhere like the storehouse

consciousness.\* The second difficulty is this business of trying to look at thoughts within that instant and not with subsequent thoughts, and this seems to me a very difficult matter, and I feel that I need some additional guidance on this.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** To answer your first question first: The understanding, for example, that the source of thoughts is the habits placed in the all-basis consciousness is a valid understanding. But it is an understanding within the context of

relative truth about how things appear; that is, in the context of relative truth, it is a way of understanding the appearance of thoughts. Here we are concerned with absolute truth, which is not an object of understanding of the intellect at all and can only be experienced or appreciated through looking directly at something—in this case, looking directly at thoughts. For example, if you were meditating and you were looking for the origin of thoughts, and the thought arose, “Well these thoughts are coming from the all-

basis consciousness,” then you would look to see where the all-basis consciousness was and where it came from; and, if you keep on looking directly, not with theory but directly, you will find nothing anywhere. It is not that you are not finding anything because you do not understand what to look for, nor is it the case that you are not finding anything because you do not know how to look. You are not finding anything because there is not anything to be found. That is the nature of things and the nature of thought as

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\***Editor's note:** Storehouse consciousness was an early attempt to translate *alaya vijñana*—here translated as all-basis consciousness—the conceptual notion of a consciousness where all the karmic latencies created by our dualistic actions are stored as potential primary causes of experience until such time as secondary conditions spark their ripening in our experience. The *alaya vijñana*, while it is a useful notion to have when seeking to understand the cause and effect of karmic actions, is also in its nature empty.

opposed to the appearance of things or the appearance of thought.

With regard to your second question, as you say, when you start to work with this technique, you find that through looking at a thought that you are looking at a thought that has already vanished, and so you are looking at a thought of the past. But if you keep on going, then what will happen is that you will start to catch thoughts, or detect the arising of thoughts, and be able to actually look at the nature of thoughts as they arise, not only once they are already present and before they have vanished, but even as they are arising.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I have three questions. The first is a vocabulary question. Is what Rinpoche was referring to in the sixth point what is called in Tibetan, *zangtal*, or *zangtal che*? Is it the same experience? The second question is: Can Rinpoche say something more about the relationship between the sixth point and the ninth point, and what the distinction between the two is? The third one is: Would Rinpoche say something about the relationship between these nine points and another way of looking at mahamudra, which is the progression of seeing phenomenon as mind, mind as emptiness, emptiness as spontaneous presence, and spontaneous presence as self-liberation?

**Translator:** The first question: Is the experience explained in the sixth point the same as what is called the experience of *zangtal*, which means, both penetrating and transparent or unobstructed?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Yes, it is the same experience. And to reiterate the meaning of the sixth and ninth points: really, the type of experience or understanding described in the sixth and the ninth parts of the technique is the same. The

difference is the context. The sixth is describing something you might experience, and the ninth is describing the same thing again as a kind of a summary, concluding the technique, encouraging you to go on in that way. Essentially the sequence described here and the fourfold sequence of introduction or pointing-out described in *The Ocean of the True Meaning* and other places—where appearances are pointed out to be mind; mind is pointed out to be emptiness; emptiness is pointed out to be spontaneous presence; and spontaneous presence is pointed out to be self-liberation—are basically the same.

**Same questioner:** Would Rinpoche say something about *hlundrup* [spontaneous presence], and particularly with respect to this technique of understanding?

You will start to catch thoughts, or detect the arising of thought, and be able to actually look at the nature of thoughts as they arise

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** In this context the idea of emptiness being spontaneous presence is that, while the nature of everything is emptiness, nevertheless, that nature expresses itself or appears spontaneously, which is to say, that the appearances of things that are emptiness is not something contrived but something spontaneous or natural. Spontaneous presence being self-liberation is the idea that, because these appearances are the spontaneous display of emptiness, they are in

their nature free of any kind of substantiality that requires any kind of change or improvement and, therefore, are in their nature self-liberated.

**Question:** Rinpoche, if I remember correctly, yesterday you talked about the mind operating in a series of small instants, little moments, and to me, having a little experience with stillness and some experience of thought, they all seem to have duration, and I guess I am not very familiar with these instants. I am wondering if this is an important thing to understand and know how they operate. It seems as if it must have some

bearing on what you are discussing now, but I wonder if you might elaborate on that, please?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The idea that the mind is made up of a series of moments is based on the idea that all things that are composites can be traced as a series of moments, and they are characterized as such because these things are constantly changing, at least a little bit, in every moment. Therefore, one cannot say that the thing is the same for any duration of time. This is the idea that everything, including the mind, is made up of things that are constantly changing. However, while this would include thought—since a thought, even while it appears to have duration, is undergoing some kind of change—this is all about how things appear; this is a characteristic of appearances, this instantaneity, not a characteristic of the nature of appearances. When you look at your mind directly in meditation, then you see through the appearance of origination, the appearance of location, and the appearance of destination. By seeing through the appearance of the origination or arising of thought, then you have seen through the illusion of substantiality, and, therefore, since the thought has no substantiality to persist, it is not a persistent series of instants or moments in its nature. This is true both of the mind in stillness and the mind in occurrence. The mind in stillness is manifestly without any kind of substantiality; therefore, in its nature there is no change occurring, and therefore, in its nature there is no succession of moments. The mind in occurrence, however, is also that way, because, when you see directly the nature of thoughts, then you see that as the thought arises it is already liberated in its nature, because it is already free of substantiality, and therefore is free of being what it might otherwise appear to be to a deluded consciousness, which is a succession of moments.

When you see directly the nature of thoughts, then you see that as the thought arises it is already liberated in its nature

**Question:** Rinpoche, I have a little bit of confusion about reconciling the mahamudra system of instruction, in which it seems basically to be saying that, because the mind's nature is naturally insubstantial and empty, it can be looked at and recognized at any time. I want to reconcile this with the common presentation of the paths and levels. We are told in a very matter-of-fact way that it is utterly impossible for beginners on either the path of accumulation or the path of

junction to generate direct realization of emptiness, or ultimate truth. What we can do at best is generate a similitude, or something that is concordant with ultimate truth, but we are taught that it is not the absolute truth itself. What I am wondering is, if this is the case—say if most people are at one of the first two levels of the path of accumulation, the lesser level, or the medium level—if one had the appropriate training and circumstances, such as having these instructions, such as having a great deal of faith and

devotion, having a lama endowed with realization, would it be possible for them, given those circumstances, to suddenly generate the realization and somehow jump over these first two paths to the path of seeing? I cannot fit these two systems together in my mind.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The reason, first of all, for the difference in presentation between the mahamudra systems and the sutra systems\* with regard to the question at what point the nature of things can be directly experienced is that, in the sutra system, the practice leading to the realization of emptiness consists of the use of analysis and the use of reasoning, and there is no presentation in the sutra system of the direct pointing-out of one's mind. If one uses the techniques of the sutra system alone, then one's resources consist of the gathering of the accumu-

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\***Editor's note:** The teachings of the sutras form the basis of the student's question.

lations and the cultivation of an abstraction of emptiness, and being limited to that, then one will not have a direct realization of emptiness until the path of seeing. On the other hand, in the traditions of the vajrayana in general, and the mahamudra in particular, the emphasis is on the direct pointing-out to the student of the nature of his or her mind, and since the mind is something that is easily realized directly to be empty, then through that, one comes to have a glimpse of emptiness. Having a glimpse of the emptiness of mind, one has a glimpse of the emptiness of all things, and since emptiness of mind is the same emptiness as that of all things, in that way then, a beginner does see the dharmata, does have a glimpse of dharmata long before the path of seeing. However, at the same time, what this beginner has is a glimpse, not a continuous and stable realization of dharmata. Although, through the practice of the mahamudra system, one can gradually stabilize it and deepen it until one attains the authentic path of seeing, as far as the relationship between the wisdom that is generated by the beginner who receives the pointing-out instruction and identifies the mind's nature and the wisdom of the path of seeing, we would have to say that what that beginner generates in the mahamudra system is a glimpse of the path of seeing, but is not the full and authentic attainment of the path of seeing.

**Question:** Rinpoche, my question is in regard to the fifth point, being aware of thoughts' arising. When you become aware of them, they seem to disappear in post-meditation experience. I am very much a beginner, but since I've been meditating, the extreme thoughts of impermanence, passion, and anger, in particular, arise, and when these thoughts arise, I've been able to catch them before they manifest. But I've hit a weird plateau

If one uses the techniques of the sutra system alone, then one's resources consist of the gathering of the accumulations and the cultivation of an abstraction of emptiness

in the sense that when these things arise, when I become aware of them, I tend to laugh. I find it very funny when these things happen and basically, I think it is funny that my mind is manifesting in extreme ways. I find that very humorous and then I get stuck in that. So then that moment is gone, and then I am stuck in the humor of my mind getting caught up in impermanence. Does Rinpoche have tips on how to proceed, disregard this, etc.?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The answer to this is really the same as the answer to Andrew's question. Through the humor and the laughter that specific thought may have disappeared, but another thought is arising, so you just wait for the next thought. You look at whatever thought is present at the time.

**Same questioner:** But if I keep laughing—because of being caught up in these extreme thoughts of impermanence or the extreme passion—that does

continue and it sort of develops because that one thought is gone. But then I just seem to get stuck in stuff.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Look at the nature of this thought of its being funny, this sensation of its being funny, and then that will dissolve. Look at the nature of whatever thought is present. It does not matter which thought you look at. As long as there is a thought present you have an opportunity to look at the nature of thought. And the nature of any of them is the same, and it is that same nature that you are trying to see.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I found it rather unusual that sometimes, when looking at the nature of thought as an observer, the thought disappears at that moment. Is it just an appearance and does the act of observation cause its insubstantiality?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** This happens when the conceptual content of the effort of looking replaces the previous thought, and so it is an appearance that is produced by your looking. The way that you look at the thought drives that thought out because it is replaced with something else. The remedy for this is the second of the nine techniques, where, rather than attempting to look at one thought, you allow a whole series of thoughts to continue, giving yourself an opportunity to actually see, not only thoughts toward the end of their duration, but to see thoughts actually coming into presence.

**Same questioner:** The second part to the question is: The emptiness that is realized in stillness of the mind and the emptiness looking at the nature of one thought and the emptiness that is realized by looking at the occurrence of thought, both its origination, its abiding, and its cessation, and also the emptiness of the observer looking, are these all the same emptiness? Are they all one taste? Are there graduations of emptiness?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The looking at the origin, the location, and the destination of thoughts, in particular, is more of a method designed to allow you to identify the nature of thought. But the nature of the mind in stillness and the nature of the thoughts that arise in the mind in occurrence are the same. That is, the same nature.

**Question:** Rinpoche, in my meditation I've had some experience with looking at thoughts in stillness and occurrence and not seeing any sub-

stance. However, it seems that I experience something that is hard to explain. It is not really a feeling even, or a thought. It seems to be something almost intangible like an irritation, or something heavy that almost seems to abide. It does seem to just stay there. I continue to look and I do not know if I just need to look more, but it seems very much present all the time.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** It is probably that you are just not yet used to looking in this way, and as you become more used to doing it, then this sense of irritation or discomfort or the heavy, abiding presence will be seen through.

If you find that the effort itself somehow becomes a cause of distraction, then you should look right at the nature of that distraction as it occurs

**Question:** This is a question related to several that have just arisen. I am wondering about the effort that one makes in staying with the first moment and not rushing on to the second. In my own experience I find that the most difficult aspect of the meditation. I try too hard to create very quickly the second thought. What's happening? I bring myself off of that moment, it seems, through genuine effort, but how do you realize the nature of emptiness in the effort itself?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** First, all the effort that you describe is necessary because what you are talking about is the placement of mindfulness and alertness, but if you find that the effort itself somehow becomes a cause of distraction or disturbance, then you should look right at the nature of that distraction that occurs, or look at the nature of the effort.

So now we will dedicate the merit. 

Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## Determining Whether Your Recognition of the Mind's Nature Is Authentic



*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**T**his morning I explained the second technique of viewing the mind, which is viewing the mind in the midst of occurrence. There is now the corresponding introduction or pointing-out that goes with that way of viewing the mind, which is pointing out the mind's nature within occurrence. The idea here is that, having practiced viewing your mind within occurrence, you will have had some experience of this. What the experience was might vary. You might have had an authentic recognition of the mind's nature, or you might have had a different kind of experience. In any case, it is the accumulation of experience

itself that is important and that is dealt with here in the introduction or pointing-out. The introduction serves to help the student understand their experience and determine whether or not it is actually an authentic recognition of the mind's nature, and, as it is set out in *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, it consists of a dialogue between the teacher and the student. However, having received this as instruction, you can also use it in your individual practice to test the validity of your own experience.

First you practice looking at your mind within occurrence, and then you try to assess the experience you have on the basis of doing so. In this text, there are set forth essentially three different types or levels of experience one might have. In one case one really has no experience whatsoever; in the second case one has some experience, which is to say, a partial recognition, and in the third case there is a full experience, a full recognition. This can be discovered either through the questioning of the student by the teacher, or by the student's questioning himself or herself. In the first case, when asked to explain their experience, the student is likely to say something like the following: Well, I experienced that my mind is empty or that my mind is emptiness or that it lacks all substantiality. If you say that, that then is an indication that you have had no experience, because this is a concept and jargon that you were using because you are still trying to control your meditation through the presuppositions of theory and dogma. Because you had that thought about the mind and you had come to the conclusion that, well, probably the mind must be empty, it must be insubstantial—through reasoning—then this is what you say. But it is not something you discovered in meditation. The second type of situation is when asked about their experience the student says, well what happens is that I look at a thought and at first the thought is

Having received this as instruction, you can also use it in your individual practice to test the validity of your own experience

there, but as I look at it, it dissolves and disappears and there is nothing there whatsoever. In this situation the student has some degree of experience, a partial recognition.

The third situation is one where the student has had a real or decisive experience of their mind's nature and in that case they are likely to say that they have not found anything that could be called a something or a nothing. There does not seem to be anything that they can apprehend, and yet they feel no fixation on this absence of anything to apprehend. There is not even a separate thinker or watcher that is failing to apprehend anything in the mind. Often such a student will say that they have had the experience of seeing thoughts vanishing as they are arising, which is an indication that they have experienced a simultaneous arising and liberation of thought. In such a case, the student is instructed to continue to practice as they have been, and further practice at that point is indeed very important.

**T**he nature of stillness and of the mind that is in a state of stillness is free from origination, abiding, and cessation. This is something that appears directly to you in your experience when you look at the mind within stillness. But whereas, before one began to practice meditation, one may have regarded the state of the occurrence of thought as fundamentally different from stillness, since when thoughts arise, they agitate you, and so forth, once you have practiced this meditation, then you will discover that there is no real difference between the nature of the mind in stillness and the nature of the mind in occurrence. Just as the nature of the mind in stillness is free from origin, location, and destination, in the same way the nature of the thoughts that arise in the context of occurrence are a union or a unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. That state of stillness itself is also



such a unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. This means that not only is the nature of the mind experienced within stillness empty, but even the thoughts that are experienced in occurrence have the same nature as that nature of the mind. This means that when thoughts appear to move or to occur, it does not mean that there is any substantial thing or truly existent thing that is rushing about in your mind. The thoughts themselves have the same nature as the mind that generates them. Once this has been recognized then there will no longer be any preference for stillness over occurrence, and the absence of a preference for absence over occurrence comes about because of the direct or naked seeing of both states as mere cognitive lucidities without any substantial existence.

Although one recognizes the cognitive lucidity or the lucidity of awareness within emptiness, there are different ways that this might be recognized. For example, someone might find that when they look at the nature of a thought, initially the thought arises, and then as the thought dissolves, what it leaves in its wake or what it leaves behind it is an experience or recognition of the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. Because this person has recognized this cognitive lucidity and emptiness, there is some degree of recognition, but because this can only occur for them or has only occurred for them after the thought has subsided or vanished, then they are still not really seeing the nature of thought itself. For someone else, they might experience that from the moment of the thought's arising, and for the entire presence of that thought, it remains a unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. This is a correct identification, because whenever there is a thought present in the mind, or when there is no thought present in the mind, and whether or not that thought is being viewed in this way or not, the nature of the mind and the nature of every thought is always a unity of cognitive

Once the nature of thought has been correctly recognized, thought itself becomes the meditative state

lucidity and emptiness. It is not the case that thoughts only become that as they vanish.

The word naked is used a great deal at this point in the text. And the word naked here has a very specific and important meaning because it is used to distinguish between understanding and experience, that is to say, understanding and recognition. It is very easy to confuse one's understanding for an experience or a recognition. One might understand something about the mind and therefore think that one had recognized it directly. Here, the use of the term "naked" means "direct;" that is to say, something that is experienced nakedly or directly in the sense that the experience is free from the overlay of concepts.

Whereas normally we have the attitude that thought is something we must get rid of, in this case it is made clear that it is important not to get rid of thought, but to recognize its nature, and indeed, not only the nature of thought but the nature of stillness must be recognized. In particular, with regard to thought, as long as we do not recognize its nature, of course thought poses a threat to meditation and becomes an impediment.

But once the nature of thought has been correctly recognized, thought itself becomes the meditative state and therefore it is often said that "the root of meditation is recognizing the nature of thought."

There lived in the eighteenth century a great Gelugpa teacher named Changkya Rolpe Dorje, who from his early youth displayed the signs of being an extraordinary person. He became particularly learned and also very realized, and at one point he composed a song called "Recognizing Mother." "Mother" in his song is the word he uses to refer to dharmata or the nature of one's mind. This song was so extraordinary that a commentary was written about it by Khenchen Mipam Rinpoche. In this song, Changkya Rolpe Dorje makes a very clear distinction between recognizing and not recognizing the nature of

one's mind. In one part of the song he says, "Nowadays we scholars of the Gelugpa tradition, in discarding these appearances of the mind as the basis for the realization of emptiness and of the basis for the negation of true existence, and in searching for something beyond this to refute, something beyond this to negate in order to realize emptiness, have left our old mother behind; in other words, we have missed the point of emptiness."

Changkya Rolpe Dorje gives another image for this mistake that we tend to make. He says that we are like a small child who is sitting in his mother's lap, but forgetting where he is, looks for his mother everywhere; looks above, below, left and right and is unable to see his mother and becomes quite agitated. Along comes the child's older brother, and the image the older brother represents is both the understanding of interdependence and the recognition of the nature of thought. The older brother reminds the child by saying, "Your mother is right here, you are in her lap". In the same way, although the nature of our mind or emptiness is with us all the time, we tend to look for it indirectly; we look for it somewhere outside ourselves, somewhere far away. And yet we do not need to look far away if we simply view the nature of thought as it is.

Up to now, for us, thought and the nature of thought have been hidden by thought itself, simply because we have not known how to view thought. But now, knowing how to look at or how to view thought, we are in a position superior to that in which we meditate without thought, because, far from becoming an impediment, thought becomes an opportunity for recognition. Therefore, when thoughts arise, do not fight them, just recognize them. However, recognition

When you can see the essence or the essential nature of thoughts, then the arising of thought no longer means bad meditation, and the absence of thoughts no longer means good meditation, because the nature of mind never changes

of thought does not simply mean being aware that a thought has arisen, or being aware of the contents of that thought. It does not simply mean, "Oh, this is a thought of anger, this is a thought of desire, this is a thought of devotion." Recognition of thought means seeing the empty essence of all of these thoughts. When you can see the essence or the essential nature of thoughts, then the arising of thought no longer means bad meditation, and the absence of thoughts no longer means good meditation, because the nature of mind never changes.

If you have studied a great deal, and in particular have studied the *Madhyamakavatara* by Chandrakirti and the *Bodhicharyavatara* by Shantideva, such as the ninth chapter in [the latter] text on prajna, then you will have encountered the statement that it is impossible for the mind to be aware of itself. This is taught in the madhyamaka system in these texts, and many reasons are given for this statement. This would cause someone who has studied a great deal, or who was learned in the doctrine, to wonder, because in the context of mahamudra, we say that the mind *is* aware of itself. Then again, if you have studied valid cognition, and, in particular, the explanation of valid cognition composed by Dharmakirti, you will have found the statement that there *is* such a thing as self-awareness of the mind, because it is one of the four types of direct valid cognition that are taught in the study of valid cognition. If you operate under the assumption that the self-awareness spoken of in mahamudra, the self-awareness spoken of in valid cognition, and the self-awareness refuted in madhyamaka are all the same, then you will definitely perceive a contradiction. However, the term self-awareness is used differently in each of these three con-

texts.

First of all, in the madhyamaka context the self-awareness that is refuted is the mind being aware of itself as a substantial thing, that is to say, the mind as an appearance having true existence and being able to directly experience or be aware of its own truly existent characteristics. From among the two categories of things, cognitions and inert matter, mind of course is a cognition, and as a cognition it is aware. What is refuted in the madhyamaka context is that that cognition has a true or absolute existence and could, therefore, be aware of its own substantial or absolute existence. The mind is empty of substantial existence and is therefore not aware of any substantial existence within itself. In short, the mind does not see itself, or is not aware of itself, in the sense of seeing a thing.

In the mahamudra context, when we say that the mind can be aware of its own nature, we mean that the mind is aware of its own nature, which is emptiness. Of course, all things are empty, but among all things, mind is manifestly empty. When you look at your mind in the mahamudra practice you observe that there is no shape, no color, no substantial characteristic of any kind, that the mind has no true origination, abiding, or cessation. If the mind had substantial existence, it would possess these characteristics, it would come into being, it would abide, and it would cease. What the mind sees when the mind looks at its own nature is its own absence of true existence. What is refuted in the middle way school is the mind seeing its own presence of true existence, since it does not have any. Therefore, in the mahamudra context, the use of self-awareness is quite different from the way it is used in the madhyamaka context.

On the other hand, in the context of valid cognition we find the statement that all mind is self-aware, which seems to be a complete contradiction of the madhyamaka refutation of self-awareness. However, in the context of valid

What the mind sees when the mind looks at its own nature is its own absence of true existence


cognition, self-awareness has yet a third meaning. It means that you are aware of your own experience, that which is experienced by your mind is not hidden from you, does not need to be inferred by you or deduced by you, is obvious to you. Therefore, if your mind was not self-aware in that way, then you would have no way of knowing what you were thinking. You would have no way of knowing what you were seeing, what you were hearing, what you were smelling, and so forth. In short, the capacity for all the experiences of the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth, the mental consciousness, is based upon self-awareness. However, this awareness of your own experience, which is called self-awareness in the context of valid cognition, is not an awareness that has a separate subject and object. On the other hand, it is still a relative truth form of self-awareness, and therefore it is different from the self-awareness spoken of in mahamudra, because the self-awareness in mahamudra is aware of absolute truth.

Today I have explained viewing the mind within occurrence and the corresponding introduction to the mind's nature within occurrence. The function, again, of the introduction or pointing-out was to enable you to assess the experience you have while viewing the mind within occurrence.

If I were to say to you that through my great compassion and my wonderful blessing I will cause you to have experience and realization, or if I were to say to you that through my great compassion and blessings I will save you from samsara, I would be lying. I do not possess any compassion or any blessing, but on the other hand, I know full well that I have no intention to mislead you or fool you or guide you incorrectly. My intention in teaching is simply to provide you with that which is most beneficial. Furthermore, these teachings are not something that I have come up with myself. These are the teachings of

all the Indian and Tibetan siddhas of our lineage, and it is in reliance upon these teachings and these practices that they attained supreme siddhi. Therefore I am completely confident that what I am explaining to you in this context is in no way deceptive or misleading and is com-

pletely authentic and worthwhile. Therefore, please practice it as much as you can.

I am going to stop here for this afternoon and we will meditate together briefly for a few minutes, and I really mean a few minutes, because I have to prepare for the abhisheka. 

These are the teachings of all the Indian and Tibetan siddhas of our lineage, and it is in reliance upon these teachings and these practices that they attained supreme siddhi

Pointing Out the Dharmakaya  
**Instructions on Viewing the Mind  
Amidst Appearances**



*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**G**ood morning. We are going to begin as usual with the lineage supplication. This lineage supplication was composed by Pengar Jampal Zangpo, and it is regarded as the distillation of his realization of mahamudra attained through meditating for eighteen years in isolation on an island in the midst of Sky Lake in northern Tibet. Therefore, when you chant the lineage supplication please do so with devotion and an undistracted mind.

In this text of instruction on mahamudra, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, the vipashyana presentation consists of five ways to view the mind or look at the mind and five corresponding introductions to the mind's nature. Of these five pairs of sections, the most important are viewing the mind within stillness and viewing the mind within occurrence. These are the most important because, in the case of viewing the mind within stillness, this teaches one how to generate the wisdom of vipashyana in the midst of the experience of the stillness of shamatha, and in the case of viewing the mind within occurrence, it teaches one how to generate this wisdom when thoughts arise within that experience of shamatha. Therefore, these two are the most important to practice and, in a sense, the most useful and beneficial.

The third way of viewing the mind is viewing the mind amidst appearances. Now, appearance refers to two aspects of experience; one is what are called external appearances, which are externally apparent objects, and the other is what are called internal appearances, which means what appears within or what is experienced within your mind. The first of these two categories, external appearances, consists of the objects of the five senses: the forms that are perceived by the eye; the sounds that are perceived by the ear; the tastes that are perceived by the tongue; the smells that are perceived by the nose; and the tactile sensations that are perceived by the whole body. Because we have five sense organs, then we generate five sense consciousnesses which contact their respective objects, of which we then become aware. And our sense experiences are an unlimited variety of things. Forms, shapes, colors, sounds, smells, and tastes can be pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, and so forth. In any case these are what is meant by the term, external appearances.

It is somewhat harder to look at the nature of external, physical appearances, simply because we have such a deeply entrenched habit of seeing them as separate from our minds

Internal appearances consist of, to begin with, the replication by the mind of the similitudes of what is experienced by the senses. Internal appearances include the mental images of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, and also all of the concepts generated on the basis of these, which generally start out as being [in each case] an abstraction based upon the initial sense impression. Internal appearances also include sicknesses, experiences of pain and suffering, of pleasure, of heat and cold, of joy and depression, and so on, negative states of mind such as kleshas, positive states of mind such as love and compassion, and so forth. All of these different mental experiences are called internal appearances.

Whether one is working with external, physical appearances or internal, mental appearances, in either case, the technique here is to look at the nature of these. It is somewhat harder to look at the nature of external, physical appearances, simply because we have such a deeply entrenched habit of seeing them as separate from our minds. In fact, if you analyze these with reasoning, you can determine that the externally apprehended objects are not separate from the internal apprehending cognition, and you can determine through reasoning that the perceived appearances, therefore, are not composed of particles, but in fact, are mental creations or designations based on physical perception. However, we nevertheless have a very strongly entrenched habit of seeing external things as separate from ourselves, because we naturally experience our perspective or viewpoint as being a mind that is looking out at a world that is somehow outside of and separate from that perceiving mind. It may be helpful, in order to work with this problem, when you are meditating on external appearances in particular, to allow the focus of your eyes, the physical focus of

your organ of vision, to relax. Without allowing your eyes to focus on any one thing or another, allow your vision to relax to the point where you do not see any given thing particularly clearly. This will cause a slight reduction of the vividness or intensity of visual appearances and can help generate an experience of the nonduality of appearances and mind.

At this point in the text, it says to look at a vase, a wall, a mountain, and so forth. The particular point here is to look in a way that is relaxed so that your vision is somewhat diffused and not focused on any one thing. By allowing your vision to be unfocused you will not see the details of the forms that are present in your line of vision. The reason why this is helpful is that it is by seeing details, through focusing on a specific thing physically, that we promote or sustain our fixation on the apparent separateness of visual perception. In this technique, look with your eyes in a way that is very relaxed so that, not seeing the details of any of the things in your line of vision, your mind will start to relax and you will experience an absence of separation between the perceived external objects and the perceiving or experiencing cognition. Whereas we normally think that externally perceived objects and the perceiving cognition are inherently separate, that the one is out there and the other is in here, nevertheless, when you relax your vision in this way and simply look without concepts at appearances, then in your experience at that time, there will be no distinction between the apprehended objects and the apprehending cognition. There are still appearances, you are still physically seeing things, but there is no fixated apprehending of them.

That is working with outer or external appearances.

In working with internal appearances you

In working with internal appearances you are working with the sensations that arise for you internally and all the things that appear to your mind . . . as mental perceptions

are working with the sensations that arise for you internally and all the things that appear to your mind—the forms and sounds and so forth—as mental perceptions, and all the other things that arise in your mind. Previously, when you looked at the mind within stillness and occurrence you were looking at what you would normally regard to be the internal or subjective aspect of mind, the mind that experiences. Here, although really there is no ultimate distinction between the internal cognition and the externally experienced object, in this technique of looking at the mind amidst appearances you would probably say you were looking at what appears to be the external, objectively appearing aspect of mind. You are looking at appearances that appear to the mind, rather than looking at the

mind to which they appear. Ultimately, of course, these two are not two different things, but in our normal and confused way of perceiving them they do appear to be. Here you are concerned with forms and sounds and pleasure and pain, and so forth, all of the things that you experience. In other words, you are looking at the experienced aspect rather than the experiencing aspect. Nevertheless, if you look at these directly, in a relaxed way and without concept, then there will be no fixated apprehension of the characteristics of appearance, and in that way, while the appearances themselves will not cease, they will not be a cause of further fixation because there is no fixated apprehension of them to begin with.

In this technique, as in the previous ones, there are several subdivisions of ways that you look at the mind within appearances. The first is to examine the relationship between your mind and the objects that appear to it. Whether we are speaking of the sensations that appear in your mind or the objects that appear, supposedly, externally to the mind, in either case, you have an experiencing cognition and an experienced

object. The first way of looking at the mind within appearances is to look at whether this experiencing cognition and what it experiences are the same or different. You should not let this become an exercise in logical reasoning; you are not attempting to analyze the situation and determine this through thinking about it. What you are looking at is: How do you experience it? Do you experience the mind and what it experiences as different, or as the same? The second way of looking at the mind within appearances is related to that. When objects appear to you—principally here externally apparent objects—is it the case that the appearances come into and enter your mind, or that the mind somehow goes out and enters into appearances? Which of these is the case? Again, this should be looked at experientially and not analytically.

Do appearances come into the mind or does mind go out to and enter into appearances are the second and third ways of looking at the mind within appearances. The fourth way, with regard to this inseparability of mind and appearance, which you may have discovered—where, although there is the appearance of a subject and an object, you may nevertheless be experiencing them as inseparable—is: Do you experience this as nonexistent objects that nevertheless appear and a nonexistent cognition that nevertheless experiences these objects? Do you experience this in that way as a unity of appearance and emptiness?

The fifth part of the technique concerns another type of experience: You observe that, while objects that appear to you do not cease to appear—even when you look at them in this way—in experiencing them without fixation you observe that, while appearing, they are nevertheless empty of true, inherent, or independent existence. When you look inward at this mind

In this way it is said that appearances appear while being empty and remain empty while appearing, which is what is meant by saying that they are a unity of appearance and emptiness

that experiences these objects, you discover that, although your mind experiences these appearances, that mind itself has no substantial existence as anything or anywhere at all. In that way, although there is the continued experience of appearances, you are without fixation on any supposed existence or reality to either the apparent objects, or the apparent subjective cognition. You experience an absence of a viewing mind and an absence of an inherently existent viewed object. Nevertheless there is the continued appearance or experience of apparent objects by the mind. In this way, it is said that appearances appear while being empty and remain empty while appearing, which is what is meant by saying that they are a unity of appearance and emptiness. This way of looking at appearances is said to be like the way a small child will look at the images in a temple when it enters that temple. The child has no fixated apprehension of one thing or another. This fifth point is to look to see whether this is how you experience it or not.

From the point of view not of meditation practice, but of reasoning, it can be determined that all the things that appear to us are of the nature of our mind, and also that the mind itself is obviously of the nature of the mind itself. Normally when we think about things we regard that which appears to us externally as composed of particles, and therefore as made up of matter, and we regard our cognition or our mind as a mere cognitive clarity or awareness and therefore as fundamentally different in nature from what we experience or what appears to us. But if we analyze carefully how we experience, we will see that what appears to us are actually fixated images created by our minds through taking many things together and desig-



nating them as units with certain designated characteristics. If you analyze the objective bases in physical reality for these designated images—and it is the designated images which we experience, not the objective bases—then you determine that the objective bases themselves, while apparently composed of particles, are actually composed of particles that when analyzed [in greater and greater detail] to the end, eventually disappear under analysis, and end up being composed of nothing. Nevertheless, appearances do appear to us. This of course is about reasoning and not about meditation; this is not an exercise for meditation. Why then, if this is how things are, if the appearances that we experience are merely designated, fixated images based upon taking things as lump sums, why do we experience these things as externally existent and separate from ourselves? Simply, because appearances appear to our minds, we assume that they have an existence separate from our minds. Because we see something, we assert or assume that it exists. We never assert the existence of something we have not perceived. The basic argument that we always use for asserting the existence of something is that we perceive it. Nevertheless, given the way we perceive things, when we perceive things, we are really perceiving mental images, so, therefore, since there is no way to say that anything exists other than having the reason that you perceive it, and since everything you perceive is by definition, in fact, cognition perceiving its own clarity in the form of these fixated images, then as was said by Dharmakirti, “Everything you experience is really just cognitive clarity, or cognitive lucidity.”

Nevertheless, many of the things that appear to us as external objects, such as rocks and mountains and trees, and so on, seem very solid, very independent, and one might ask, “How can we assert that such things are mental appear-

ances?” For example, when you dream of rocks and mountains and trees, these things are very vivid and seem quite external to you and yet they are not external to you; they are simply

mental images and mental appearances. The reason why those specific mental images arise in that specific dream is the force of habit. In the same way, the reason why a given being experiences the world in their particular way is because of their particular habit. Things are not really external to the perceiver. They are experienced as though they were external to the perceiver through the power of that perceiver’s habit. In this way it is taught that appearances are mind.

Pursuing this kind of reasoning, which establishes that appearances are mind, will lead to certainty about this. If it does

lead to certainty, then you can rest within this certainty in your meditation, and there will arise some experience in the meditation of the absence of inherent existence of external appearances—the unity of mind and appearances, and so on. This may arise from time to time. However, you should not be discouraged if you find that you cannot generate any resolution or certainty about the mental nature of appearances. It may be helpful to use the distinction that was proclaimed by the omniscient Longchenpa when he said, “Appearances are mind, but apparent objects are not mind.” The distinction he was making was between appearances—the actual subjective experience of a thing, such as the internal mental experiences—and the external objects that generate appearance.\* Therefore it may be helpful to limit your training of your mind within appearances to

Things are not really external to the perceiver. They are experienced as though they were external to the perceiver through the power of that perceiver’s habit

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\***Editor’s note:** Bearing in mind what Rinpoche has been teaching in the paragraph immediately prior to this quotation and bearing in mind his answer to the first question on this subject on page 66, it is important to recognize that this is not a definitive statement.

those things that are clearly subjective appearances. For example, if you use those things that clearly appear to you as mental phenomena, such as sensations, emotional states, and so on, then you can still use these for training the mind within appearances and [at the same time] you will not be troubled by the inability to resolve whether [external] appearances are mind.

**T**hat was viewing the mind within appearances, which is the nineteenth topic presented in the text. Next is pointing out the mind within appearances, which is the twenty-fourth topic, and this is a presentation of what is an authentic experience of the relationship between mind and appearances.

When you are meditating and looking at the mind within appearances, then you may have the experience that, while the perceived objects and the perceiving mind do not seem in any way to disappear or cease to exist and are, in a sense, still present, when you actively look at them, you do not find anything in either that exists separate from the other. And in that way, when looking at the mind that experiences appearances, you find that there is nothing in that mind to fix upon as a truly existent subject or apprehender, yet the mind still appears to experience. And when you look at the perceived objects, while they do not disappear and while you are looking at them, they remain vivid appearances that are without anything in them anywhere that you can fix upon as existing separate from the experience of the nonduality of appearances and mind. This nonduality of appearance and mind is held to be the authentic experience or recognition of the mind within appearances.

I am going to stop there for this morning, but if you have any questions, please ask them.

**Question:** Rinpoche, just a few minutes ago you seemed to say that some objects are exempt from

being appearances that appear to the mind. You were talking about appearances, and then you were talking about apparent objects as not being part of that same sort of scheme. You seemed to be saying that there is something beyond mind, [apparent objects] that are not subject to the rules of karma, that would be permanent, in effect.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The statement by Longchenpa, that appearances are mind, but the objects that appear are not mind, is regarded as a concession to the difficulty of recognizing that apparent objects are mind. It is not regarded here as a definitive statement that only subjective

appearances are mind and the other things are not. It is a concession to the difficulty we have with recognizing that all things are nothing other than mind. As a concession to that difficulty, and as a step to realizing that [all appearances, subjective and objective, are merely mind], you are given this distinction between subjective appearances and apparent objects. Apparent objects are things that appear to you as external to yourself, and appearances are your internal experiences of

things, such as your sensations, physical and mental. The reason why this distinction is made is that when you are meditating it is easy to work with the internal appearances and to recognize their nature and to use them as a basis for the recognition of the mind. It is harder to work with external appearances. It is easy to determine the mental nature of external appearances using reasoning, but it is difficult to experience it directly in meditation. Therefore it is suggested to emphasize using the internal appearances as objects for meditation.

**Question:** Rinpoche, my question is very closely related to the last one, but I guess I would ask it a little bit differently. At some point you said to

This nonduality of appearance and mind is held to be the authentic experience or recognition of the mind within appearances

us that, if we came to believe that when we no longer exist or we seem to die that things do not go on, that would be a fallacy. I think that is what I understood. I guess my question is, if I understand your response to the last question, we are working toward understanding that even the things that appear external and hard and solid like rocks and trees are also the fabrication of our mind. We just use the internal things, as you said, to begin with, because it is easier for us to work with that than to actually come to experience the mental nature of external objects. We may understand intellectually, but to experience that the tree is also totally a fabrication would be difficult. First, I want to know if I understood you correctly, that indeed we are eventually going to come to the realization that everything is mind, including the things that seem most solid. And then the second part of my question is, when the world appears to continue, and I guess it does, when we die, if it does, is this again just because others have the same mental habits, or very similar mental habits to those, let's say, that I have? So they'll still see the rocks and trees when I perhaps go through the bardo and experience something totally different and perhaps come out on the other side in another realm altogether?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** As for your first question, yes, you understood correctly. Finally one has to resolve that even apparent objects are not other than mind. With regard to your second question, the reason why, in the experience of others, the appearances of the world do not stop when a given person passes away is that the similar experiences of others are produced by karma similar to that which produced the experiences of the person who passed away. For example, when several different people see much the same thing, they see much the same thing because they have accumulated much the same

karma. However, they are each seeing it individually. Everyone's experience is individual, as similar as it may be to that of others. It is like, for example, placing a vase on a table and a hundred mirrors around it. Each of those mirrors will reflect the image of the same vase, but each is yet a distinct image of that vase.

**Question:** Rinpoche, this question is in two parts. The first one has to do with the fourth and fifth techniques in the subdivision of techniques under this whole rubric of looking at appearances. What I want to know is, is it correct to link the experiences that one has in meditation to philosophical views found in the madhyamaka traditions? Specifically, can you link the fourth experience of meditation up to the autonomy or the middle way school, the *rang gyu*, and can you link the fifth experience, the fifth part of it, up to the consequence middle way school, the *tal gyur*; and would that be correct to do? That's the first part. The second part has to do with Rinpoche's statement that pursuing the reasoning will lead to [logical] certainty, and then resting in that one can generate

some actual experience of that certainty. So does Rinpoche, in that connection, feel that it is useful and appropriate to practice analytical meditation as a way of preparing oneself for mahamudra, as in the tradition of other teachers?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** With regard to your first question, there is not any particular correlation between the fourth and the fifth parts of the technique with the svatantrika and the prasangika schools. These are really more talking about experiences that happen while doing this meditation. The certainty that would be generated through the logical analysis and analytical meditation on the view is a kind of a

support for this practice—or could be—and would assist it. But it is not exactly correct to say that by resting in that certainty gained through analysis experience will arise. It is more the case that that certainty will give you the confidence to do the technique. The technique itself is strictly speaking independent of logical reasoning. The technique consists of looking directly at appearances; therefore it is not like a continuation of analytical meditation. On the other hand, it would certainly do no harm to familiarize yourself with the views of the middle way school, and so on, through pursuing analysis and analytical meditation, because they will help and inform the mahamudra view. Nevertheless, the mahamudra view itself is gained through direct experience and not through analytical meditation.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I do not really have any great knowledge or experience to ask a really good question. This experience of mahamudra, whatever it is, this sense of melting or dissolving or just being part of everything that happens to be, makes me feel quite raw and anxious and sad. I thought I was supposed to feel good and blissful, and I am wondering if the fear or the anxiety is what provides the glue that we are always trying to use to stick things together that are not really together, or make things appear solid that are not really solid?

**Thrangü Rinpoche:** Exactly what kind of anxiety?

**Same questioner:** Well, if I were to jump into the lake in my normal state of mind I would feel that I was in the lake. But with practice, I begin to feel that I am just part of the lake and anxious about feeling a loss of boundary and just dissolving and just being part of the lake.

**Thrangü Rinpoche:** I think that the solution to this anxiety is to clarify your understanding,

because whether we meditate or not, the nature of things, dharmata, is unchanging. It is not the case that through meditating you are going to somehow bring about your own destruction. In fact, there is nothing to destroy, and through understanding the view in an intellectual way, you may be able to free yourself from this anxiety that is based on a fear of annihilation. The condition for this anxiety is probably too much fixation on your experience. And the remedy for that is to study a little bit more and understand more about the view in a conceptual way.

**Same questioner:** Could I ask about the remedy for the sadness, just the feeling that we are creating our own suffering and creating so much suffering with just fabricating, and so it just seems so endless? How could we possibly help others when some of us who

have been practicing a long, long time are barely able to help ourselves? How could we be of genuine benefit? I guess my question is about bodhicitta.


**Thrangü Rinpoche:** Sadness, per se, is good. As was said by Jetsun Milarepa, “Sadness is the infallible spur to diligence.” The discomfort that you are describing seems to be produced by a kind of experience of emptiness, and it is because of the attitude you take toward the experience that it becomes uncomfortable. If you change your outlook or change your attitude a little bit about your experience, then this should shift things and you will not find the anxiety and the discomfort. Specifically, by coming to understand fully that there is nothing that is going to be destroyed by emptiness, then you will be free from fear; you will have more confidence in your practice. We all have this attitude that our minds, or whatever we may say our minds are, are really tiny solid things that we have to protect, and, having that attitude, then naturally when we start to have an experience of emptiness we are very threatened by it because we

fear annihilation. But if you really look at your mind and you really understand it, you will see that there is not anything there that could die. There is not anything there that needs to be protected. Having that experience will shift things so that you will have confidence and no fear.

**Question:** I was hoping that Rinpoche might

reflect upon the kind of experiences one might have if one took the opportunity to take the physical form of one's root guru as the object of appearance?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** It would be just the same. From this point of view it is just another appearance.

So now we will chant the dedication of merit. 

If you really look  
at your mind  
and you really  
understand it,  
you will see that  
there is not  
anything there  
that could die.  
There is not  
anything there  
that needs to be  
protected. Having  
that experience  
will shift things  
so that you will  
have confidence  
and no fear



### Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## The Viewing of Body and Mind to See If They Are the Same or Different

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**S**o far, we have discussed looking at the mind within stillness, then looking at the mind within occurrence, and finally, looking at the mind within appearances. Corresponding to these, we have gone through the identification, recognition, or pointing-out of the mind within stillness, within occurrence, and within appearances. It was said by Lord Gampopa, “The mind itself is the co-emergent dharmakaya.” This means that when you look at the mind itself—as you do, for example, when looking at the mind

within stillness—and if you identify it as it is, you will see that it is empty, which is to say that it has no substantial existence of any kind. However, the mind is not merely empty; while being empty, it also is cognitive lucidity. Therefore the mind itself is the seed of the attainment of the dharmakaya, because the mind in itself possesses the qualities and potential that will enable you to remove all obscurations and to perfect all wisdoms.

In the next line of this quotation, Lord Gampopa says, “Appearances are the light of the co-emergent dharmakaya,” which is taking things in a slightly different order from the one that we have been using in this text. Having talked about the mind itself as the co-emergent dharmakaya, he then says that the nature of appearances is that they are the light or radiance of that co-emergent dharmakaya. This refers in general to what we have been calling both external and internal appearances. It is perhaps easier to see with regard to internal appearances, which are experiences within the mind that arise from the mind just as the rays of sunlight arise from the sun. This means that this mind itself, which, as we have seen, is empty and yet is cognitive lucidity, has a natural radiance or power to it as cognitive lucidity. Before meditating, before recognizing things to be as they are, one will have seen the radiance of this mind as solid external things that are sources of pleasure and pain. But through practicing meditation, and through coming to recognize things as they are, you will come to see that all of these appearances are merely the display or radiance or light of the mind which experiences them.

One of Gampopa’s chief disciples, Dagpo Gomtsul, added to this quotation, saying, “Thoughts are the display or power of the co-

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emergent dharmakaya.” This refers to the second way of viewing the mind and pointing out the mind’s nature that we have been using—viewing the mind within occurrence. Thoughts are called the display or power of the co-emergent dharmakaya because they are a display in the sense that they move about; they are vivid and of varied occurrence. They appear suddenly, and they can change their intensity from being very intense to being very weak, and so forth;

and they are of an unlimited variety in how they can appear. There are all manner of virtuous and unvirtuous thoughts. For as long as you have not meditated and have not understood the point of thoughts, then thoughts obscure and impede you, but once the nature of thoughts has been recognized and they have been seen to have no inherent existence, then thoughts neither obscure nor impede the process of meditation. While thoughts continue to manifest in their variety and change, nevertheless their nature is seen to be the dharmakaya, which is the nature of mind, and are therefore understood to be the display of the dharmakaya.

Within all three of these techniques of looking at the mind, the main concern is the mind itself, which normally we take to be “I,” a self which we take to have substantial existence. The approach we are taking here is not particularly to attempt to refute these assertions, not to assert that the mind is not the self, or that it has no substantial existence. It is simply to look directly at the mind itself and, through seeing its nature to see directly that it is empty, that it is without a self. In that way, one determines the nature of the mind, the nature of the thoughts that arise [in or] around the mind, and the nature of the appearances that are the environment in which we find ourselves.

Next, in the fourth technique, we look at and will identify the nature of the body and mind. This is called viewing the body and mind to see if they are the same or different. The function of this is to undermine and avert our fixation. Our strongest fixation and attachment are on our mind and on our body. And this is undermined and averted by demonstrating the emptiness of both. In order to demonstrate to ourselves that both the body and the mind lack inherent existence, we will look to see if they are the same or different. In the conventional context of confused appearances, we would normally regard them as distinct or as different because the mind is cognitive lucidity and the body is a physical substance. Therefore we would normally say that they are different because they have different characteristics or natures. The mind is cognition and the body is matter. However, this is a statement that is valid only in a relative context.

When we look with reasoning at the relationship between the body and the mind, it seems obvious that they are different, and it does not require a great deal of argument to assert their difference. However, when we look at the relationship between body and mind from the standpoint of meditation experience, there is something to be looked at here, because we come to a different conclusion. For example, first, if you look at your body, you define your body as that which is your body from the head all the way down to your toes. Now, where is your mind apart from that? Is your mind something you can point to outside the body, that is separate from the body? When you look you find that there is no mind that can be separated from the body to be pointed to. Therefore, from that point of view, you would tend to say that your mind is no different from your body, that your mind is a characteristic or quality of the body.

Also, if you look for a body that is outside of

Our strongest fixation and attachment are on our mind and on our body. And this is undermined and averted by demonstrating the emptiness of both

or separate from your mind, you do not seem to be able to find that either, because your identification with your body is based on the notion that this is my body, which is a notion found in your mind. Your experience of body is based on the appearance of your body to your mind. Therefore from that point of view, you would also have to say, not only is there no mind outside your body, there is no body outside of or separate from your mind.

Your body merely appears to your mind, and you also have no mind that is outside of or separate from or other than your body. There is no body outside of your mind, and yet your mind has no true or inherent existence. Therefore, your body, which must merely be a characteristic or something appearing to the mind, must have that same nature and lack inherent existence. When you experience this in meditation, it does not mean that your body disappears, but your fixation on it as solid and as a source of suffering disappears. In the practice

you rest evenly in the confidence that the body is merely an appearance to your mind. This will then generate less attachment, and there will be less of a sense of solidity and of independent existence to the body, even though it will not cease to appear to you. That is how to view whether the body and mind are the same or different, which is the twentieth topic in the text. Corresponding to this is the introduction to or pointing-out of whether the body and mind are the same or different.

Through looking at this again and again, you come to the conclusion that the body and the mind are neither the same nor different. They both appear, and yet in their appearance they lack true existence, because the appearance of the one depends upon the appearance of the other. In that way, while they are vivid appearances, they are vivid appearances without any inherent existence as what they appear to be.



They are the unity of lucidity and emptiness, like for example, the reflection of the moon in a body of water. If you ask, "Is there a reflection of the moon in the body of water," you would have to say yes, because you see it. But if you were asked, is there actually a moon in the body of water, you would have to say no.

What is the use of experiencing this? The use is that we normally have tremendous fixation and craving for the support of our bodies, which makes us constantly threatened by what will happen to the body. We are threatened by experiences of heat and cold, hunger, thirst, and so on, and the fact that these experiences are threatening to us comes about because of our fixation on the body. We think that the body is a solid and existent thing that is somehow possessed by or hosts our mind. But if you recognize the nature of your body to be the unity of appearance and emptiness or lucidity and emptiness, then even though you will still physically feel hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, you will not be afflicted by them. They will be vivid appearances that are perceived as empty and that do not therefore bring suffering.

In the beginning, one cannot look directly at great physical sufferings such as intense sickness and not be affected by them. But one can, in the beginning, work with less intense sensations and gradually progress to the point where any physical experience can be seen through, which makes these instructions for viewing the oneness or distinctness of body and mind very useful.

That is viewing the unity or distinctness of body and mind and pointing out the unity or distinctness of body and mind. This has to be actually practiced for it to lead to its result. However, the result will be that you will be able to experience what would otherwise be intense physical suffering without its posing a problem

for you, and you will also not be overpowered by physical pleasure. These will not lead to kleshas, such as arrogance, jealousy, and so on.

This practice of mahamudra is often called the path of liberation, and the reason for that is that it is a path that is extremely simple, meaning that it does not require a lot of preparation or devices. It can be practiced at any time or in any situation, provided one possesses mindfulness and alertness. It is exactly this that

The result will be that you will be able to experience what would otherwise be intense physical suffering without its posing a problem for you, and you will also not be overpowered by physical pleasure

needs to be practiced by monastics. They can practice just this mahamudra without having to add anything to it or search for anything more profound, and they will attain liberation. It is just this that can be practiced by male and female householders. They need not add anything else to this or look for anything more profound, in order to attain liberation. The root of mahamudra practice is the maintenance of mindfulness and alertness in your mind, which need to be cultivated, both in formal meditation practice and in post-meditation. The post-meditation discipline of maintaining mindfulness and alertness in the midst of one's activities, such as walking, sitting, talking, eating, and so on, is rather difficult for

beginners. But if you keep on practicing this discipline without becoming discouraged, it becomes not too difficult, and you can actually attain liberation of your mind, which is why mahamudra is called the path of liberation.

Essentially, therefore, this path is sufficient in and of itself. On the other hand, it is appropriate to enhance one's training of the view and meditation of mahamudra with such supplementary practices as the generation stage of yidam practice, the practice of guru yoga, the practices of the path of methods, such as The Six Dharmas of Naropa, and other practices that involve

conceptual effort. All of these practices are helpful to mahamudra and not harmful to it. Therefore, it is the custom, when we have the time and opportunity, to engage in these elaborate practices, even up to the preparation of mandalas, the making and offering of tormas, and so on. If these practices are done with a proper samadhi and clear visualization, and so forth, then they can bestow great benefit or enhancement upon one's fundamental mahamudra practice.

Sometimes the supplementary practices you do need not be too elaborate. They could be simpler practices, such as the meditations on Chenrezig, Amitabha, Medicine Buddha, and so forth. All of these practices can be used as contexts for the practice of mahamudra and all of them are helpful. You should not think that in order to supplement your mahamudra practice you need necessarily to do very complicated and elaborate practices. Whatever type of practice you do, if you mix it with the mahamudra practice, it will facilitate that practice.

The fundamental requirement is to preserve mindfulness and alertness at all times. We can see this from the biographies of the great siddhas of India. There were eighty-four principal male and female siddhas in India. In the case of all of them, their root practice was mahamudra, and practicing mahamudra, they all attained the supreme siddhi. This is true of all of the siddhas who are known to us, including Saraha, Tilopa, Naropa, Maitripa, and so on. In the case of some of these, their lifestyles involved a certain amount of elaboration. For example, Nagarjuna was a great scholar and teacher, and King Indrabhuti not only ruled his country, but lived in a situation of the utmost luxury. But all of them, whatever their circumstances were, preserved this mindfulness and alertness of mahamudra throughout all of their activities and in that way came to attain liberation.

Some of the mahasiddhas were merchants,

The fundamental requirement is to preserve mindfulness and alertness at all times

some of the mahasiddhas were tradespeople, some of them were householders, some of them lived in situations of extreme poverty, were poor laborers or even beggars. What they all have in common, however, is that they all tamed their minds; they all cultivated circumspection of conduct and a mindfulness and alertness of

meditation. In the case of each and every one of them the meditation of mahamudra was born within them and thereafter fostered by them until they attained supreme siddhi. But they did this in the midst of their particular circumstances without having to change their circumstances in any specific way in order to practice. Some of them had lifestyles that we would consider good, some of them had

lifestyles that we would consider bad, some of them were very wealthy, some of them were very poor. But because they were able to cultivate this practice of mahamudra in the midst of any situation and thereby attain liberation, then we call this path the path of liberation, which is simple or free of elaboration.

The practice of mahamudra does not depend upon conduct or lifestyle; it depends on meditation or samadhi. If you can cultivate this meditation of mahamudra throughout long periods of sitting absolutely still, of course that is excellent; but if you can cultivate it in the midst of many busy activities, that also is excellent. Nowadays this practice of mahamudra is what everyone needs, especially people in the West who are very busy. It depends entirely upon taking hold of your mind, which from one point of view is not necessarily all that easy, but it is definitely possible to do in any situation and it is supremely beneficial.

The text that I am teaching at this point is *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*, which is a very profound text written by the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, and it bears tremendous blessing. At the same time, it is the shortest complete presentation of mahamudra practice. So it would be very helpful if you were to

study the longer presentations of mahamudra. This is a way of relying upon the second of the four gurus, the guru who is the dictates of the sugatas, or the teachings of buddhas and bodhisattvas; because if you study various texts on mahamudra, it will definitely help your view and meditation.

When the Sixteenth Gyalwang Karmapa was in the West he was approached by some of his students and asked, "What are the most beneficial books to translate for the use of future practitioners?" He suggested that the most important text to translate was the text, *Moonbeams of Mahamudra*, by Dagpo Tashi Namgyal. It was therefore translated and has been published. It is very, very helpful to study this book. I realize that it is somewhat intimidating in its thickness and also in the density of the text itself. Even though on first reading it may be difficult to penetrate, on the second reading you may find things that did not make sense to you the first time which will be very helpful and which you can actually apply to your experience. Maybe things that do not make sense to you the second time will make sense to you the third time you read it. Another text that is very much worth studying is the longest of the three mahamudra commentaries by the Ninth Karmapa, which is known as *The Ocean of the True Meaning*, and if you can study this and similar texts it will be very helpful. Of course if you have someone to teach the text to you, that is best. But even if you do not, you should read it and rely upon it as the guru of the dictates of the sugatas. By studying these texts you will actually learn things that will help your experience of meditation, chiefly by comparing what you have experienced to what is described in the text.

However, the way that you study such texts and the motivation with which you study them are important. You might read these books out of curiosity and the desire to learn something. You might read them with the wish to know all about the person who wrote them and what that per-

Dharma texts are  
'the teacher who  
never gets mad  
at you'

son had to say. There is nothing wrong with that in general, because these are dharma books, and so therefore you are learning something about dharma. But this approach to study is principally that of a thinker, someone who speculates. Here we are concerned with the use of study as a way to refine our experience of meditation.

Therefore, as you are reading these books you should be looking for things that actually reflect and illuminate your experience. You should be looking for statements or instructions in these

texts that will enable you to assess the quality of your experience and enable you to detect possible distractions and diversions and so forth. If you read these texts with the motivation that you are doing so in order to help your practical experience of meditation, then you will discover

a great deal in them that will be helpful in just that way. You will come across something that will reveal a point that you have been unable to understand or unable to apply, and you will all of a sudden be certain, "Ah, this is how it is!" That is actually receiving the pointing-out from the guru who is the dictates of the sugatas.

Great masters of the past said that dharma texts are "the teacher who never gets mad at you," [laughter] because your relationship with the book is entirely up to you. For example, if you do not understand something and you read it again and again and again, unlike a teacher who might get upset at being asked the same question a hundred times, the book will never get angry at you for reading the same passage again for a hundred times. If while studying the texts you all of a sudden run out of time and have to put the book away abruptly and quickly, the book will never get angry at you for closing it. In that way, this guru who is the dictates of the sugatas is very convenient to study with and very beneficial to your experience and realization.

We are going to stop here and meditate a bit.





### Pointing Out the Dharmakaya

## Viewing the Mind to See If Stillness and Occurrence Are the Same or Different

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on Pointing Out the Dharmakaya.*

**G**ood morning. Whenever you study or practice mahamudra in order to generate recognition where there is no recognition, and in order to increase the recognition where there is recognition, it is essential to supplicate with the utmost devotion. The practice of supplication and the use of liturgies, such as the lineage supplication, to precede either mahamudra or any other meditation practice is very beneficial. As usual, we will begin with the lineage supplication and please chant it with faith and

devotion.

This morning we are concerned with the fifth of the five ways of viewing the mind and the corresponding fifth of the five ways of pointing out the mind's nature. Previously we saw that the first way of viewing the mind was viewing the mind within stillness, and the second was viewing the mind within occurrence. Here we look at both of them, and this way of viewing the mind is viewing the mind to see if stillness and occurrence are the same or different. This is very much like the fourth technique, in which we viewed the mind to see if body and mind were the same or different. Here you are concerned with the mind, and in particular with the two states of mind, stillness and occurrence. When we think about this, and also about how things appear in general, we would say that stillness and occurrence are different, because they are distinct states of mind. When your mind is in a state of stillness, it is at rest with no thoughts arising; and when your mind is in a state of occurrence, thoughts are present and your mind is not at rest and not in a state of stillness. From that point of view it would seem obvious that these two are different. However, when you look directly at the essence of these two states of mind, then you discover that the nature of the mind within stillness and the nature of the mind within occurrence are the same. Therefore, from the point of view of how they appear, these two states could be said to be different, and from the point of view of how they really are, these two states could be said to be the same.

When you look to see if stillness and occurrence are different in nature, there are several questions that you can ask of your experience to see what these two states are really like. In general, when you look to see if they are different in nature, you are looking to see if their

When you look directly at the essence of these two states of mind, then you discover that the nature of the mind within stillness and the nature of the mind within occurrence are the same

characteristics are different, what characteristics the one possesses that the other does not. For example, do they have distinct shape, distinct color, and so forth? Do they have any substantial characteristic that makes them distinct in nature? That is the general consideration, and then specifically with regard to how they might seem to you, the first question is: Are they simultaneously present, yet separate, like two strings or pieces of thread put side by side? In other words, equally present and equal in degree of reality, or equal in how fundamental they are to the mind, but nevertheless separate, is that how they are? That is the first one. The second one is: If they are distinct and separate, do they have a relationship? Do they have a relationship of supporting and supported? Is stillness the environment in which occurrence occurs? For example, like the earth and the trees that grow

on it. Is that what their relationship is? The third question is: If you find that they do not seem to be simultaneously present, but distinct, like two separate pieces of thread or rope, and they do not seem to be in the relationship of environment and that which is supported by that environment, then is the relationship between stillness and occurrence like two pieces of rope that are braided to form a braided rope—so that they alternate, so that when there is stillness there is no occurrence, and when there is occurrence there is no stillness? Is that how they are?

Those three questions are ways of looking at the possibility that stillness and occurrence are fundamentally different in nature. The next set of questions is concerned with the possibility that they might be fundamentally the same in nature. Again if, through looking at the mind, you come to the conclusion that they are the same, then you have to question what this sameness or oneness of stillness and occurrence

means and consists of. If they are one, are they one in the sense of a piece of iron that can be changed into gold and then be changed back into iron? Is it some sort of transformation in place, is that what their oneness is? That is the fourth question. Or the fifth, is it the oneness of two distinct things that have been mixed to form a mixture like water and milk poured into the same container, is their oneness like that?

The sixth question is: Is it the case that stillness and occurrence are not mixed like water and milk, but are distinct in their characteristics, like water and waves that rise on the surface of that body of water and therefore appear in alternation, so that when there is stillness there is no occurrence and when there is occurrence there is no stillness, but that nevertheless their nature is the same? Is it the case that the nature of stillness is the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness and that the nature of occurrence is that same unity, and that yet nevertheless they appear in alternation? That is the sixth question.

The next three questions, the final three of this section, are as follows. If you find that the answer to the sixth question is yes, and that the nature of both stillness and occurrence is lucidity-emptiness, what exactly does this mean? The seventh question is: If you think that the nature of both stillness and occurrence is lucidity-emptiness, then do thoughts become this lucidity-emptiness when they are recognized? When the nature of a thought is seen, does that nature become this lucidity-emptiness? Or, the eighth question, does a thought become lucidity-emptiness whether it is recognized or not, but only after it vanishes? Does the thought vanish into this state of lucidity-emptiness? Or, number nine, is the nature of a thought lucidity-emptiness from the moment of its inception, irrespective of its being recognized or not, or having vanished or not?

With regard to their actual nature, what you

will discover when you look at stillness and occurrence in general and in these nine ways is that stillness and occurrence are distinct experiences, but nevertheless their nature is the same. The nature of occurrence is lucidity-emptiness; occurrence, the thoughts that move through your mind, are not things that in any way exist apart from mind and that therefore have a nature other than that lucidity-emptiness which is the mind's nature. Stillness, as well, is simply another expression of the same nature of the mind, so therefore the nature of stillness, as well, is

lucidity-emptiness. Their appearances are distinct and, as experiences, they occur in alternation. You can recognize a state of stillness as distinct from a state of occurrence, a state of occurrence as distinct from a state of stillness, but when you perceive the nature of either one of these, you are seeing the same thing.

While the appearances or manifestations of stillness and occurrence are distinct as experiences, they are equally lucidity-emptiness in their essential nature. For example, when the mind is at rest there is nothing that exists that is at rest and there is no place in which the mind is at rest. Nevertheless, while it is insubstantial and without inherent existence in that way, the cognitive clarity of the mind is undiminished by the mind's being at rest. Therefore, when the mind is at rest, the nature of that mind is a cognitive clarity that is empty, so it is called lucidity-emptiness. When there is the occurrence of thought within the mind, then the thoughts themselves have no inherent existence. The thoughts do not come from anywhere that truly exists, and they do not remain or disappear anywhere that truly exists. While these thoughts have an appearance of occurrence or movement, they are nevertheless simply the display of that same naked cognitive clarity which is undiminished when the mind is at rest. Therefore, these thoughts that are utterly insubstantial or without inherent existence are in themselves, in

The nature of occurrence is lucidity-emptiness . . . the nature of stillness, as well, is lucidity-emptiness

their nature, that cognitive clarity and are therefore a cognitive clarity that is empty, so they too are lucidity-emptiness. With regard to the nature of thoughts being lucidity-emptiness, it is not the case that thoughts upon their arising are solid and truly existent and only become lucidity-emptiness when they are recognized, or through some effort of meditation. Nor is it the case that thoughts only become lucidity-emptiness when they subside or when they disappear. From the moment of their inception, from the moment of their arising, all thoughts are of this nature of lucidity-emptiness. As is said in the liturgy for meditation on Guru Dorje Trolö called Zangpupma, “See all thoughts as the wind moving through space.” Of course we can detect the movement of the wind through space, but it has no solidity and it has no beginning and end. In the same way, thoughts do not come from anywhere; they are not present anywhere; they do not go anywhere and they have, themselves, no substantial entity or no substantial existence. Therefore thoughts, like the mind at rest, or thoughts, like the mind in occurrence, are naked lucidity-emptiness.

If you practice this meditation, then you will definitely come to this experience and recognition.

Following this section in the text there are four additional introductions. The first of these is the pointing-out that appearances are mind, and this is connected to some extent with the previous practice, the third practice, which involves determining the sameness or difference of appearances and mind. Through doing that practice, in the beginning, you will come to a resolution that the internal appearances, mental experiences, are nothing other than mind, and eventually you will come to the recognition that even external appearances are nothing other than mind. In any case, the recognition that no appearance whatsoever exists beyond the mind is the identification of appearances as mind.

Having recognized that all that appears is the

See all thoughts  
as the wind  
moving through  
space

display of the mind, then it is necessary to recognize the nature of that mind. In order to do this you use the first two techniques: looking at the mind within stillness and looking at the mind within occurrence. Through looking at the mind in these two situations, you discover that the mind has no origin, has no location, and has no destination. You experience states of stillness and occurrence, but nothing in these states has any origin, location, or destination, and you discover that there is nothing that is still in stillness and nothing that is moving in the state of occurrence. This recognition that these states which are distinct—or lucid or vivid in their appearances—are nevertheless utterly empty is the second recognition, the recognition that mind is emptiness.

Having recognized that appearances are mind and that mind is emptiness, does this recognition that mind is emptiness mean that mind ceases? Upon this recognition does mind cease to exist, like a candle being snuffed out? Of course it does not. Because while mind is emptiness, the display of this emptiness that is mind’s nature is unceasing and unlimited in its variety. The emptiness that is the nature of mind is not an absolute nothingness, not a dead, blank, static emptiness. It is an emptiness that is at the same time an unimpeded or unceasing and unlimited display of cognitive lucidity. In short, the emptiness of mind itself is at the same time its *capacity* to arise in experience, its *capacity* to exhibit its display. So the third recognition is the recognition that emptiness is spontaneous presence. Now here in the texts this is referred to as the recognition that the gleam or light or display of that emptiness that is the mind’s nature is of an unceasing and unlimited variety, of which the nature is great bliss or *mahasukha*. The reason why this statement is made is that through recognizing that appearances are mind and that mind is emptiness, you become free from fixation upon the reality of substantial things and upon the fixation upon the identification of the im-

puted self with some part of these substantial things. As long as you have this fixation on substantial reality and a fixation on a self, of course you suffer, because these fixations are the cause of suffering. So in the absence of these fixations, when in contrast to those fixations you experience the display of emptiness as it is, as a spontaneous presence that is not substantial entities and is not a self, then rather than this causing suffering, this produces great bliss. Therefore this is the third recognition, the recognition of emptiness as spontaneous presence.

The recognition of emptiness as spontaneous presence is very important, because normally when we think of emptiness, or even use the word emptiness, we have an idea of nothingness, of nothing whatsoever. Of course our meditation on emptiness is by no means a meditation on nothingness, a meditation on nothing whatsoever. If we attempted to cultivate this state of nothingness, that would be the cultivation of a nihilistic view. Mind of course is empty, but the emptiness of mind is a capacity for display, a capacity for an infinite variety of unlimited and unceasing display. Therefore this emptiness of mind is spontaneous presence; it is not an incapacity for display. Therefore, because this emptiness is a capacity for spontaneously present display, then, when this is fully revealed, upon obtaining awakening, you do not become an idiot; you become infinitely wise. A buddha is not an idiot, a buddha sees all things exactly as they are, sees all beings exactly as they are, and is fully capable of engaging in unlimited activity for the benefit of beings. The reason why a buddha has these qualities is that emptiness is spontaneous presence. However, you might wonder: If emptiness is spontaneous presence, in other words, if the display of emptiness is unceasing even after it has been recognized, does that mean that that display will continue to manifest as kleshas and suffering as it does now in the unrecognized state? The

The recognition of emptiness as spontaneous presence is very important

answer is no, because when the nature of this display is recognized to be as it is, to be the spontaneous present display of emptiness, then that display is self-liberated, which means that when thoughts arise and their nature is recognized, then simultaneously with their arising they are already freed, they are already liberated, they bring no fixation. Therefore the fourth introduction is pointing out spontaneous presence to be self-liberation. Self-liberation here is like the fact that a snake no matter how many knots it ties itself into can untie the knots by itself. Someone does not have to come along and help the snake out. The snake can uncoil itself, can untie itself. In the same way, when the nature of thoughts and so forth is recognized, then the thoughts arise already liberated. They do not bring up further fixation.

Although the nature of the mind never changes, because we have habits that have accrued over a period of time without beginning, our experience of meditation will fluctuate. Sometimes, even though we do not have realization, it will seem that we have realization. Sometimes, even though things are going well, the meditation will seem to be terrible and pointless. Also, it is common to generate a great deal of hope and anxiety about the progress of meditation. We tend to hope that our meditation will go well and that we will have good and profound experience, and we tend to fear that it will go poorly or badly. Hope and fear are irrelevant in the practice of meditation because in this practice of meditation you are not attempting to create anything new. You are merely trying to observe, just as it is, what is already there, so you need not have any anxiety with regard to what you experience while making that observation. You simply just look and rest in seeing whatever you see, and you do not have to hope to see one or the other.

Through receiving this instruction and practicing this meditation some of you may have recognized the practice and the nature of your



mind. By this I do not mean that I have any particular blessing to bestow, but that these instructions are profound. If you have recognized or you do recognize mind's nature through this practice, do not become arrogant about it; just keep on practicing, keep on meditating. It is possible that some of you are still unsure of how to rest the mind, still unsure how this actually works, and you may not have recognized your mind's nature. In such a case do not become despondent. Do not think, "Oh, I do not understand, I cannot understand, it is hopeless." Simply continue meditating and you will definitely be able to recognize your mind's nature. Even if you have not yet recognized it while receiving these instructions, you certainly can recognize it through doing the practice. It is worthwhile pursuing this, because up to now we have never entered the path that will lead to buddhahood. We have simply wandered around in samsara restlessly and pointlessly, and now you are entering the path that leads to full buddhahood, which once begun will never be lost. Depending upon your diligence, the habit of this path will increase quickly or slowly, and you will attain buddhahood quickly or slowly, but you will definitely attain it and therefore you are very fortunate.

I am going to stop here for this morning. If you have any questions please ask them.

**Question:** Rinpoche, although with the realization of mahamudra as it has been described, one achieves a direct experience or discovers or recognizes this nature of the inseparability of bliss-emptiness, yet at the same time one may have a direct experience of suffering and also may be following the path of compassion, which would make one sensitive to the suffering of others, and in fact, one's whole life could be dedicated to helping others and recognizing

their suffering. What I would ask for is a way of understanding how the recognition of the immeasurable suffering of sentient beings is related to the recognition of bliss-emptiness?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Usually we regard compassion as a state of misery, because you see the sufferings of others and you cannot do anything about it, and that makes you miserable.

But the compassion that arises through the recognition or realization of mahamudra is not a state of misery; it is actually a state of great bliss. As is said in *The Aspiration of Mahamudra*, "At the moment of kindness, emptiness arises nakedly." The compassion that arises out of mahamudra ensues upon the recognition of emptiness, but at the very moment at which compassion arises, there is also further experience of emptiness itself. In particular, because of the realization from which this compassion ensues you see exactly how beings could, can, and will be liberated. You see exactly how you could help beings and exactly how

Depending upon your diligence, the habit of this path will increase quickly or slowly, and you will attain buddhahood quickly or slowly, but you will definitely attain it

beings can come to the same realization. Therefore it is not a compassion of hopelessness; it is a compassion of great optimism. While from one point of view we would consider compassion a type of sadness or characterized by sadness, in the case of the compassion of mahamudra, because of the tremendous confidence that your realization gives you, confidence not only in your own realization, but in the possibility of realization on the part of all beings, then compassion is also regarded as bliss.

**Same questioner:** Thank you. Could I ask just one further question to clarify it? Why, at the recognition of bliss-emptiness mahamudra realization, would compassion at that moment arise? What is the logic or progression there?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** As was said by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa in his mahamudra aspiration, “The nature of beings is always buddha,” which means that when you recognize the nature of things, which includes the nature of beings, you recognize that there is no intrinsic need for beings to suffer. Therefore you see that the nature of your realization and the nature of the suffering of beings is the same, but because beings do not have that realization, they are in [a seemingly] endless experience of samsara. When you realize the nature of all things, you also realize at the same time that all beings could have that realization too but do not, and that knowledge automatically produces tremendous compassion. Again, it is not an impotent compassion, because you also recognize how to help beings, or lead beings to that realization.

For example, if you consider individuals like Naropa, Marpa, and Milarepa, who realized mahamudra, and compare their minds and our minds, it is not the case that their minds are inherently superior. It is not the case that there is some reason why they are inherently or intrinsically capable of realizing what they realized and why we beings are intrinsically incapable of it. That is not the case at all. The nature of their minds and the nature of our minds is exactly the same. The only difference is that they realized it and we have not realized it. And the reason why some have realized it and others have not realized it is not that the nature is different. It is a difference in conditions, and principally a difference between exerting oneself on the path and not exerting oneself on the path. But anyone can become a buddha.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I’d like to ask whether it is appropriate to ask in this current situation for some further instruction and guidance on how to work with these techniques in a group situation

so that we can better reinforce ourselves in a group rather than just trying to work in isolation?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** Well, what type of group situation do you mean?

**Same questioner:** A dharma practice group, basically.

**Translator:** Do you mean people who have received this teaching here?

**Same questioner:** Yes, primarily yes.

**Translator:** Primarily, or?

**Same questioner:** Primarily, other than where Rinpoche authorizes any additional people to be there.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** You can do that. You can use this as a regular practice and you can even explain this to other students. Some of them will get it and some of them will not get it, but people can try to practice it.

**Question:** Rinpoche, there has been a progression of teachings. I’d like to ask about the one where we talk about the nature of occurrence and the nature of stillness as having the same nature—like waves coming from water. But later, when you were talking about spontaneous presence you talked about thoughts arising. I was wondering, in the enlightened state, when thoughts arise, does that mean that thoughts arise, or there is a sort of a looking around at thoughts? In other words, are thoughts coming when we think, or are they spontaneously there and it is just a looking around at these thoughts? Because we’ve been told they do not come from anywhere and they do not go anywhere, yet they appear. So what makes it possible to survey

When you recognize the nature of things, which includes the nature of beings, you recognize that there is no intrinsic need for beings to suffer

them like that?

**Translator:** I may not have understood your question at all, so if this answer does not have anything to do with what you were asking, we will have to try again.

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** You talked about the awakened state. In the awakened state there is no thought as we know it, which means no thoughts connected with fixation at all, or joy and displeasure, jealousy, competitiveness, all the kleshas and everything we know of as thought. On the other hand, it is incorrect to simply say there are no thoughts for a buddha, because, as we understand thought, that is tantamount to saying that a buddha is an idiot. So what we say is that buddhas possess among their wisdoms, the wisdom of discrimination, which is the equivalent for buddhas to what we call thoughts. But it is not conceptual in the heavy-handed way we are familiar with, and it consists of a natural, clear perception of the characteristics of everything around.

**Translator:** Now was that what you were asking about?

**Same questioner:** I was wondering whether the progression from water and waves to spontaneous presence was a way of teaching, or was that actually what happens? Is this a progression of having thoughts in our present state? Can we then recognize the nature of their being empty to be spontaneous presence? Is that a different level of enlightenment?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** No, these are just different ways of describing the same nature. They are not describing different levels of experience.

**Question:** Sir, we have a unique point of view, as for instance, I am standing here so I see things

from this specific point of view. And there is a very strong sense of ownership of any particular point of view or a sense of ownership of experience, which also seems to extend to a sense of my experience, my realization. I assume that this is fixated and I am wondering how to work with that specific sense of ownership, that sort of sense of my owning this unique experience?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** The way that you deal with this sense of ownership is the way you deal with the fundamental fixation on a self, from which it springs. There are two ways to tackle this—one is characteristic of the sutras and the other is characteristic of tantra. In the context of the sutras, the only way to deal with this fixation on a self and the resultant sense of perspective or viewpoint and ownership and all of that, is to analyze this imputation of a self, and through analyzing the self, you determine that it does not exist. Once this determination of its nonexistence has become conceptual certainty, then you meditate resting within that certainty produced

by analysis, and over a very long period of time this does erase the imputation of a self. The procedure in tantra is different. Rather than analyzing the relationship between the self and that which is owned by or perceived by the self, in vajrayana we simply determine that all of this fixation comes from our mind. Whatever the fixation manifests as, it starts with our mind. Therefore, we simply look at the mind, and by looking at the mind and determining that the

mind has no true existence, you thereby remove the ground from all of this fixation without having to work it out separately in terms of ownership and all of these different issues, and in that way you deal with the whole thing at once.

**Question:** Rinpoche, I just want to tell you from the bottom of my heart how wonderful it has been to be with you and to hear you and to be

filled with these instructions. I feel very blessed. I also feel very strongly about the sangha and the opportunities to be with other practitioners and particularly those who have allowed me, through their dedication and setting up and all the work they do, to bring you here and to allow this to take place.

My question is, Rinpoche, with the realization or knowledge that I possess, hopefully increased by your teachings, I deal with samsara now, and will continue to. We will all go back out into the world, and the softness, the gentility, and this peaceful nature will not necessarily follow us, or if it does, we will not necessarily hear it, see it, smell it, or taste it. My question is related to that. Being doctors, lawyers, philosophers, workers, nurses, practitioners, and being compassionate people wanting to aid and assist others, what ought we to do?

I am particularly thinking of an analogy. Maybe it is because of how I am built, or what I look like, but I seem to have an affinity for bears. When I was in the Territories, I encountered a polar bear when I was on a komatick and skiddoo, and fortunately, the komatick did not tip and the skiddoo regained its power and I was able to get away and the bear pretty much stayed in its den. I was very fortunate. About ten years ago, I was up in the Northern part of B.C. and my son and I were out in the woods and a grizzly came on the same path, and we were very fortunate that there was another group of people behind us because we took off, jumped in the water and somehow got away.

**Translator:** And the bear ate the other people? [laughter]

**Same questioner:** There were no funerals that I was aware of. The third incident was not too

long ago in my home town of Lillooet, in the North. I go out and I have the wonderful opportunity of meditating, walking in the woods and stuff like that, and I still do it; I may be stupid, but I still do it. I was meditating and I was very peaceful and it was just before winter about two years ago. Bears were down feeding from the

fruit trees and just going back to get fat like me and relax. A bear came right up by me about fifty meters away, saw me as I saw it from the corner of my eye and I think it just froze. I'd like to think I was just at peace. I do not know, I guess the point of all this is that we go back to samsara, there are different ways of dealing with samsara. We saw in the Vietnam war a Buddhist monk sitting in front or sitting in the center of a boulevard with lots of people and he had doused himself with gasoline and he burned himself alive in protest to the violence happening in his country, to his people, to the spirit of people. We have had indications of people standing in

front of tanks, we have had people chaining themselves to trees in the forest. Samsara is working havoc around us. How ought we, given these instructions, to implement them? What do you advise we do, having recognized that all of this is around us? Meditating is one thing. I am wondering if there are other practical ways that we can engage the buddhadharma? Thank you Rinpoche!

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** We need to practice dharma and we need to practice meditation, but we do not place our practice in an environment of blind faith. You still need obviously to retain intelligent sensitivity to what needs to be done in the specific situations that you encounter, both for your own benefit and as it affects others. When you are in a situation where you can practice, where there are no adverse conditions such as rampaging bears [laughter] and other

When you are in a situation where you can practice, where there are no adverse conditions such as rampaging bears and other things, then of course, practice as much as you can

things, then of course, practice as much as you can. But we have to accept—all of us—that as human beings we cannot escape birth, old age, sickness, and death. We are going to experience these things and we are likely to experience a great deal of other unpleasant things along the way. You simply have to maintain in the long term the momentum of your effort to attain liberation, and in the short term, deal appropriately with whatever comes up.

**Question:** I was wondering if Rinpoche could talk about when it is potentially useful to others to hear of your own specific experiences with mahamudra, and when it may not be useful or may even be potentially harmful, either to self or others?

**Thrangu Rinpoche:** There are experiences and experiences; and some types of experiences are

Talking in a simple and unpretentious way about meditation practice does inspire other people to practice

pointless to talk about, and other types are helpful to talk about. For example, if through your practice of meditation you start to have hallucinations and see various things, then there is no point in telling other people about that. On the other hand, if through your practice of meditation you gain experience that sometimes your samadhi is clearer and at other times it is not as clear, and when you did such and such a thing it helped it to become clearer and so on, recounting those experiences can be of help to others, because they will hear about what you did that helped you and maybe it will help them too. That will probably not harm them and could possibly help them. Also, talking in a simple and unpretentious way about meditation practice does inspire other people to practice.

So now we will chant the dedication. 

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When in contrast to those fixations, you experience the display of emptiness as it is, as a spontaneous presence that is not substantial entities and is not a self, then rather than this causing suffering, this produces great bliss.

— from Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary  
on *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*

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