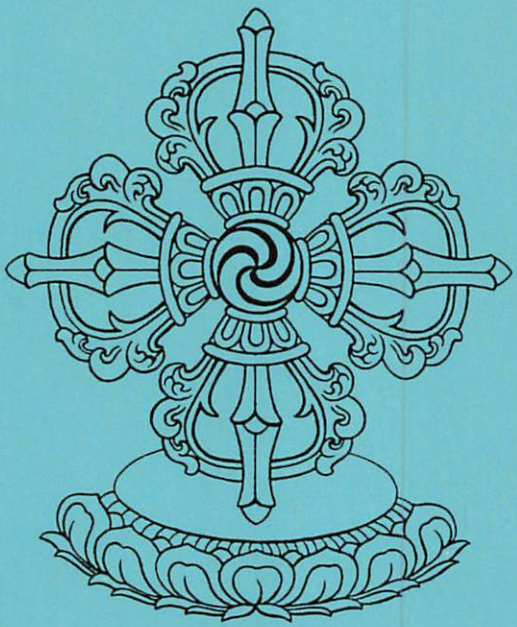
# *A Guide to Shamatha and Vipashyana Meditation*



Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

# *A Guide to*

# *Shamatha, and Vipashyana Meditation*

**By**

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## *Acknowledgements*

Thrangu Rinpoche has said many times that studying Buddhism just is good, but Buddhism cannot be understood completely without actually doing meditation practice.

In this book we have collected some of Rinpoche's teachings that he gave to students new to the Dharma in the hope that this booklet will be widely used by anyone interested in meditation.

We would like to thank the several translators—Ken and Katia Holmes, Lama Yeshe Gyamtso—and several of the editors of these works including Kate McDonnell, Annelie Speidelsbach who has helped make this booklet available.

## *Note*

We capitalize all practices so that tranquility is a peaceful state of mind and Tranquility is Shamatha practice.

All dates are given in our era (AD or CE).

# 1

## *Why We Practice Meditation*

The reason we practice meditation is to attain happiness both in the short term and the long term. When we speak of happiness, we usually mean physical and mental pleasure. But in order to have an enjoyable experience, our mind must be at peace because as long as our mind is unhappy and without any kind or peace, then no matter how much physical pleasure we experience, it will not result in true happiness. On the other hand, even if we lack even the most basic physical conditions of comfort—if our mind is at peace, we will be happy anyway.

We practice meditation, therefore, is to develop a state of mental happiness and peace. The reason meditation helps with this is because we normally have a great many thoughts and many different kinds of thoughts running through our mind. Some of these thoughts are very pleasant and some of them are unpleasant, agitating, and worrisome. Now, if we examine the thoughts in our mind from time to time, we will see that the pleasant thoughts are comparatively few and the unpleasant thoughts are many. This means that as long as our mind is ruled or controlled by the thoughts that pass through it, we will be quite unhappy. To gain control over this process, we have to begin with the practice of Tranquility meditation, (also called Shamatha meditation (Tib. *shine*)[1], which produces a basic state of contentment and peace.

An example of how meditation can make us happy is the great Tibetan yogi Jetsun Milarepa, who lived in solitude in

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1. At the end of this booklet we have a Glossary of terms and the Tibetan script for the words in the Glossary of Tibetan words.

caves and isolated mountains. His clothes were in rags and his food was poor and scanty. In fact, for a number of years he lived on nettle soup alone and, as a result, he became thin and emaciated. If we were to consider his isolation and poverty, we would think that he must have been miserable. Yet, from his many spiritual songs, we see that his mind was at peace and his experience was one of constant unfolding of delight. His spiritual songs express the utmost state of rapture. He saw every place that he went to, no matter how isolated and austere, as beautiful and he experienced his life as extremely pleasant.

If we cultivate this mental contentment and peace, we will tend not to become very ill and heal more easily. The reason is that one of the primary conditions for causing physical illness is mental agitation which produces a disturbance in the subtle channels[2] and energies within our body. Disturbances in the subtle channels creates new illnesses and also prevents the healing of old illnesses. This agitation of subtle winds or energies in the subtle channels also interferes with the benefit that we receive from medical treatment. If we practice meditation, our mind settles down and the energies moving through these subtle channels and return to their rightful functioning. For example, Milarepa living in caves and wearing just a cotton robe in the high Himalayan mountains and eating just teaspoons of barley flour each day throughout the early part of his life did not harm his health—he had a very long life, and was extremely vigorous to the end of it.

The long-term benefit of the practice of meditation is to become free of all suffering, which means we no longer experience the suffering of birth, aging, sickness, and death. This attainment is called "the supreme attainment" or enlightenment. The root of this attainment is the practice of meditation.

As said before, we have a lot of thoughts running through our mind, some beneficial such as thoughts of love, compassion,

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2. In the body there are the physical organs, blood, nerves and so on. But there is also a subtle body which cannot be seen or photographed. It is made of up of subtle channels through which subtle energy or *prana* flows much like the meridians in acupuncture.

rejoicing in the happiness of others, and we also have many others that are negative such as depression, anger, jealousy, competitiveness, and so on. We have many negative habits that we have been accumulating from beginningless time. It is only by removing these negative habits that we can free ourselves from suffering.

We cannot simply remove these disturbing emotions (Skt. *kleshas,* Tib. *nyon mong*) by saying to ourselves, "I will not create any more negative emotions," because we do not have the necessary control over our mind. To get rid of these negative emotions, we need to practice Shamatha meditation. When we begin to practice this basic meditation, we usually find that our mind won't stay still for even a moment. But this condition is not permanent and will change as we practice. Eventually we will be able to place our mind at rest at will, at which point we will have successfully eliminated these disturbing emotions. After developing Shamatha meditation we can then apply a second method—Insight or Vipashyana meditation (Tib. *lhagtong*)—which consists of learning to recognize and directly experience the nature of our own mind. This nature is referred to as emptiness.[3] When we learn to recognize this nature and rest in it, all of the disturbing emotions that arise will dissolve into this emptiness. Therefore, freedom from disturbing emotions, which is called Buddhahood, depends upon the elimination of these disturbing emotions. We do this with the practice of meditation. This practice of Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation is the general path which is common to both the sutra and tantra paths.[4]

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3. Emptiness (Tib. *tongpa nyi*) refers to the fact that everything we usually think of as solid and real such as a house or our mind is really ever changing mental concept.

4. The sutra paths are based on the actual words of the Buddha and the tantra path was developed later in the Vajrayana teachings. This means these two meditations are practiced by all schools of Buddhism.

## ANYONE CAN MEDITATE ANYWHERE

Since Dharma practitioners have innumerable varieties of lifestyles, they need a practice that fits into their particular lifestyle. If we look at the history of the practice of Mahamudra[5] which is the practice of Shamatha and Vipashyana, the flexibility of Mahamudra meditation becomes evident. During the flourishing of the Mahamudra teachings in India in the 8th to 12th centuries, there were innumerable people who practiced this meditation and who then attained realization through this practice. Of these, 84 Mahamudra practitioners became famous and these were called the Mahasiddhas. If we study the lives of these mahasiddhas, we will see that they had a vast variety of lifestyles, occupations, and social positions.

Some mahasiddhas were extremely wealthy, influential, and busy. But even in the midst of that lifestyle, they could still practice Mahamudra and benefit themselves and others. An example of this was King Indrabhodhi who was very wealthy and governed a kingdom. Nevertheless, while he continued to fulfill his responsibilities as a monarch, he was able to practice Mahamudra and attain enlightenment.

Another example of the 84 mahasiddhas was the great scholar and teacher, Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna was a leading teacher at a Buddhist University and he composed a great number of scholarly works at a time when India had a great variety of religious and spiritual traditions. To clarify the position of Buddhism, he composed a number of books. These books are still studied today and are considered eminently trustworthy. They are so convincing in their exposition of emptiness that reading them can actually change how we think. He was very busy with all of his teaching and writing, but nevertheless found time to practice Mahamudra and attained enlightenment.

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5. Mahamudra is a meditation that begins with Shamatha to calm the mind and then turns to Vipashyana to investigate the mind's true nature, and finally integrates these into our daily living with Mahamudra.

A very different example of the 84 mahasiddhas was Tilopa who was a commoner. Being neither a great king nor a great scholar, he made his living by grinding sesame seeds to make sesame oil. Nevertheless, while doing this menial task, he was able to practice Mahamudra meditation and attained realization.

If we look at the lives of the 84 mahasiddhas of India, we find that some were merchants, some were laborers, and some were simply wanderers. What they all had in common was that they were all able to attain supreme realization through the practice of Mahamudra. The point is that regardless of what our particular responsibilities and work in this life may be the practice of Mahamudra will be effective in achieving realization. It is for that reason that this form of meditation was recommended by the Sixteenth Karmapa for busy Western students.

There are many Buddhist meditation practices that are extremely profound, but their implementation often requires great austerity or a strict retreat situation. In short, many of these meditations simply don't fit into our lives. But Mahamudra is basically the cultivation of mindfulness and alertness and the practice of Shamatha and Vipashyana that doesn't require tremendous austerity or a strict retreat. Mahamudra simply fits into our life just as it is. The most important working with our mind to make it calm and peaceful which then starts to fill our life with joy. This meditation reduces the stress and anxiety which would otherwise lead to mental disturbances and physical illnesses. A joyful mind also makes it possible for us to have energy to successfully accomplish whatever we are trying to do.

## The Mind is Most Important

We basically have our body and our mind. Because we can see and feel our body, we tend to think that it is more important. But actually, if we look at our experience more closely, we will see that our mind is more important. It has been said that our body is really like a servant who is employed by the mind with our mind being the master. When our mind is happy, we experience well-being that extends to our physical body. Also, when our

mind is in a positive state, our physical and verbal actions will automatically be positive as well. And when our mind is aware, clear, and lucid, our actions will be more effective. So, working with our mind is extremely important and there is basically no other way to do this than to work on the habits we have. We are constantly developing habits and patterns of doing things that may be positive or negative. The way to work with the mind is to cultivate positive and constructive habits, and to abandon the negative and destructive ones.

The ultimate result of meditation practice is Buddhahood. It sounds like we're talking about the achievement of some kind of god or super person, but this is not what it means at all. The word "buddha" simply means "to wake up." For example, the Tibetan word for "buddha" is the two-syllable word *sang-gye.* The first syllable *sang* means "to purify" or "remove." This means we let go of all of the disturbing emotions that otherwise afflict our mind: sadness, regret, aggression, jealousy, arrogance, ignorance, apathy, and so on. The second syllable is *gye,* which means "to expand" or "flourish." So *sang-gye* means that when we can let go of all the negative feelings and problems that have afflicted our mind, then all of our innate good qualities, which have been obscured by these emotions, can flourish. These innate qualities that have been obscured by the disturbing emotions are wisdom, awareness, compassion, kindness, love, and so on.

Now, the source for the removing our negative thoughts and qualities is the practice of meditation. When we begin to practice meditation, we often doubt the possibility of overcoming all of the problems and defects which we have. We also doubt we cannot possibly achieve all these good qualities. But these things can actually be achieved as is explained in a line from a spiritual song composed by the great mahasiddha Saraha. The homage of this song says, "I pay homage to the mind itself, which is like a jewel that grants all of our wishes." Normally spiritual songs begin by paying homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, or the sangha. But here Saraha pays homage to the mind. Now, our mind is often filled with things that we regard as unpleasant: a

lot of suffering, misery, fear, anxiety, anger and so on. But these unpleasant things are not, in fact, an intrinsic part of our mind. These negative qualities are not who we are. At the same time, we often doubt the strength of our own capabilities. We should not think, "I am not very smart," "I am not very capable," "I'm not very compassionate," and so on because these positive qualities are actually within us, but they are hidden. In the Buddhist tradition we say the basic nature of everyone is buddha nature.[6] We all possess this potential within ourselves to develop all our positive qualities. Saraha refers to our mind as a wish-fulfilling jewel. Now, if we possess a jewel, but don't know what it is, we might just throw it away and obviously we would not get much use out of it. But if we recognize it as a valuable jewel, we can clean it off, and we could get great benefit from it. In the same way, if we value our mind and cultivate it, we can actually achieve tremendous qualities. If we don't value it, our mind will remain confused and all of the positive qualities within us will never be revealed.

## WHY WE MEDITATE ON SHAMATHA AND VIPASHYANA

In almost all religions there is an emphasis on taking responsibility for our behavior and helping others. The best way to fulfill this responsibility is to take hold of our mind and remove the problems which inhibit and afflict us, thus allowing our innate qualities and wisdom to flourish. This, more than any other single thing, will improve the quality of our life.

Whether a Buddhist or not, educated or not, male or female, rich or poor, we have the same basic responsibility which underlies everything in our life. This is getting hold of our mind. We might think that meditation is very good, but very difficult to practice. In fact, it's not really that difficult because

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6. Buddha nature or buddha essence (Tib. *deshek nyingpo*) is the innate capacity of all sentient being (not just humans or Buddhist) to reach enlightenment. We don't usually experience this buddha nature because it is covered up by the disturbing emotions and ignorance.

meditation is working with our own mind which is right there and belongs to us and is very much at the center of our experience.

We might also think that the limitations and problems which we have are solid and real. In fact, when we start to examine the mind, we see that it is not solid at all. We might think that enlightened qualities are very difficult to develop, but as we begin to examine our mind, we discover that these good qualities have always been there in our mind. Taking hold of the mind is therefore something anyone can do if they wish to.

Our mind definitely belongs to us to take hold of and take care of, and doing this is entirely up to us. If we decide not to take control of mind, then whatever happens will happen. But if we do take control of it, we can completely and definitely change our state of our mind. It is for these reasons I strongly encourage people to practice meditation. Because the bottom line of our lives is that we must treat ourselves well.

Some of the thoughts that arise in our mind take hold of us and make us happy and others take hold of us and make us miserable. By practicing Shamatha meditation, the thoughts that make us miserable will decrease and our mind will become more happy and workable.

There are two main aspects to meditation: "Shamatha" and "Vipashyana" meditation. These terms Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation are used in several spiritual traditions, and they mean different things in each tradition. For example, the Hindu tradition uses the terms Shamatha and Vipashyana, but they are different from the meditation techniques of the Buddhist tradition. The reason these same terms are used by different traditions is simply because both Hinduism and Buddhism arose in India, and therefore they both used both these Sanskrit words for describing meditation.

The purpose of all Buddhist practice is to clear away the negative emotions and thoughts that afflict our mind, thereby allowing our good qualities to develop. We may then think that the Buddhist Theravada, the Zen, and the Mahamudra meditations are identical. But actually, the instructions and

methods that each of these traditions use somewhat different methods but they all have the same goal, enlightenment.

We should begin our meditation practice with Shamatha meditation. The reason we begin with Shamatha meditation is that normally our mind does not rest. It is agitated by regret, by misery, by anxiety, and by all kinds of thoughts which disturb us. So, first we need to calm our mind down so it develops some stability. We have many thoughts arising in our mind all the time. Some of these thoughts are positive, some are negative, and others are simply neutral. By practicing Shamatha meditation the thoughts that make us miserable will decrease and our mind will become more pleasant and workable.

## A Brief Overview of Shamatha Meditation

In this chapter we will give a brief overview of Shamatha meditation and in the next chapter a more detailed account of this meditation will be given. Doing Shamatha meditation in short sessions will usually bring us the greatest benefit, but occasionally it is acceptable to lengthen the sessions. We begin Shamatha by sitting in the meditation posture. This posture is sitting on the ground, legs crossed, back straight, hands on knees (or meditation mudra), looking straight ahead with eyes open. If we can't sit cross-legged, it is all right to sit in a chair.

After sitting in the proper posture, we begin to work with the mind to keep it free from distraction. First, we must not dwell on the past when we're meditating. We don't think about the past, we don't engage in recollection, and so forth. Second, we don't beckon the future, which means we do not speculate, plan, or think about the future. Of course, we have to do this in post-meditation, but in meditation sessions, we don't think about the future.

This leaves the present. In meditation practice, we experience whatever we experience directly in the present moment because our mind's experience will not stop simply because we're not thinking about the past or the future. These instructions of dealing with past, present, and future are the

principal instructions for meditation. But if we find we can't do this, we can supplement this by using the breath as an anchor for our mind. There are different ways this can be done. We can count the breaths, or we can simply follow the breath with our mind. In any case, as was said by the Buddha, "When there are a lot of thoughts, follow the breath."

When we begin to meditate, we should it for a short time; but do it again and again and again. The whole point is to develop a habit of meditation. If at first, we meditate for too long, the mind just becomes more and more agitated and difficult to control. If we meditate for a short time and we do this many times, then each time our mind will be fresh and clear and able to settle down more easily. So we should meditate again and again until the habit of meditation grows stronger.

It is important to control the mind in meditation. The uncontrolled mind is very strong and dangerous like an angry elephant. Not only can it not be controlled, but the mind just goes its own way. If a very strong negative feeling of anger or desire arises, normally we are not able to control it. But we can control it if we use the right tools of mindfulness and alertness. Alertness is knowing exactly what we are doing while we are doing it. Mindfulness is having control of our mind and not letting it run out of control.

As I have said, when meditating, we should not follow a thought about the past, we should not anticipate the future, and we should not be involved with thoughts of the present. Thoughts of the past are like what we did yesterday; thoughts of the future are like what we are planning to do tomorrow, and thoughts of the present just pop up. In all cases we shouldn't follow the thread of these thoughts. We should just relax and leave thoughts alone by not following them one way or another. For instance, in our meditation we may think of something that happened a month ago or think of a thought we just had and think, "I've been thinking about this." Doing this then just ends up following that thought with another thought and so on. So we should not follow any of these thoughts. Similarly, we may be planning something for next week and then think, "I shouldn't

be thinking of this!" We must avoid following thoughts in our meditation because meditation is simply leaving things just as they are without being too relaxed or too tense. If we manage to do this, we will find that the mind calms down quite naturally by itself.

## CULTIVATING LOVE AND COMPASSION

In addition to basic Shamatha meditation, it is necessary to also cultivate love and compassion which are essential for our Buddhist practice. Being loving and compassionate helps us and obviously it also helps others as well. We really have no choice but to develop these qualities because in this world, we must live with others. If we have contact with others and can get along with them, it helps everyone. When we cannot get along with others, it hurts everyone. So, we definitely need love and have the desire that others be happy and free from suffering.

Because all humans possess buddha nature, they have an innate desire to help others. However, their love and compassion tends to be limited. They usually have love for their friends and family, but not others. What we should be doing is to expand these feelings of love and compassion until they are unlimited. We begin cultivating love and compassion by freeing ourselves from strong attachments for some and dislike for others. Once we've cultivated impartiality, we can then cultivate love and compassion for all sentient beings.[7]

Developing unlimited love and compassion will lead to a tremendous joy and equanimity, called unlimited joy. If we develop true love, we need to then develop this into compassion for others, then we also must take joy in all the positive achievements of others, and finally this leads to equanimity in which we treat all sentient beings the same, not as friends and enemies. These four qualities can also be cultivated to supplement our Shamatha practice.

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7. Sentient beings are all beings that have a mind. These include all humans, animals, hungry ghosts, jealous gods, gods, and even demons and beings in hell.

## SENDING AND RECEIVING PRACTICE

In addition to cultivating love and compassion in meditation, we can also do Sending and Receiving (Tib. *tonglen*) practice. This practice is designed to reverse a tendency we have to be self-centered. We usually want to be happy and are so concerned about our own happiness that we don't particularly care whether other beings are happy or not. Usually as long as we are not suffering, we don't often think about everyone else who is suffering.

In Sending and Receiving practice we seek to reverse this tendency by cultivating the willingness to take on the suffering of others and to give our happiness away to them. In this practice we imagine that when we breathe out that all of our happiness and all of the causes of happiness such as our prosperity goes out with our breath and we are giving this happiness to all other beings. As we breathe in we imagine that all of the suffering of other beings, and every negativity that caused their suffering, leaves those beings and dissolves into us and they become free of it.

This practice scares some people who think, "If I imagine giving away all of my happiness and taking on all of the suffering of others, suppose it really happens. What will I do then?" But, in fact, the practice of Sending and Receiving is not dangerous because we can't catch anything by doing this practice because all of our suffering arises only as a result of our previous actions or karma, and not from this practice we are doing now.

We might then ask, if we can't literally take away the sufferings of others and give away our happiness, what is the point of the practice? The point is that Sending and Receiving practice changes our mind. It develops a readiness for our mind to put others before us and that serves greatly to pacify our own attachment and aggression. In fact, it does more than that. While it may not immediately affect others but it will change how we act, which affects others beneficially. So, there's nothing to be

afraid of in the practice of Sending and Receiving and we should not think that it is a pointless practice.

When we do this practice, we visualize all the countless sentient beings that exist in front of us. As we breathe out, we think that rays of brilliant, white, luminous light comes out of us and strikes and engulfs all other beings, causing all of the happiness and causes of happiness such as proper conduct and virtue to transfer from us to other beings and causing them to actually experience this happiness. As we breathe in, we think that we take in all of their misery, the suffering, and the pain, as well as their causes from all of these beings in the form of a murky, dark, grimy light. We imagine that when we inhale this that other beings will thereafter be free of all of this suffering and these causes of suffering.

In Sending and Receiving meditation we are developing a virtuous state of mind because we're developing the habit to actually help others that are suffering. Now, if we find that we have some fear inhibiting our ability to do Sending and Receiving, we can visualize that in the center of our heart is a white, very luminous HRI syllable like the rays we breathe out or simply visualize a mass of brilliant light. And when we breathe in all the dark, grimy stuff, we visualize that it is filling our entire body and that it all dissolves into the HRI.

The Tibetan Syllable HRI.

*An original calligraphy by Thrangu Rinpoche*

# 2

# *Shamatha Meditation*

When I give teachings on meditation, my hope is that I will give practitioners something that will actually help them work with their own mind. There are many ways to practice Shamatha and Vipashyana and here we will be using the methods used in Mahamudra. The reason to teach Mahamudra is that when the Sixteenth Karmapa came to the West and was asked what practice would be appropriate for westerners, he said that he felt the most appropriate practice was Mahamudra. Of course, Mahamudra is also appropriate not just in the West but in the world. The practice of Mahamudra meditation has two parts: the common preliminary practices and the actual practice. It is suggested that we do the preliminaries before beginning any meditation practice. These can actually be done in just a minute or two and are for basically reminding ourselves why we are meditating.

## The Four Common Preliminaries

The common preliminaries are four contemplations to motivate us to practice dharma. The first preliminary is remembering that we have a precious human birth. Having encountered Dharma, we are very fortunate. The purpose of contemplating this is that it inspires us not to waste our human life, but to cultivate spiritual practice.

The second preliminary is the realizing that although we are very fortunate to be a human being and to have access to spiritual teachings, there are many conditions that can cause us to lose

our life. So, this is a contemplation on the impermanence of human life and making us realize that we should practice diligently.

The third preliminary is the contemplating the results of our actions, which inspires us to base our practice on doing virtuous actions and abandoning unvirtuous actions so that we can develop positive karma.

The fourth preliminary is contemplating the problems and worries and negative aspects of cyclic existence or samara and reminds us of the ultimate purpose of Dharma practice which is to free ourselves and all others from the causes and the results of samsara.

To practice Dharma we need to have enthusiasm for Dharma and these four ordinary preliminaries, often called "four thoughts that turn the mind" (towards Dharma) help us develop this diligence. The most important one is the contemplation of impermanence, which we may think is depressing and something we want to avoid thinking about, let alone meditate on. But the Buddha said, "Contemplation of impermanence provides the first inspiration to practice Dharma." The recognition of impermanence is what inspires us in the beginning to appreciate and take delight in Dharma. Sometimes it is difficult for us to build up the energy and to apply ourselves to the Dharma, but the thinking about impermanence helps us get over that.

How do we actually meditate on impermanence? We simply look at the world around us. If we look at things, places, people and their activities, we see that all of these things are impermanent in the sense that these things are constantly changing. As Milarepa said, "I have never studied books written in ink on paper. All my books are all that appears and exists before me." If we look at our own life and the lives of other people, we will see the changes that occur all the time, and we will come to recognize impermanence of our life and circumstances should inspire us to practice diligently.

## THE POSTURE IN MEDITATION

There are two important points in meditation—the body and the mind. As far as the body is concerned, it is important to keep the body straight so that the subtle channels of the body will be straight, too. If these subtle channels are straight, then the subtle energies within these channels will circulate freely. It is said that the mind is like a man riding the horse of the circulation of the subtle energies of the body. When the mind is riding with this energy unobstructed, the person will be relaxed and peaceful.

## THE SEVEN POINTS OF VAIROCANA

The practice of Shamatha meditation involves two aspects: first is our posture and second what we do with our mind. The physical posture practiced by all the practitioners of the Kagyu tradition is called the "seven dharmas of Vairocana." Vairocana is the name of one of the five wisdom buddhas and literally means "the illuminator." This posture is also called "the seven dharmas of the illuminator" because if we take this posture, our mind's natural clarity is enhanced and our mind's nature is greatly facilitated or illuminated. Also, the five buddha families are correlated with the five aggregates (or skandhas, Tib. *pungpo*) and Vairochana represents the aggregate of form. So, Vairocana is the pure nature of the aggregate of solid form.

We begin the first these seven points of posture by sitting on some kind of cushion. The reason we sit to meditate is that if we attempt to meditate while walking around, our mind simply will not easily come to rest as it does when we are sitting. It's fine, of course, sometimes to practice walking meditation, but for the most part meditation is done while sitting down. We might ask, "Why don't we lie down to meditate?" Well, lying down might bring the mind to rest, but it will tend also to make us lethargic and sleepy. So, it's best to meditate sitting.

The first of the seven points of the posture is the placement of the legs. The traditional explanation is that the legs should be crossed in what is called the "vajra posture," with the legs are

fully crossed with the feet placed on the opposite thighs. Now, if we can cross our legs in this manner, this is the best posture; but if we cannot, it does not mean that we cannot meditate. The fully crossed legs in the vajra posture makes our body extremely stable. If we are flexible, we can sit in the vajra posture, which is usually known in the West as the full lotus posture. But if we are not that flexible, or find this posture uncomfortable, we can sit cross-legged. If we can't do that, we can sit in a chair. We should not feel that sitting in a chair will diminish our meditation. After straightening the body, lock the legs in the position the best we can.

The second point of posture is that the placement of the hands should be in an even placement. Quite often, this is taken to mean the actual hand position found in paintings and statues in which the left hand is placed palm up in the lap and the right hand is placed palm up in or on the left hand. This position can be seen, for example, in the position of the Buddha Amitabha.[8] This is acceptable as a meditation posture. The meaning of the words "even placement," however, has a wider connotation meaning simply that the hands should be placed at the same level, placed evenly, as opposed to, for example, holding one hand aloft in space and placing the other we down on the ground. Therefore, it is also acceptable to place one's hands palms down on the thighs just behind the knees, a posture called the "earth pressing gesture." Either posture of placing the hands is fine because the purpose of placing the hands evenly is for our mind to come to rest.

The third point of posture is that "the spine should be as straight as an arrow" which means that we sit up straight. The reason it's necessary to sit up straight when we are meditating is that our body and our mind are very connected. Specifically, our mind rides on the subtle winds or energies, which depend upon the channels which are present within our body. So if our posture is bent or crooked, or if we're leaning to the left or to the right, or we're leaning forward, then the channels will be bent as well.

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8. See the picture of the Amitabha buddha on page 50.

If the channels are bent, then the winds won't flow smoothly and our mind will be in a state of agitation or unrest.[9] If we sit up straight and our channels are straight, then the winds flow smoothly and properly, and our mind will be naturally come to rest.

The fourth point is that the upper arms are "spread like the wings of a vulture." What this actually means depends upon which of the two positions of the hands we are using. If we are placing the hands palm up in the lap, it means that we allow our elbows to go outward somewhat, like spreading wings. If we're using the posture where our hands are palms down on the thighs, it means that we do not allow our elbows to sink and be extremely bent, so we straighten them somewhat. In either case, the function of this aspect of the posture is to make our entire posture more erect with our shoulders pushed back a little to promote the clarity or our mind. Doing this will help us prevent to have mental dullness in meditation.

The fifth point of posture is that the neck be "slightly bent downward like a hook," which means our chin should be brought back in and down. We bend the neck slightly, bringing the chin in, which will naturally enhance our mindfulness and alertness. There are two subtle channels inside the throat and if they are bent slightly forward, the subtle energy will circulate in them.

The sixth aspect of posture is that the tongue touches the palate. There are two subtle channels inside the throat and this will also cause less saliva in our mouth so we will swallow less often. Now, this sounds extremely unimportant, but when we're actually practicing meditation, if we constantly have to swallow, it's very distracting.

The seventh point of posture is the gaze. This is important because our thoughts tend to follow our gaze. For this reason

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9. In Tibetan Buddhism and medicine we have a physical body of flesh and bones but inside this body we also have a vajra body made up of subtle chakras, channels, winds, and drops which can't be measured and are like the meridians in acupuncture.

some people find it helpful to meditate with closed eyes, which is all right. Other people find that closed eyes makes their mind dull and sleepy. The gaze for meditation is to look straight forward. When we are doing Shamatha meditation, we would look straight forward, but slightly downward. When we are practicing Vipashyana meditation, we still look straight forward, but slightly upward. In any case, we don't direct our attention to what we see.[10] We don't try to focus the eyes, and we don't send our mind after our vision. So, whether our eyes are focusing clearly or not, we simply don't pay attention to it. Instead, we look at our mind, that is, we meditate.

These seven points of posture are called the seven dharmas of Vairocana. When we implement these points, our body needs to be comfortable, which is to say that the posture should be neither tense nor rigid, and should not be uncomfortable. This means that if any particular point of the posture is painful or uncomfortable causing pain in our arms or legs or back, we should not force ourselves to hold this posture. There's also no rule that all seven points of this posture have to be maintained in order to meditate. The point of the posture is to allow our subtle channels to relax, and then our subtle winds will allow us to rest comfortably. But if the posture causes too much tension and pain, we should not force ourselves to do it.

## MACHIG LABRON'S POSTURE

Eight principal traditions of meditation developed in Tibet. The initial founders of these eight traditions are called the "eight chariots"[11] of the practice lineages. One of these eight traditions is called the Chöd practice and the source of the teachings on Chöd was the Tibetan mahasiddha Machig Labron. In her

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10. Some meditation manuals have said that we should look four finger widths in front of the nose, but Thrangu Rinpoche says this is based on an incorrect translation.

11. The eight traditions were: Nyingma, Kadam, Marpa Kagyu, Shangpa Kagyu, Sakya, Jordruk, Nyendrub, Shije, and Chöd.

teachings on meditation, she said that the physical posture should be "a relaxation of the four limbs." This means that the most essential point of posture is that we relax our muscles, our joints, and our sinews and not attempt to maintain our physical posture using muscular exertion. If we have physical tension in a specific part of our body while we are practicing, we should consciously relax that part of the body and let go of the tension. She further said that the mental technique is to "destroy fixated perception" meaning we should neither follow nor try to get rid of thoughts. We should simply let go of thoughts as they arise, neither attempting to follow their content nor to attempt to get rid of them. Machig also mentioned the posture of speech which is to chant melodiously of the experience. This means that in actual Chöd practice,[12] we should use a melody. In other words, in the recitation of the practice we should use a beautiful melody in the supplications to the yidams to enhance our meditation practice and experience. In any case, the physical posture, as she said, needs to have the muscles relaxed.

## Mental Methods

When we meditate, we should do it for a short period of time; but do it again and again and again. The whole point of meditation is to develop a long-term habit of doing meditation. At first, if we meditate for too long, our mind will become just more and more agitated and difficult to control. If we meditate for a short time and renew the session many times, then each time the mind will be fresh and clear and we will be able to settle down more easily. So we should meditate again and again until the habit of meditation grows stronger.

It is important to control the mind in meditation. The uncontrolled mind is very strong and dangerous like an angry elephant. Not only can it not be controlled, but the mind just goes its own way. If a very strong negative feeling of anger or desire

12. A description of Chöd practice can be download at Rinpoche's website NamoBuddhaPub.org in the Practice Materials section.

arises, we normally are not able to control it. But we can control it if we use the right tools of mindfulness and alertness. Alertness is knowing exactly what we are doing while we are doing it. Mindfulness is having control of our mind and not letting it run out of control.

When meditating, we should not follow a thought about the past, we should not anticipate the future, and we should not be involved with thoughts of the present. Thoughts of the past are like what we did yesterday; thoughts of the future are like what we are planning to do tomorrow and thoughts of the present just pop up. In all cases we should not follow the thread of these thoughts. We should just relax and leave them alone by not following them. For instance, in our meditation we may think of something that happened a month ago have a thought we just had and think, "I've been thinking about this." By making this observation we will then just end up following that new thought. So we should not follow any of these thoughts that we have. Similarly, we may be planning something for next week and immediately think, "I shouldn't be thinking of this!" and we begin a new train of thoughts about what we shouldn't think about. We must avoid following thoughts in our meditation because meditation is simply leaving thoughts just as they are without being too relaxed or too tense. If we manage to do this, we will find that our mind will calm down quite naturally all by itself.

The mental technique that has been presented by most teachers of our tradition is to follow the breath. This method was originally taught by the Buddha, who said, "When thoughts are intense, follow the breath." This is to stay we concentrate on the air coming in our nose on the in-breath and the air going out on the out-breath. Because this method of Shamatha is appropriate for anyone, it's always correct to follow the breath. Sometimes, however, it's also helpful to let our mind simply rest, without a specific object to focus on. We just let our mind rest without following the breath, provided we're not distracted. Next I am going to talk about a specific method to use, but how we relate to Shamatha meditation in general.

Normally, we have a lot of thoughts running through our mind, and many of these are based on thinking about the past. Other thoughts are concerned with what may happen or what we want to happen. Now, when a thought arises that is concerned with the past, simply let it go. When a thought arises that is speculation about the future, simply let it go. Thoughts about the future can present themselves as being very important and we may think, "I have to think about this." However, when that thought arises, we should simply remind ourself that there are twenty-four hours in a day, and at this moment is the time to meditate thinking to ourselves, "I will think about this later" and going back to the breath.

Rather than thinking about the past or the future, it is recommended to simply maintain a direct awareness of our present experience in meditation. This means that thoughts may be extremely intense or emotional, but we simply don't get involved with them. Not following a thought does not cause our mind to be less aware or clear, but it does make us less conceptual. So, if we allow our mind to simply rest in direct experience of the present moment and not be drawn in by the contents of the thoughts, then our mind will rest in a state of natural peace, which is extremely helpful.

When we rest in awareness of the present moment, not thinking about the past or the future, then for a short time we will not have any thoughts. Resting in the present moment is not the same thing as trying to get rid of thoughts. We must not think, "I must get rid of all my thoughts," or "I think too much," or "I must cultivate a state of non-thought." Rather we should develop a state that is free of feelings of hope and fear. Normally, we hope to attain Buddhahood and we hope to attain freedom, and we hope to be happy, and so on. Butin meditation, we do not entertain these desires. These thoughts are just like any other thoughts. So we are simply allowing our mind to rest naturally in present moment and we should let go of any thought that occurs naturally.

Initially, we can rest naturally only for a very brief period of time. The mental faculty that we are applying at that point is

called "placement" meaning for a very brief period of time we are able to place our mind without thinking about the past or the future. As we continue to practice, these very brief periods of placement will begin to lengthen a little. The period of time during which we can rest in the present awareness without becoming distracted by thoughts will lengthen. When these periods become longer, we will reach the second stage of "continual placement." Continual placement does not mean unbroken or continuous; it just means slightly longer. Then there is a third stage of where we are able to return from distraction called "returning to placement." Through our mindfulness and alertness we are able to recognize that we've become distracted and to return to this placement of a state of direct awareness.[13]

## Two Obstacles to Meditation

The mind must have the right tension during meditation. For example, if we have a cat and we lock the cat up in a room, the cat, not finding a way to get out, will start running up and down, meowing, and tearing things apart. But if we leave the door open, the cat will go out and take a little walk and then just come back in and fall asleep in the room. Similarly, if we begin our meditation thinking, "I really must stop thinking and keep my mind very concentrated and peaceful," we will constantly be worried and think, "Oh, I've had a thought!" or "Now I'm getting too tense." We will then work ourselves up so much that we can't stop thinking. So relax, just let the mind go and think, "Whatever thought happens, it just comes and goes." If we sit there very relaxed and let it all happen, we won't have much trouble meditating.

If we use mindfulness and alertness properly in our meditation, our mind will become tranquil. However there are two main obstacles to Shamatha meditation. The first obstacle is dullness sometimes called "torpor" which means that when our mind becomes heavy and lethargic and we start feeling sleepy.

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13. For the nine stages of meditation see page 61.

This is a feeling of apathy and wanting to sleep but we can't, so there's no clarity in our meditation. We then become too relaxed and we start to follow our thoughts and become absorbed in them.

The second obstacle is agitation or excitement where the mind becomes wild and has many thoughts and these thoughts go in all directions so that our mind cannot rest at all. When we are too tense, we make too much effort focusing on the idea of concentrating and trying to be tranquil that, in the end, our mind cannot remain calm and we become distracted.

In meditation we have to constantly try to find the balance between being too tense and too relaxed by putting in just the right amount of effort into our meditation. Saraha, a great mahasiddha, said that when we meditate, the mind should be like a thread of the Brahmin. In India the Brahmins used to spin thread. If one puts too much tension on it, the thread breaks. If the thread is too loose, it won't be strong enough to make cloth. In the same way, when we meditate, the mind should maintain the right amount of alertness, neither too tight, nor too loose.

The way to correct the first obstacle of dullness is to think of the excellent qualities of the Buddha and the Dharma practice and how much we can gain through meditation. Thinking this will create a feeling of happiness, and our inspiration and enthusiasm will be renewed so that we will automatically correct our sinking mind. To do this, we think to ourselves that through meditation we will become free from the disturbing emotions and incorrect thoughts and we will then gain freedom. Even before we achieve complete freedom, meditation will give us peace of mind, which will help us gain more happiness. We have to remember that we have so many difficulties and tensions and frustrations because we have so many thoughts and we are over involved in all these thoughts. If we start thinking, "I want this" or "I need this" or "I should have this," there will be a constant tension from this wanting and attachment. Then if we can't have or achieve what we want, we will have the constant pain and frustration of being trapped. If, however, we can pacify the mind, we will have fewer thoughts which means our craving will

diminish and this constant thirst will be reduced. So meditation has the short-term effect of creating tranquility and the long-term effect of freeing us from the causes of unhappiness.

The second obstacle to our meditation is mental agitation that is caused by distraction, and this can come from pride or desire. The remedy to this obstacle is to think about all the suffering that is inherent in samsara and become aware of the drawbacks of being distracted by samsara. We have been wandering in samsara for many lifetimes and because we have allowed our mind to be continually distracted by phenomena, the result has been that we have been returning again and again in samsara and continuing to suffer. By allowing our mind to wander off in a constant dialog in our head, we gain nothing. Also, if we are distracted in our daily life, we can't achieve very much. So when we actually think of the drawbacks of wandering in samsara, we will begin working on calming this mental agitation in our meditation.

A specific method to eliminate the first obstacle to meditation, drowsiness or dullness is to visualize that there is an eight-petalled lotus in our heart which is facing upwards. We then visualize that on the lotus there are very small bright little white drops. We send these white drops up to the top of our head at about the level of the hair. We should also straighten our body a little more and generally make it move a little upwards. Also if we can make the room we are meditating in brighter and a little colder, this will help

A specific method to eliminate the second obstacle of agitation in our meditation is to visualize a black lotus in our heart which is facing downwards. In this lotus we imagine a black drop and send it downwards to the ground. At the same time we should relax our posture and let body stoop a little. Also if we can make the room we are meditating in darker and a little warmer, this will help.

## MEDITATING ON AN OUTER OBJECT

There are three main techniques of meditation: concentrating on an outer object, concentrating on an inner object, and concentrating on no object. The goal of meditation is to reach the point of not needing any object to focus on in our meditation at all. But to prepare for this goal we need to use outer objects and then inner objects to gain comfortableness and familiarity of our meditation.

The beginning of practicing Shamatha meditation usually requires some kind of external support to get hold of the mind. In the daytime we can place any small object such as a pebble in front of us that we can easily see. The object should not be a bright white, because if it's too bright, it might hurt the eyes. The technique is simply to look directly at the object and relax our mind, without losing track of the object. We are not attempting to analyze its color or shape, where it came from, or anything like that. We are simply using the object as a focus for our attention, and we do so in a very light and relaxed way, so that we don't lose track of the object.

We can also use a sacred object as our external object such as a statue of the Buddha. If we meditate on a statue or a picture of the Buddha, we should not stare at it with a forced or fixed gaze because this will just give us a headache and eyestrain. We must relax by letting our eyes rest on the external object merely to register the image. Whether our sight is sharp or blurred makes no difference. And when we look at the object, we don't think "statue, statue, statue" or whatever it is. We just look at it and try not to let the image drift out of our mind. If we begin having an important thought that is taking us away from the object, we just gently bring our attention back to the object because if we follow the first thought, then another will come, then another, and we will completely forget about the object of our meditation. When a thought comes, it is important to be aware of its presence, and then bring the mind back to "the support" to our meditation. If we develop the habit of trying to avoid the two defects of being too tight or too loose in our

meditation, our meditation will improve. If we practice this kind of meditation more and more, we will then gradually have more and more mental peace with our mind being able to concentrate with more clarity in our meditation.

If we are meditating at night and can't see the object very well, we can visualize a tiny sphere of white light the size of a pea between our eyebrows and then direct our attention to that visualized support. Or sometimes we can visualize a sphere of black light the size of a pea directly below us.

For the beginner this meditation is difficult to do for a long periods of time because we very easily become lost in our thoughts. So we meditate for a brief time with good concentration so our meditation doesn't become entangled with thoughts all the time. We do it for a short period in the beginning, and when we find that it is becoming a little easier, we can extend the duration of the meditation session.

## MEDITATING ON THE BREATH

We can also use our breath as an internal support to our meditation. Because this is the most used method of Shamatha practice, there are many variations and I will present two here.

The first method is following the breath by not losing track of our breath. Of course, we are always breathing, but normally we are unaware of our breathing. So we follow, or experience, the breath going out and we follow the breath then coming in. And in this practice we are simply using awareness of breathing as a method to rest the mind with the idea of not losing track of the breath. If, however, our mind becomes particularly wild, we can take a short break from the method and then start fresh.

The second method in Shamatha meditation is gently holding the breath. This simply means allowing our mind to come to rest in the interval between breathing in and breathing out. A distinction needs to be made between two different methods of holding the breath which have two entirely different purposes. There is an advanced method of holding the breath called "vase breathing" which is done when attempting to work

with the subtle channels, winds, and drops. In this style of vase breathing, the breath is held very strongly with much more exertion. However, here in Shamatha meditation we are simply using the method of holding the breath to help us relax, so it's very relaxed breathing.

The Shamatha method of working with breath is to begin the session by expelling the stale air from our lungs nine times. In the first three times, we block our right nostril with our finger, and breathe out through our left nostril. The first time we breathe out very gently. The second time, we start out gently, but then become more forceful. And the third time, it becomes more forceful and it ends with us expelling all the stale air we possibly can. This is while we are expelling the air out of our left nostril while blocking the right nostril. We then repeat the same thing, except we block the left nostril and expel the stale air gently, more strongly, and then completely through the right nostril. For the last three breaths, we repeat the gently, more forceful, and strong exhalation without blocking either nostril, so that we expel the stale air from both nostrils simultaneously.

In the rest of the meditation session we simply breathe in gently, and rest our mind while the breath is inside us, and then breathe out. When we hold the breath in our meditation, we do not hold it in our chest. We try to hold the air below our diaphragm, which means we bring the air we've breathed in as far down as we can, and we have the feeling that it's actually dissolving there in our lower abdomen. Then we simply rest our mind in that. Holding the breath in a Shamatha session is to simply rest the mind. It is done extremely gently, so that when we breathe in, we let the breath remain inside us as long as it will stay there naturally. When doing this we are able to rest our mind in the interval between breathing in and breathing out. If this becomes tiring, we can simply watch the breath dissolve as it is breathed without any distraction. This means simply that our mind in a very relaxed way but we do not lose track of our focus on the breath.

## DEVELOPING CLARITY IN MEDITATION

Another method of relaxation can be applied when we have established stable mindfulness and alertness and good clarity in our meditation. We then relax our fixation on how to do meditation. We relax because we have applied a strong or intense mindfulness and alertness with the hope of creating a state of stillness, and we will still be disappointed when our mind is not still. So, we have to let go of being happy when the meditation is going well and disappointed when it is not. Rather we just maintain mindfulness and alertness in a relaxed way knowing that thoughts will arise in our meditation.

If we want our meditation to be clear, we should cultivate a feeling of great joy in meditation. That feeling can be developed by thinking of all the qualities that come from meditation as opposed what comes from a distracted mind. What is the harm in distraction? If we are distracted when we are meditating, or studying, or visualizing a deity, then that time is wasted. When distracted, we are wasting some of our precious time which can never be recovered. However, if we leave our mind in its natural state without following our thoughts, what we do in our life will be very precise, very clear, and very efficient.

We might think that it may be nice to let ourselves to just follow our thoughts and this will bring about mental comfort. But if we fall under the influence of negative feelings such as passion, aggression, pride, or jealousy, it is not very pleasant. Once one of these emotions gets started, it is very hard to stop it and it only brings about suffering. For example, once we begin to feel anger, it will cause a lot of mental discomfort and if that angry feeling remains for a long time, it can actually make us physically and mentally ill. Similarly, the negative feelings of the disturbing emotion of desire is the constant craving of always looking for something which we think is going to give us pleasure, satisfaction, or contentment. But somehow we never seem able to get what we desire, so we keep constantly wanting it. It becomes very unpleasant because we never seem to achieve what we are aiming for. So if we look carefully at these negative

feelings and thoughts, we will see that their nature is basically suffering.

By developing the ability to concentrate in our meditation, we can attain tranquility. Once we reach a certain degree of mastery in meditation, it automatically brings about great physical and mental comfort. This is because meditation reduces thoughts that are constantly distracting us and this, in turn, reduces our negative feelings. Meditation will also bring about a very great feeling of happiness because, little by little, we will be able to gain control over our thoughts and feelings.

## MEDITATING WITHOUT AN OBJECT

The third step of Shamatha practice is not to rely on the internal breath or any other external support. This is a method to be used for someone who has gained some stillness of the mind by working with the breath. To understand this technique, we need to look briefly at the faculties of mind that actually perform the act of meditation. Generally speaking, the functions of mind can be grouped into either the six or eight consciousnesses. Of these, the first six are easier to detect because they are always changing. The seventh and eighth consciousness are constant and unchanging, and therefore are harder to notice.

The first five sensory consciousnesses are the consciousnesses that receive the input from five sense organs. The first sensory consciousnesses is the visual consciousness, which receives input from the eye and makes these into images with, shape, color, movement, and so forth. Usually we say, "I see with my eyes." But in fact, we don't see with our eyes. Our eyes are just physical matter and our visual consciousness takes the information of eyes and makes images that "we see." The second auditory consciousness receives information from the ear and makes sounds for us to experience. The olfactory consciousness which relies upon the nose and experiences smells. The gustatory consciousness relies upon the tongue and experiences tastes. Finally, the tactile consciousness relies upon the nerves in the whole body and experiences body sensations.

Now, these five sensory consciousnesses do experience their objects directly but they are not capable of thinking about the objects they perceive. The sensory consciousnesses themselves do not generate thoughts, such as, "this is beautiful" or "this is ugly" and so forth. In the Abhidharma teachings, the sense conscious-nesses are classified as nonconceptual (non-thinking) conscious-nesses. Therefore, while the sensory consciousnesses are active while we are meditating, it is not the sensory consciousnesses that do the meditation because they are nonconceptual. Being nonconceptual their perception of direct experiences do not harm or obstruct the act of meditation.

The sixth consciousness, however, is another matter. The sixth mental consciousness is the faculty for thinking, and it functions based upon information from the five sensory consciousnesses and also thinks about thoughts it has generated itself. The sixth consciousness evaluates if things are desirable or not based the sense consciousnesses and its own previous thoughts. This sixth consciousness produces the constant internal dialog that we have with ourselves. The sixth mental consciousness also produces thoughts and feelings of joy and misery, and so on. Basically, almost all of the mental activity of that we are aware of, is produced by the sixth consciousness and it is this consciousness that produces thoughts. So we use this sixth consciousness in meditation.

The seventh and eighth consciousnesses are not constantly changing which makes them more difficult to observe with direct experience. The seventh consciousness is called the afflicted consciousness. The disturbing emotions which arise in the seventh consciousness are not the usual disturbing emotions of attachment, aggression, and ignorance, but is the constant fixation that we have on our self, that underlies our constant belief of "I" and "me" and "mine."

The eighth consciousness is called the all-ground or alaya

consciousness[14] because it is the foundation or underlying basis for the other seven consciousnesses. As such, it is unceasing luminous clarity.[15] While the eighth consciousness is unceasing luminous clarity, it is not really involved actively in meditation. However, we experience the eighth consciousness at the higher level of non-conceptual meditation.

The practice of meditation consists of working with thought. As thoughts arise, they are the natural display of the mind, and in meditation we simply do not follow them. By not following the thoughts, the thoughts will lessen, and we will begin to experience that underlying luminous clarity, awareness without thought. In Shamatha practice we simply rest in the luminous clarity of this eighth consciousness.

To be able to rest in this eighth consciousness free of distraction, we need to apply mindfulness and alertness. Mindfulness is simply not losing track of or forgetting our intention to meditate without distraction. Alertness is recognizing what is happening in our mind, for example, whether or not we have become distracted. So Shamatha meditation consists of not following the thoughts which arise from the sixth consciousness and instead of resting in the basic luminous clarity of the eighth consciousness.

Meditation is staying in the present moment by applying mindfulness and alertness. When thoughts arise and we don't follow them, they will automatically dissolve and then we can return to a state of stillness. If this process leads to a state of lucid clarity, this is good Shamatha meditation.

Returning to our topic, when we are meditating without any object, we need to balance our effort and our relaxation. We sometimes need to increase the amount of effort we are putting into the meditation. For example, if we have a lot of wild,

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14. The eighth consciousness actually has two functions: the all-ground aspect which keeps the other seven consciousnesses unified and working together and secondly as a "store house' of keeping all the karma positive and negative karma.

15. Luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*), also called "luminosity" or just "clarity" is the mind's continuous awareness or knowing.

uncontrolled thoughts running through our mind or if our mind is extremely unclear, we need to increase our mind's innate clarity through a more forceful application of mindfulness and alertness.

## The Relaxing of the Mind

The first method of relaxing the mind is done by applying a particularly concentrated mindfulness and alertness for a very brief time. We then briefly relax our mind, allowing it to rest. Then we reapply strong mindfulness and alertness, and then relax the mind, and so on. This alternation of the forceful application mindfulness and then letting the mind rest will produce the great clarity in the mind. So it's done repeatedly for very short times. We may feel that this is inadequate meditation, because we cannot do a long period of intense mindfulness. Nevertheless, while the intensity of the mindfulness can't be prolonged indefinitely, the alternation of mindfulness and alertness with resting does lead to the clarity of mind.

The second method of relaxing the mind is applied when we have established stable mindfulness and alertness and good clarity in our meditation. We then relax our fixation on how to meditate. We relax because we have applied strong mindfulness and alertness with the hope of creating a state of stillness and will be disappointed when our mind is not still. So, we have to let go of being happy when our meditation is going well and disappointed when it is not. Rather we should just maintain mindfulness and alertness in a relaxed way knowing that thoughts will arise in our meditation.

Another problem with relaxation of the mind is that we may experience an undercurrent of thought. This occurs when we only become aware of a thought long after it has arisen. In other words, there have been very subtle thoughts going on in our mind that were unrecognized by us for awhile. Working with the undercurrent takes some care and attention. Usually, this experience indicates that our mindfulness and alertness is not strong enough. So when we are applying the methods of

relaxation and we become aware we were actually thinking a thought some time after it has arisen, then we need to put more energy and clarity into our mindfulness and alertness.

### Three Stages in Developing Stillness

Practicing Shamatha without an object has three main stages. In the first stage of meditation there seems to be more thoughts than we had before we began to practice. This is compared to a waterfall where there are so many thoughts that we begin to think that the number of thoughts are actually more than before we had begun meditation. What actually has happened is that before we took up meditating, we had innumerable thoughts running through our mind, but we weren't aware of their presence. But now when we are meditating with mindfulness and alertness, we are aware of all these thoughts. However, if we continue to practice, our thoughts will gradually slow down and this is the second stage compared to a large, slow flowing river. There are still thoughts arising, but the speed of thought has decreased, so they do not distract us much. When we continue to practice very even further, eventually the speed of thoughts will be reduced to where our mind becomes like an ocean. Here our mind is unmoving and the thoughts are like waves on the surface of the ocean. This third stage is the attainment of Shamatha. To develop this stillness we need our mindfulness and alertness to be sharp, intense, and clear.[16]

## *Questions*

**Question:** Do you mean we should practice Sending and Receiving practice as a means to reach Shamatha, or should we try to reach some degree of Shamatha in our meditation first, and then practice Sending and Receiving practice?

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16. Traditionally, there are nine stages of Shamatha and these are given in on page 61.

**Rinpoche:** Sending and Receiving practice is not really a method of Shamatha. Shamatha meditation is a practice done to allow our mind to come to rest. Sending and Receiving is concerned with the cultivation of benevolence. The order of which we do first is up to us. If we first practice Shamatha and develop a mind that is peaceful and stable, it will be good to go on and practice Sending and Receiving to cultivate benevolence. On the other hand, if we first cultivate benevolence through the practice of Sending and Receiving, that will make it easier for us to cultivate a mind that is calm and stable.

# 3

# *Vipashyana Meditation*

## UNDERSTANDING SELFLESSNESS

Previously, I discussed Shamatha meditation and now I'm going to talk about Insight or Vipashyana meditation. The function of Shamatha meditation is to develop mental stability or stillness. The function of Vipashyana is to look at the nature of the mind to realize the nature of phenomena in the world.

The Buddha in the sutras taught the nature of phenomena by presenting selflessness.[17] Later on in what is called the second turning of the wheel of Dharma he presented the emptiness of external phenomena in detail. The reason he presented selflessness first was that we have a lot of suffering in samsara and we want to eliminate this suffering. But we cannot just abandon suffering because to get rid of suffering, we need to abandon its cause. The cause of suffering is the disturbing emotions, such as attachment, anger or aggression, ignorance.[18] If we eliminate these disturbing emotions, we will automatically be free from

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17 . Selflessness (Skt. *atman*, Tib. *dagme*) is the belief that there is no solid, eternal, permanent, or substantial self. Emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tongpanyi*) refers to the belief that all external phenomena such as trees and rocks also do not have any substantial, permanent, or solid existence.

18. The disturbing emotion (Tib.) *marigpa* has been translated as "ignorance" or "bewilderment" or "confusion" in English. This does not refer to normal meaning of ignorance like not knowing something like how to count, or confusion like being confused about what someone has said. Rather, it refers to not understanding that the phenomenal world that we all experience are just false or deceptive appearances, rather than emptiness, the true nature of phenomena.

suffering. But we cannot simply decide to abandon the disturbing emotions either. We have to eliminate their cause and the cause of disturbing emotions is the belief in a self.

We can't get rid of a belief in self by simply suppressing it. We can, however, get rid of it by disproving the existence of a solid, real self through reasoning. Because the self does not exist, we can prove its nonexistence and get rid of our belief and attachment to a self.[19] So the approach of Mahamudra meditation[20] is to recognize selflessness which will lead us to eliminating the false belief of a solid self. That is why the Buddha began teaching the concept of selflessness.

If we meditate on selflessness, we will definitely come to realize that "I" or "me" is insubstantial or "empty," and that leads to the attainment of what is called arhatship. An arhat (Tib. *dag dempa)* is literally someone who has defeated the enemy. Here, the enemy is samsara, the disturbing emotions, and suffering. An arhat is therefore someone who has defeated the cause of suffering, and therefore is victorious over suffering.

If we believe that we are a solid thing, then we will also believe some things are "mine" that belong to this self. It's easier to analyze the fixation that we have with "mine" than we have on "I" because our definition of "mine" is constantly changing. Sometimes "mine" refers to what we own such as "my house" or "my phone" or "my room." Sometimes it's much smaller than a house as in "my body" or "my nose." Sometimes it's much larger than this as in "my country." And there is no benefit to the identification of "my" territory or "my" possessions because this mental concept only causes us suffering.

For example, if we are in a store that sells watches, and we see a watch fall off the counter and land on the ground and break, we will notice it, but we won't suffer as a result of it. But if an identical watch which we think of as "my watch" falls off our

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19. These logical reasoning is given on page 41.

20. Mahamudra is the main meditation of the Kagyu Lineage which includes Shamatha, Vipashyana, and also mindfulness and awareness on and off the meditation cushion.

wrist and falls on the ground and breaks, we suffer. We'll think, "My watch is broken!" But if we look at the two watches, they're physically identical. If we analyze our watch, we won't find the "my" anywhere in it. All we'll find is "watch" so, that the "my" is a mental concept or idea which is not a real thing. Nevertheless, we fixate so much on this concept of "mine" so whenever we lose something such as "my mother," "my child," "my job," "my health," "my reputation" and it leads us to suffering.

Initially, we come to recognize that what we call "mine" does not exist. Then, we begin to recognize that even the "self" to which these things belong to also does not exist. We can prove this to ourself by showing that what we call "my self" changes from minute to minute. For example, we talk about our body saying "my body." By saying "my body," it shows that at this moment we don't think of the body as the self, but as a possession of the self. If that is true, then the self or "I" must be our mind. But in other moments we will say, "My mind today doesn't feel good." Well, if we can call this our mind, then our mind also is not the self in which case, the self must be the body. But we've already indicated that the body is a possession of the self, and not the self itself. Also, the body is not a unit. We can divide the body saying, "my head," "my kidney," and so on. So none of the parts of the body are the self, they just belong to the self. When we pursue this analysis in detail,, we discover that there is no self aside from it being a mental concept.

A second argument to explain emptiness is based on all things taken together as a single thing which in Buddhism is called an aggregate (Tib. *pungpo*). We usually incorrectly believe the different parts of the mind and the body are a single thing and so we develop an attachment to this "self." We then develop aggression to defend this self, and we become uninterested in anything that doesn't seem to affect the self. Because almost every living being on the planet has the belief in a self, it leads to all of the suffering of samsara. If we realize that there is no self, we will have no fear and no suffering of losing anything and will develop a state of extreme tranquility and

happiness. This is the reason that the Buddha first taught that we should contemplate and meditate upon the selflessness of persons.

The Buddha's early students practiced this and innumerable numbers of them became arhats. But this realization is not enough because there is even more to be realized beyond this. Beyond this is the selflessness or emptiness of phenomena. Phenomena is everything that is outside of us—houses, trees, wind, plants, and so on. These teachings on emptiness were taught later on by the Buddha in the Prajnaparamita teachings (Tib. *sherchin*).

## EMPTINESS

The word "emptiness" usually brings to mind an image of nothingness, which we consider as something is lacking. But, in fact, emptiness in Buddhism does not mean an empty voidness. It means that all of these appearances of the outer world that we cling to and fixate on are without any substantial existence. The problem we face with external objects or appearances and all of the suffering we experience is not because of the appearances themselves, but because of our fixation upon them. It is our attachment to external things—desirable material objects, desirable people, relationships, praise, which can lead to temporary pleasure and also great suffering. These external appearances are not real solid things and so we are able to not develop a strong attachment to them, and then they will not cause us any suffering. For example, a beautiful rainbow never causes anyone to suffer because we recognize that it is utterly insubstantial, and so we don't try to possess it or mourn its disappearance. Another analogy is the reflection of the moon in a still body of water. We do not want to possess that image of the moon in water because we recognize it is insubstantial. In the same way, all of the appearances in our whole world that

arise[21] are empty in their nature. But failing to recognize them as being substantially nonexistent, they appear to us and we turn these appearances or experiences, into something negative. But if we recognize appearances for what they are, they will not harm us. Now, this is not pretending that things or situations don't have any existence. It is recognizing that the nature of phenomena are empty, and that if we recognize this, we can directly experience them for what they are.

When we think about emptiness, we're apt to think of it as something that is very far away from us, in the sense that it is something we can only realize after long periods of meditation. It seems emptiness is the ultimate result of the Buddhist path, simply because when we look at things, they seem so solid and real to us. But emptiness can be directly realized through the practice of meditation and it can also be understood through logical analysis. For that reason the Buddha taught emptiness in two ways: the path of the sutras and the path of tantras.

In the sutra path we engage in logical analysis to prove that emptiness is the nature of things. And by doing so we create a conceptual belief of emptiness. However, in the Vajrayana approach we use meditation to create a direct experience of emptiness which leads to the full realization of what this means. The presentation according to the sutras leads to a clear understanding of emptiness, so I'll explain that first.

## The Logical Analysis of Emptiness

According to the sutras, emptiness means interdependence which is simply the idea that nothing exists independent or separate of other things. Nagarjuna composed a great many treatises with many proofs of the existence of emptiness. The easiest way to understand interdependence is a very simple example. If I hold up a 4-inch and a 6-inch stick of incense,

21. The word "appearances" is deceiving because it usually refers to what we see. But here it means everything that happens in samsara including things like ending a marriage, working in a job, not getting the house we want, the amount of wealth we have, and so on.

everyone can tell me this is the longer stick and that is the shorter one. Therefore, it seems these are characteristics inherent in the objects themselves. But if I exchange the 6-inch stick with a 2-inch stick, the short piece of incense (4-inch) has become the long one with the other one is the short one. The point of this is that the characteristics of things are relative to what they are compared to.

So long and short are mental concepts and have no inherent identity of the objects themselves. This is true of many other concepts as well: great and small, pleasant and unpleasant, self and other, here and there, ugly and beautiful, and so on. All of these characteristics of outer phenomena are characteristics created by our mind.

Now someone may ask, "Are some things that we experience physically real?" Take my hand as an example. We would agree that my hand is what we would conventionally call "a hand," which we believe is solid and real. But "hand" doesn't exist. A "hand" consists of fingers, flesh, bones, and so on, and we might say, "Well, a hand is defined as a collection of fingers." But if I take my forefinger, then I have to say it has three joints, is made up of flesh, bone, nerves, muscles, and so on; so a forefinger doesn't exist either. A "hand" appears to be an single object but things are not single objects but rather mental labels for collections of things which we call aggregates. We fixate on the body as a single unit or aggregate, then we begin to believe and behave that we must protect and cherish this body of ours and try to acquire all kinds of things and conditions for this aggregate we call "me." All external phenomena such as a mountain, the sky, a house, an animal, the ocean, and so on are all aggregates and our mind treats them as solid, real things. But nevertheless, it is this belief in the reality of aggregates that produces the sufferings of samsara and is the basis of all of our fears. If we recognize the emptiness of these aggregates, we will no longer be ruled by fear of losing our body or our possessions that we think are "mine" or the suffering we go through trying to do and protect what others think of us.

The Buddha taught this in The Prajnaparamita dharani[22] which is: GATE, GATE, PARAGATE, PARASAMGATE, BODHI SWAHA. *Gate* means "to go," and *paragate* means "to go beyond," to the other side of something. And *parasamgate* means "to completely go beyond," to the other side of something. So, the Buddha said that with the realization of the illusion or emptiness of all phenomena, we have gone completely beyond the causes of samsara and reached a complete state of nirvana. This is enlightenment, and therefore the mantra ends with *bodhi swaha,* meaning that "this is the actual attainment of enlightenment."

## LOOKING AT MIND

To discover the emptiness of mind, we begin by taking the seven dharmas of Vairocana posture already explained. We begin by practicing Shamatha, letting thoughts dissolve until finally our mind comes to rest and we experience stillness. Now, even in the midst of stillness, our mind still has awareness, so we will recognize this stillness. We will actually experience it, and that is the state of Shamatha. Then we look to see exactly what this stillness consists of, that is, what it means to say, "my mind is at rest." If we look,[23] the luminous clarity (Tib. *salwa*) of mind will emerge. We can then experience what mind is and what the mind is doing without focusing on anything. Because we can directly experience our own mind, nothing about it has to be deduced or inferred using logic.

So within that state of Shamatha, we look at our mind and try to see what is resting. By saying "our mind is at rest," we mean that it is free of thought. If the mind has some kind of substantial existence, then it will be at rest somewhere. For example, if a car is parked, we can say this car is parked on this particular street. But when our mind is at rest, we can't find the

22. A dharani is a longer form of a mantra.

23. By "look" we mean to directly perceive without any conceptualization or thought.

mind anywhere. Even if we try to go through the parts of our body to find where our mind is at rest, we won't find it, no matter how carefully we look. And if we try to find the substantial characteristics such as the color or shape of the mind, we won't find anything either. Now all substantial things in samsara have definite characteristics. The car could be parked facing east or west, or it could be parked incorrectly sticking out in the middle of the street. Nevertheless, even though our mind at rest or we could say our parked mind is still we don not find it anywhere and it doesn't rest anywhere. And yet, even though our mind is at rest, we can still experience that. This indicates that the nature of our mind is emptiness. The nature of resting the mind is also emptiness, and the location of our mind is also emptiness.

When we meditate on the nature of our mind, we don't find the mind anywhere. Not finding anything, we may initially think that we have somehow failed to see it. Either we misunderstood how to look for it or we just haven't looked hard enough. But, in fact, the reason we didn't find anything is that the nature of our mind is utter insubstantial, which is why it is empty. To thoroughly comprehend this emptiness, we need to experience it directly in meditation.

It is important to note that the emptiness of mind is not nothingness like empty space. The mind's emptiness is not a mere absence of substance, but rather it is a vast openness, which means that while the mind is empty of substance, the mind still knows and experiences. Although the mind experiences, it is empty; although it is empty, it experiences. Therefore, we often refer to the mind as the unity of luminous clarity (the continuous knowing) and emptiness. This quality of luminous clarity increases through the practice of meditation, and it finally becomes the wisdom of the nature of phenomena and the wisdom of the variety of phenomena. But the nature of these two wisdoms is still emptiness. Therefore, the nature of mind is also called the unity of emptiness and wisdom.

This whole process just described is the process of developing Vipashyana meditation by looking directly at mind.

## LOOKING AT THOUGHTS

When we meditate on the mind's true nature or essence, we discover the nature of our own mind. But while this is going on, thoughts will continue to arise—positive thoughts, negative thoughts, and neutral thoughts. When these thoughts arise, we will often think that something has gone wrong with our meditation. But rather than rejecting a thought and attempting to suppress it, we should simply look at the nature of the thought by looking directly at the thought itself and trying to see where the thought has come from. "Has this thought arisen within our body or outside the body, and if so exactly where?" Then we also look at the substance of the thought: "Does it have a color or a shape?" "Does the thought have a particular quality of attachment, anger, faith, or devotion?" "Does it have a substance?" "Does it have a location?" But when we look for the location and substance of thought, we don't find anything. Even when we look to see how the thought arose, we can't say that the thought arose gradually or suddenly. We can't find anything at all.

Although we tend to regard thoughts as a problem in meditation, they are not a problem by themselves because the nature of thought is exactly the same as the nature of the mind. Both their natures are empty and that is why there is the absence of location, origination, or substance of the mind. Although thoughts by themselves are not inherently harmful, it often seems to us as though our mind and thoughts are two entirely different things. As long as we regard them as different, these thoughts will actually obstruct our practice of meditation. We often tend to feel the need to get rid of thoughts, as though thoughts are our enemies when, in fact, thoughts are not a problem. When we are meditating and a thought arises and we look at its nature, we will see its nature is actually the same nature as our mind. And if a thought does not arise, and we look directly at the nature of our mind, we see that same nature. So whether thoughts arise or not is not an issue in the practice of Vipashyana meditation. This is the main difference between

Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation. With Vipashyana meditation there is an understanding of the direct experience of the mind's nature. That recognition is Vipashyana.

When we perceive the direct experience of the mind having no substantial characteristics, we lose our incorrect belief of being a solid self. The emptiness upon which we meditate is not faraway from us or something requiring great logic. It is simply perceiving the insubstantiality of our own mind. When we look at our mind using direct experience, we discover that there is no substantial entity to be perceived, and that is the direct experience of emptiness. Therefore, the meditation on selflessness that was taught by the Buddha really comes down to this recognition of mind's nature.

## THE CREATION STAGE OF DEITY MEDITATION

In addition to meditation on the nature, we also do another Vajrayana practice is called the creation stage. This is the visualization of the various deities, such as Chenrezig or Tara or the Medicine Buddha in deity practice. (Tib. *yidam*)[24] practice. Sometimes we visualize these deities in front of ourselves to develop faith and devotion and sometimes we visualize ourselves as actually being the deity. In the beginning, meditation on a deity may seem somewhat strange. Generating a clear visualization of the form, color, clothing, and implements of a deity may seem to be not only difficult, but basically pointless. In fact, visualizing ourselves as deities is very useful. That is why Vajrayana practices consist mainly of having two stages: the creation stage in the beginning of the practice which is visualizing the deities, and the completion stage at the end which is dissolving these deities into emptiness and resting on the nature of our mind. In general, the practice of Shamatha consists simply of trying to keep our mind from being distracted

24. These practices and instructions to do them can be found at NamoBuddhaPub.org as free downloads.

and this is very difficult. But as we cultivate the practice of the generation stage, our mind is kept undistracted because we have to visualize the color, the hand gestures, the clothes, and so on of the deity. This process brings the mind to rest, which enhances the practice of Shamatha.

The function of the creation stage is to change our outlook of the world. Normally, we live in a world of our impure perceptions and we create an impure outlook. In the practice of the creation stage, we learn to perceive the world, our body, and our mind as being pure. Beginners tend to see the value of Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation, but they don't see the value of the creation stage practices simply because it seems to be a kind of pretense. This attitude on the part of beginners often makes them think that the creation stage looks like pretending to be something that they are not. Pretending to be a deity appears to be futile, but in fact it is very useful and appropriate because our fundamental nature as sentient beings is buddha nature. Buddha nature is the capacity that all sentient beings possess that is their true nature and allows them to reach buddhahood if they try. So we have within us this innate potential for experiencing a pure world and pure appearances. The reason we don't normally perceive this world as being pure is that our perception is obscured by our disturbing emotions. Nevertheless, if this innate potential is cultivated, pure appearances will definitely be perceived by us. Therefore, these visualizations in deity meditation are very useful and appropriate.

By visualizing our body as the yidam and seeing our mind as the wisdom of the yidam and by inviting the wisdom deity to be within us causes us to gradually experience the inherent purity of phenomena. In fact, visualizing these deities is the best way to do this. So, in the Vajrayana tradition we do creation stage practices involving visualizing ourselves as deities and, in some practices, visualizing deities in front of us.

There are differences among individuals in their ability to visualize the deities based their subtle channels and so forth. Some people visualize very clearly and quickly, while others do not. Of course, if we have a clear visualization, that is excellent,

but if we don't, it's not something to worry about. Any visualization is based on the sixth, mental consciousness. A visualization is basically an abstraction of our visual experience and it is not going to be as clear as physically seeing an object. But as our sixth consciousness becomes more and more used to the act of visualization, visualizations will become clearer. How much benefit we get out of our visualization is not based on how clear the visualization is.

## *Questions*

**Question:** If in reality there is no self, then what is it that reincarnates?

**Rinpoche:** Basically, the self is a concept that our mind creates to account for our experience. The basis of this belief is the continuity of experience. Our mind is unable to explain to itself the going from one life to another, so it develops this idea that the self dies and then the self reincarnates into another body. Our mind believes that what reincarnates into a baby is the same as what died in the previous life. This is similar to us believing that the person we are today is the same person that we were yesterday. But in fact, whether we are talking about yesterday and today, or this life and the next life, it's mistaking what is actually a continuum for a solid identity.

For example, if we stand at a certain point on a river bank, we can say that this is the same river today as it was yesterday. But it's not really the same river because it's not the same water. The river is continuous and related to what there was yesterday, but it's not actually the same. It just appears to be the same thing to us. As we saw earlier, this "self" is sometimes thought of as being our body and at other times as being our mind. If we consider the changes that we gone through in our life, we cannot say that we have had the same body or that we had the same mind. When we were a child, we had a small child's body, and our mind thought very differently. When we were a child, we didn't play or do things the same way that we do when we are grown up. Even though we intellectually know that we are

constantly changing, because of the continuity of our experience we believe "I'm still the same person," and go through life thinking of ourselves as a solid "I." And the same thing happens with reincarnation. We are mistaking a continuity of mind with experience for a "self."

## *The Amitabha Buddha*

Amitabha is one of the Five Wisdom Buddhas and is red in color, resides in the pure land of Sukavati (Tib. *dewachen)* along with Chenrezig. He is sitting in a full-lotus posture and with his hands in the position of meditation.

# 4
# *Bringing Obstacles to the Path*

So far, I have explained the practice of Shamatha, which is how we can calm down our coarse thoughts and disturbing emotions. Then I explained the practice of Vipashyana, which is how to see the nature of our mind and thus eradicate our negative qualities and increase our positive qualities. Generally speaking we can divide phenomena as being false or confusing and phenomena as being true and clear. The disturbing emotion of ignorance is what guides us in samsara and wisdom is what guides us in nirvana. When we realize the true nature of phenomena, we are at the end of our practice which is without defects and includes all our positive qualities. Until we actually attain the end or fruition of our practice, we still have to deal with disturbing emotions, suffering, illness, and so on in our daily life off the meditation cushion. The next discussion is a set of practices of Mahamudra meditation on how to deal with adversity in our regular life using the practice of meditation—this is called "bringing adversity to the path. These are mostly challenging situations that occur to us in life rather than on our meditation cushion, but the solutions or these situations are using what we have learned in Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation.

## 1. Bringing Adversity to the Path

There are six types of adversities or obstacles which keep us away from our Dharma path. The first adversity is thoughts. Thoughts can be virtuous or unvirtuous and they can be pleasant or unpleasant. In either case, if we follow the thought in our

practice, we will become more confused which leads to more problems. But we can apply a remedy to the thought, and it will lead to happiness. This remedy is called "bringing thoughts to the path."

When we are meditating, eventually a thought will arise. It could be a weak thought or an intense thought, a virtuous thought or an unvirtuous thought. In any case the remedy is the same. We need to recognize that the thought has arisen, and once we recognize that the thought is there, we need to get hold of it and apply an antidote to that thought. But there is no actual remedy for eliminating thoughts.

Instead we can do recognize that a thought has arisen and then analyze the thought asking questions such as, "Where did it come from? What color is it? Where is it located?" which has already been extensively explained.

Another way to deal with thoughts when they arise is not to try to stop or get rid of the thought or to follow it. In other words, we don't try to alter the thought in anyway or analyze it. All we do is look directly at it in a relaxed way. When we look directly at the thought, the substance of the thought will disappear. But even before the thought has dissolved, we will see its nature which is beyond our conceptual mind. In this way even though the thought is still present, it has become meditation and that is how to bring thoughts onto the path.

When we attempt to look at particularly intense thoughts as a beginner, we may find this uncomfortable or unnatural. But if we continue to look directly at thoughts, it will eventually become quite natural and be an effective way to do our meditation even in the midst of many thoughts. Once we are experience with this method, it can become a habit of dealing with thoughts as they arise.

### 2. Bringing disturbing Emotions to the Path.

The second type of adversity to be brought to the path concerns the disturbing emotions. Disturbing emotions are a specific type of thought that are particularly problematic because they cause

us suffering and indirectly cause others to suffer as well. According to the Buddha's teachings in the sutras and the tantras, all disturbing emotions can be summed up into five major types, and these are often reduced to three different types. These are usually referred to as the five or three poisons because they poison the mind if they are not dealt with.

The first major disturbing emotion is a strong attachment to anything such as food, wealth, pleasure, relationships, and so on. This is considered poisonous because being attached to these things can cause us suffering and causes us to do negative acts. The second disturbing emotion is aggression. Aggression has many varieties such as hatred, holding a grudge, spitefulness, malevolence, and so on. All of these are varieties of the same basic disturbing emotion of aggression. The third disturbing emotion is apathy arising from ignorance or mental dullness. As explained earlier this ignorance is not understanding that the phenomena in the world is not solid and real. The fourth disturbing emotion is pride, which is thinking that we have all these good qualities that others lack. And the fifth disturbing emotion is jealousy, which is resenting the fact that others have good qualities, wealth, or pleasures, and we think that we also deserve these. These five types of disturbing emotions do not normally arise all at one time, but they are problems that can definitely ruin our practice of Dharma and particularly our meditation practice.

The first step in taking disturbing emotions onto the path is to recognize that a disturbing emotion has arisen. Often when a disturbing emotion arises, it takes hold of our mind before we are even aware that it has arisen. So, we need to learn about these distinct emotions so we can recognize them when they arise. Often, when a disturbing emotion has arisen and we are emotionally invested in it, we don't try to stop or get rid of the disturbing emotion. The antidote for disturbing emotions is identical to the approach dealing with thoughts in meditation. We don't need to stop them because the nature of the disturbing emotion is empty, which is the same as the nature of thought, which is the same as the nature of mind. So once we have

recognized the disturbing emotion, we simply look directly at its nature without attempting to alter our mind or the disturbing emotion. As we look at the disturbing emotion's nature, we will experience and recognize its nature. To do this, of course, our mind needs to be relaxed and we also need to have some clear awareness. When the disturbing emotion's nature is recognized, it is still there but it is no longer poisonous or a problem. Before the disturbing emotion has vanished, it becomes an aid to our meditation.

### 3. Bringing Gods and Demons to the Path

The third type of adversity or obstacle is to bring gods and demons onto the path. Now this is somewhat symbolic and what is called "gods and demons" includes all kinds of hallucinations and paranormal experiences which some people tend to regard as negative forces from external beings.[25] Or we have experiences that are not paranormal, but still involve intense fear. So basically, "gods and demons" here means experiences of intense fear.

Now fear can arise for a good reason. There may be something real to be afraid of. But sometimes fear arises for no apparent reason. We just suddenly become afraid and this can reach a point of terror, or it can simply remain as an undercurrent in our mind in the form of anxiety. Whether or not we view this as the activity of gods and demons, it is still a problem because this anxiety and terror is by its very nature disturbing and unpleasant.

We deal with this obstacle in exactly the same way as we did with thoughts and disturbing emotions. The first step is to recognize the presence of the anxiety or fear in our mind. Then, we don't try to stop, get rid, or indulge it. We simply look

25. Thrangu Rinpoche is addressing a Western audience here, but has said in other teachings that there are definitely numerous invisible beings—some who are helpful and some who are malevolent and that they are everywhere around us in our gardens and in our houses.

directly at its nature in an unaltered way. As we look at it directly, we will experience its nature. We find that this fear and anxiety has the same nature as our mind, the same nature as thoughts, and disturbing emotions. It has no substance. When we recognize that the anxiety or fear has no substance, we can then begin to realize that there is nothing to be afraid of. Now the fear hasn't vanished, but it has become part of our meditation because its nature is recognized. And even before it vanishes, this feeling we have longer becomes what we could call fear. By using the method of bringing gods and demons to the path, what usually upsets us and we try to avoid is not only pacified by recognizing its nature, but it actually becomes a source of benefit to our meditation.

### 4. Bringing Suffering to the Path

The fourth obstacle to be brought onto the path is suffering. A great deal of our suffering is connected with sickness and death and these are considered separately as the fifth and sixth obstacles to the path. Suffering here means we are miserable ourselves, and we suffer when we see the misery of others that causes us to become upset or depressed. The question here is how to deal with both of these types of suffering in our meditation.

Actually, there are really three situations to overcome—because there are two possible reactions that practitioners tend to have towards the misery or suffering of others. These reactions occur when we witness the suffering from illness, misery, deprivation, poverty and so on of others. We can react with a lack compassion when they see the suffering of someone else, because we have the fear that the same thing might happen to us. We think, "What would I do if that happened to me? I'd better practice so it doesn't happen to me." That is called "the foundation level to the suffering."

The second type of reaction is that a compassionate practitioner will see the person or animal who is suffering greatly and realize that there must be many, many sentient

beings everywhere who share that same misery. They will then develop the desire to help them and want to do something about it.

Whether we feel our own misery or develop sadness that comes from witnessing the misery of others or are afraid it will happen to us, we should recognize the presence of this worry and sadness in our mind and look at its nature. Looking at its nature we see that it is empty, it has no real existence except for what our mind made up. While the sadness is still there, it is transformed into meditation, and being transformed into meditation, it no longer becomes a problem.

### 5. Bringing Illness to the Path

The fifth type of adversity is to bring illness to the path. Now illness is a type of suffering, but it is considered separately here because it is so intense. The idea is how to use meditation to deal with an experience of illness, but we should not to use meditation to replace medical treatment.

Illness can be either physical or mental and arises in us because our bodies are composites and therefore our body is impermanent and subject to illness. We experience physical and mental problems of various degrees at various points in our lives. When these arise, our usual reaction is simply to feel miserable. The approach here is to neither indulge in endless thinking about the illness and the pain or to deny how bad it is. We simply look directly at the sensations of illness—the sensation of pain or discomfort to see its nature. The sensation, of course, is extremely intense and therefore it is vivid and clear. When we look directly at its nature, the vividness of the sensation is not diminished, but because we experience its nature, the experience of illness or pain becomes a state of meditation. This means that while the illness or pain does not cease through seeing its nature, it is no longer quite the problem it was before and no longer quite the source of misery it was.

This is also called "bringing illness down off its pedestal," which means bringing illness down to a level where it is not

controlling us and is not such a problem. There are two ways to do this. We can look directly at the sensation of feeling ill or pain and see the emptiness which is its nature. The other way is to look at the nature of the mind that is experiencing the sensation. In either case the result is the same, and bringing illness to the path will actually help a great deal.

We might wonder how we can practice this as a technique when we're not ill. The way to prepare for this is to pinch a little bit of our skin, which hurts if we've ever tried it. It hurts, but not that much so it's good to start with this. If we look at the nature of the pain of pinching our skin, if we look directly at it, we'll see that it is empty. While we are observing or experiencing its emptiness, the pain is still there. The pain still hurts, and because we are experiencing the emptiness of the pain, it's no longer a problem. When we develop stability in that practice, then gradually we will be able to deal with actual illness and more and more intense degrees of discomfort.

### 6. Bringing Death to the Path

The sixth adversity is to bring death on the path. Approaching death usually inspires tremendous fear and sadness in us, and as a result, we often try to avoid thinking about it and live in denial of death. Denial of death, of course, is useless since it's going to happen to us anyway. What we need to develop is a method where we can transcend both fear and denial and go through death without fear and suffering. It is actually possible to do this before we die and there are many methods for doing this, but here the approach that is based on Shamatha and Vipashyana.

Basically, death consists of three different stages. First is the actual dying and second is the mind that continues after death without a body. The suffering of the approach of death is the fear of losing our life and everything that goes along with that. It also may entail a fear of what's going to happen to us after we've died. In any case, the way to deal with the fear of approaching death is basically the same as how to bring gods and demons to

the path because fear of death is a type of fear. So we look directly at the fear and we recognize its nature to be emptiness.

The second stage of death is the experience of dying. Throughout our life, our body and mind have been united. Death causes the gradual separation of our mind from our body. Therefore, it's an experience different from anything we've undergone in this lifetime and being a completely new experience, it will be unfamiliar and could be terrifying. The approach here is to prepare ourselves for that experience, so that we can look at the nature of it with a relaxed mind while it is occurring.

The third stage is when our body and mind has completely separated and we experience phenomena even stranger, even more novel, than dying itself. This is what is called the after-death interval, or *bardo.* Because it is completely new to us, it is also apt to be terrifying. So, we prepare ourselves for it so that our mind can be relaxed and look at the nature of this experience at that time.

Death is usually accompanied by great sadness and suffering and when that starts to happen, we need to reflect upon what death really is. The first thing we need to remember is that we are not alone in dying, everyone dies, so there is no point in fearing death, since it cannot be avoided. We have to remember that there is no reason to be sad about it, because death is the most natural experience in the world—it happens to everyone. So initially we encourage ourselves by trying to gain a perspective on what is happening to us. This will reduce the intensity of the sadness and suffering enough so that we can recognize the appearances or experiences which will occur as we come closer and closer to the actual moment of death. By employing Shamatha and Vipashyana during the dying process and also when we are actually in the bardo, we can reduce our fears and confusion and make correct decision for our rebirth. By not panicking our mind will be relaxed enough to be able to notice these experiences of dying.

After we have stopped breathing our mind soon leaves our body and we will then be able to experience the luminous clarity of our mind (Skt. *dharmata*) as it really is. If we have previously

experienced this luminous clarity in or samadhi[26] in our meditation, then we will be able to recognize it in the bardo and not be frightened by it, and that will help make it be possible for us to consciously choose our subsequent rebirth.

There is an actual technique for preparing for the appearances that arise in the bardo and is similar in nature to the bardo experience, but it is less intense. The method is to close our eyes very, very tight, so that our eyelids, our upper eyelid in particular, are actually pressing on our eye. As we squeeze our eyes shut quite tightly, we'll see darkness. But then because of the pressure on the eyes within the darkness, we will start to see a light. It will be various colors—green, blue, yellow, red—and of various shapes. This is a little bit of what we will see in the bardo immediately after death.

When we do this as a practice, initially what we see is quite surprising. We can't think of a reason why we should be seeing these things simply by squeezing your eyes. But what we see is called clear light (Tib. *ösel*), or natural display of dharmata. We see this because this is the nature of our mind and the nature of all phenomena and has no existence outside of ourself. As we look at this light or these appearances, they don't disappear and we are then able to see their nature. In other words, we are able to recognize that they are not external to us.

Also in the bardo there are sounds that are similar to these lights or appearances. We can prepare for that with a similar technique which involves gritting your teeth so that our jaw is clenched. If we do this in an appropriate environment, we won't hear anything at first. But if we do it long enough, eventually we begin to hear a hum that eventually this becomes a roaring sound. This is called "the empty sound of dharmata." By familiarizing ourself with these appearances and sounds, then when we actually experience them in their full intensity in the

26. Samadhi is the experience of one-pointed concentration in our meditation that is not distracted by anything.

bardo, we will be prepared and our mind will stay relaxed through the process.[27]

## SUMMARY

These six methods for bringing adversity to the path teaches us how to deal with obstacles in our life and meditation. But for these methods to work, we need to apply them. We can't just forget them. We are extremely fortunate to be practicing Shamatha and Vipashyana meditation, to be studying it and receiving instruction in it. As I mentioned earlier, practicing Shamatha and Vipashyana in the context of Mahamudra is very convenient to practice. It does not involve anything that does not fit into a conventional lifestyle, so please do as much meditation as you can. Even if you do it only for very short periods of time, by practicing regularly for the rest of your life, you will benefit yourself tremendously.

Because of considerations of time or other circumstances some people find themselves unable to practice and then may become unhappy. But don't feel too bad about that either, because even having had contact with these teachings and having the motivation to study and practice these teachings, will eventually benefit you greatly.

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27. Thrangu Rinpoche has a complete book on the bardo in his *Journey of the Mind: Through Life, Death, Bardo, and Rebirth* explaining the bardo in detail and how to prepare for it before one dies.

## The Nine Levels of Stability of Meditation*

1. Resting the mind
(One places one's mind on an object for a brief duration.)

2. Resting the mind longer
(One places one's mind on an object and it wanders and then one places it back again on the object.)

3. Continuously resettling the mind
(One keeps placing the mind, but there are still thoughts such as "this is important" or "I like this" which prevent complete placement.)

4. Intensely settled mind
(The mind appears to be vast and the thoughts appear only as small intrusions in this vast space.)

5. Taming the mind
(One feels joy, enthusiasm, and relaxation in one's meditation.)

6. Pacification of the mind
(The mind appears tame, but it still wanders because we are still attached to these wanderings.)

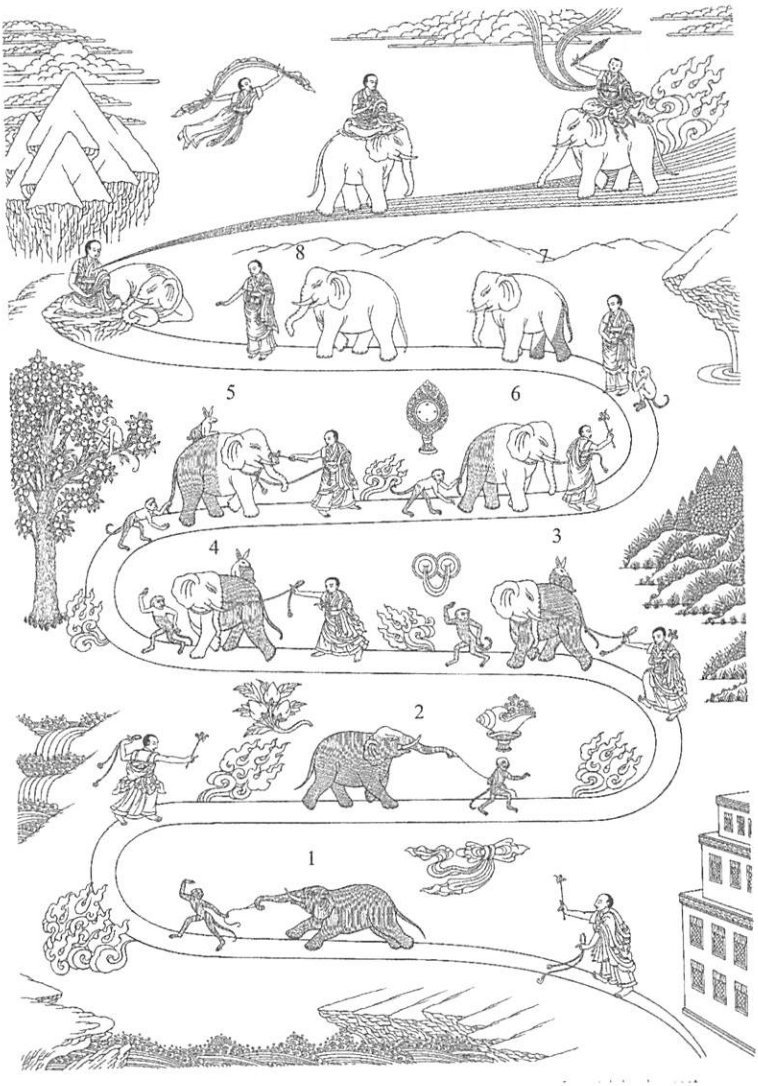
7. Complete pacification of the mind
(Whatever the distraction that appears in mind, one immediately applies the right antidote.)

8. One-pointed mind
(One can place the mind almost completely, but it still requires some exertion.)

9. Resting in equanimity
(Mind rests simply and naturally in its own nature.)

*These nine ways were first given in *The Ornament of Clear Realization* by Maitreya.

## *A Graphical Representation of The Nine Stages of Shamatha Meditation*




The explanation of all nine stages of Shamatha meditation which are numbered in this diagram can be found on the next page.

**A Description of the Drawing of the Nine Stages of Shamatha**

**The monk** is trying to tame his mind.
**The elephant** represents his mind which begins with the elephant being all black and gradually turns white.
**The monkey** represents subtle mental obstacle of agitation.
**The rabbit** represents subtle mental obstacle of dullness.
**The flames** along the path represent the amount of effort required to tame the mind.
**In the center** are the five senses of touch (cloth at stage 1), taste (fruit) and smell (perfumed conch) at 2, sound (cymbals) at 3, and sight (mirror) at 6. These are the objects of distraction to the mind.

**In stage 1.** The monk is holding a harness but his mind (elephant) is running way ahead of him with the monkey mind leading.

**In stage 2.** The monk still has poor concentration with the halter representing mindfulness or alertness. The elephant and monkey are almost all black representing an untamed mind.

**In stage 3.** The monk finally lassoes the elephant taking control away from the monkey (agitated mind) and the rabbit (subtle mental obstacles) appears.

**In Stage 4.** The elephant, monkey, and rabbit look back at the monk who is holding the reins. This represents that the mind has realized the monk is control of mental distractions.

**In Stage 5.** The distracting factors of Shamatha meditation (monkey, elephant, and rabbit) are still there, but the monk is leading and finally in control. He now leads the elephant with traditional hook used in India. Also the flame of exertion at this time is small.

**In Stage 6.** The monk is now leading without needing the hook and monkey is now following and the rabbit disappears so the mind is pacified. At this point the elephant is half white (in control).

**In Stage 7.** The elephant is now three-quarters white and going on by itself. The monkey is sitting next to the monk showing that there are still some subtle obstacles in monks meditation.

**In Stage 8.** The monkey has disappeared and the elephant becomes completely white. The mind can now remain continually in one-pointed concentration (samadhi).

**In Stage 9.** The final attainment of Shamatha. The monk and the elephant representing the mind can now rest simply and naturally in its own nature.

At this final stage, the path becomes a rainbow. Depicted here as the monk is riding the elephant across the rainbow representing having attained mental bliss. He is also shown flying representing the freedom of this accomplishment.

Finally, the monk returns from this path riding the elephant, his mind, ready to help all other sentient beings. He is holding a flaming sword representing the attainment of supreme knowledge of the true nature of reality.

The Drawing and Explanation is taken from Robert Beer in his *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs.*

# *The Glossary*

**aggregates, five** (Skt. *skandha*). The Buddha in the *Surangama Sutra* taught that sentient beings are not solid and enduring objects but rather collections composed of "heaps."

**alaya consciousness.** According to the Chittamatra school this is the eighth consciousness and is often called the ground consciousness or storehouse consciousness because it store residual latencies (Tib. *bag chag)* of sensory experiences.

**Amitabha Buddha.** One of the buddhas of the five buddha families. He is depicted as being red in color and is a member of the lotus family. Amitabha is known as the "buddha of boundless light" because he made a special commitment to allow unenlightened beings into his pure realm to receive the Dharma.

**arhat.** The highest level of a practitioner on the Foundation path, one who is free from the four maras: the mara of conflicting emotions, the mara of the deva, the mara of death, and the mara of the aggregates.

**bardo**. Literally, bardo means "between the two." There are six types of bardos, but here it refers to the time between death and a rebirth in a new body.

**bodhichitta.** Literally, "mind of enlightenment." There are two kinds of bodhichitta: absolute bodhichitta which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena and relative bodhichitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the suffering of samsara.

**buddha nature** (Skt. *sugatagarbha*). The original nature present in all sentient beings, when realized, allows them to achieve enlightenment.

**Chenrezig** (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*). The deity of compassion who is known as the patron deity of Tibet. His mantra is OM MANI PEDME HUNG.

**Chöd practice.** Pronounced "chö" and literally means "to cut off." This practice helps to cut off all ego involvement and the disturbing emotions. The *mo-chö* (female chöd) practice was founded by the famous female saint Machig Labdrön.

**dharma** (Tib. *chö*). With a lower case "d" means phenomena or a truth.

**Dharma** (Tib. *chö*). With capitial D it means the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddhadharma).

**completion stage.** In the Vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the creation and the completion stage. In the completion stage one dissolves the surroundings and the deity and rests in the emptiness.

**consciousnesses, eight.** These are the five sensory consciousnesses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sensation, the sixth mental consciousness, seventh afflicted consciousness, and eighth ground consciousness.

**consciousnesses, sensory.** The five sensory consciousnesses that process the information from the sense organs into perceivable images, sounds, smells, tastes, and body sensations. They do not evaluate the sensory information.

**creation stage.** In the Vajrayana there are two stages of meditation: the creation and the completion stage. The creation stage involves visualization and contemplating deities for the purpose of realizing the purity of all phenomena. In this stage visualization of the deity is established and maintained.

**dharmata** (Tib. *chönyi*). Often translated as "suchness" or "the true nature of phenomena" or "things as they are." It is phenomena as they really exist or as seen by a completely enlightened being without any distortion or obscuration so we can say it is "reality."

**disturbing emotion** (Skt. *klesha, Tib. nyon mong*). The emotional obscurations which are also translated as "afflictions" or "poisons." The three main disturbing emotions are attachment, aggression, and ignorance or delusion. The five disturbing emotions are these three above plus pride and jealousy.

**emptiness or selflessness of persons** (Tib. *dag me*). There are two kinds of emptiness—the emptiness of a personal self and the emptiness of external phenomena. When one examines oneself, one finds the individual does not possess an independent or substantial self. This position is held by most Buddhist schools.

**emptiness or selflessness of phenomena** (Tib. *tong pa nyi*). This doctrine asserts that not only are persons selfless, but when one examines external phenomena, one finds that external phenomena are empty, that is, they do not have an independent or substantial nature. This position is not held by the Foundation vehicle schools, but is accepted by the Mahayana and Vajrayana schools.

**four immeasurables.** Four mental attitudes or qualities that can be developed without limit: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. Traditionally, they are formulated as an aspiration: "May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. May all being never be separated from the sacred happiness that is sorrowless. May all beings be inseparable from happiness and rest in the great impartiality."

**four ordinary preliminaries.** A meditation on the four thoughts that turn the mind towards Dharma. They are the precious human birth, impermanence and death, the problems of samsara, and karma cause and effect.

**interdependent origination** (Tib. *tendril*). The principal that nothing exists independently, but comes into existence only in dependence on various previous causes and conditions. There are twelve successive stages of this process that begin with ignorance and end with old age and death.

**Kagyu.** One of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Marpa. The other three are the Nyingma, Sakya, and Gelug schools.

**luminous clarity** (Tib. *salwa*). Also translated as "luminosity" or "clarity. The nature of mind is empty of inherent existence, but it also has this quality of knowing and awareness called

the mind's luminosity. This luminosity has nothing to do with light, but with a clear and sharpness quality of mind.

**Karmapa.** The title of 17 successive incarnations of Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa who heads who heads the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

**Machig Labdrön** (1031–1129). A famous female saint who developed the Chöd practice of "cutting off" (one's attachment to one's self), which is said to be the only practice developed in Tibet that was actually taken back to India and then practiced there.

**Mahamudra** (Tib. *chak gya chenpo*). Literally, "Great Seal." A meditation practice that emphasizes perceiving the nature of mind directly rather than understanding it through inferential reasoning.

**mahasiddha.** A practitioner who has a great deal of realization. The most well-known mahasiddhas lived in India between the eight and twelfth century and practiced tantra. Their biographies are found in *The Eighty-four Mahasiddhas.*

**Medicine Buddha** (Tib. *sangye menla*). A form of the Buddha who is blue in color and holds a medicine bowl in his lap and the stem of the Aruna fruit in his right hand. The Medicine Buddha practice is often done for those with either a mental or physical illness.

**meditational deity** (Tib. *yidam*). A tantric deity who embodies the qualities of buddhahood and is used as a meditational deity in Vajrayana practices. For example, Chenrezig is a yidam who represents true compassion, and he is visualized over one's head in the Chenrezig practice.

**Milarepa** (1040-1123). Milarepa was a student of Marpa who attained enlightenment in one lifetime. He is famous for his *Hundred Thousand Songs of Realization.* His student Gampopa founded the Dagpo Kagyu lineages.

**Nagarjuna.** An Indian scholar in the second century who brought the Prajnaparamita teachings on emptiness into this world and then wrote several masterful works on proving emptiness using logical reasoning. He also founded the Middle Way (Skt. Madhyamaka) Buddhist school.

**nirvana.** Literally, "extinguished." Individuals live in samsara and with spiritual practice can attain a state of enlightenment in which all false ideas and conflicting emotions have been extinguished. This is called nirvana.

**prajnaparamita.** The Buddhist literature outlining the Mahayana path and emptiness written mostly around the second century.

**samsara.** Conditioned existence of ordinary life in which suffering occurs because sentient beings still possesses attachment, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

**Saraha.** One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas of India who was known for his spiritual songs which was one of the first teachings on Mahamudra.

**sentient beings.** These are any being with a mind and include humans, animals, hungry ghosts, jealous gods, and even gods.

**selflessness of persons** (*dagme*). See emptiness of persons.

**Shamatha** or **Tranquility meditation** (Tib. *shinay*). This is basic sitting meditation which has the purpose of settling or taming the mind so that it will stay where it is placed.

**Sending and Receiving practice** (Tib. *tonglen*) A meditation practice promulgated by Atisha in which the practitioner takes in all the negative conditions of others and then sends to them everything that is positive to them.

**six consciousnesses** See consciousnesses, eight.

**Six Dharmas of Naropa.** These six special yogic practices that were transmitted from Naropa to Marpa and consist of the Subtle Heat practice, the Illusory Body practice, the Dream Yoga practice, the Luminosity practice, the Ejection of Conscious-ness practice, and the Bardo practice.

**spiritual song** (Skt. *gur*). A religious song spontaneously composed by a Vajrayana practitioner concerning his or her realization. It usually has a certain of number of syllables per line.

**subtle channels and winds.** These refer to the subtle channels (Skt. *nadi,* Tib. *tsa)* which are not anatomical in nature but through which subtle energies or "winds" (Skt. *prana)* travel.

**sutras.** The Foundation and Mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha's Vajrayana teachings and also the shastras which are commentaries on the words of the Buddha.

**Tilopa** (928-1009). One of the eighty-four mahasiddhas who became the guru of Naropa who then transmitted his teachings to Marpa, who brought them to Tibet.

**Vajradhara** (Tib. *Dorje Chang*). The name of the dharmakaya buddha. Many of the teachings of the Kagyu lineage came from Vajradhara.

**Vajrayana.** There are three major traditions of Buddhism (Foundation, Mahayana, Vajrayana). The Vajrayana is based on the tantras and emphasizes the luminosity aspect of phenomena and is mainly practiced in Tibet.

**Vipashyana meditation** (Tib. *lhagtong*). Sanskrit for "insight," This meditation develops insight into the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmata).*

**Vairochana.** The sambhogakaya buddha who is one of the five wisdom buddhas.

**wish-fulfilling jewel.** In ancient Indian texts it is said to be a jewel that existed in the naga or deva realms which gave the owner whatever he or she desired. Now this is used metaphorically for Dharma because it provides a person with everything that they need.

**yidam**. Tibetan for a tantric deity that embodies qualities of Buddha-hood. A meditational deity or Yidam practice that uses the visualization of a yidam.

# *Glossary of Tibetan Words*

| Pronounced | Spelled in Tibetan | Tibetan |
|---|---|---|
| bardo | bar do | བར་དོ |
| bag chag | bag chags | བག་ཆགས |
| chak gya chenpo | phyag gya chenpo | ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ |
| chönyi | chos nyid | ཆོས་ཉིད |
| dag dempa | dgra bcom pa | དགྲ་བཅོམ་པ |
| dagme | bdags med | བདག་མེད |
| deshek nyingpo | bde gshegs snying po | དེ་གཤེགས་སྙིང་པོ་ |
| dewachen | bde ba can | བདེ་བ་ཅན |
| Dorje Chang | rdo rje chang | རྡོ་རྗེ་ཆང |
| gur | mgur | མགུར |
| lhagtong | lhag mthong | ལྷག་མཐོང |
| marigpa | ma rig pa | མ་རིག་པ |
| nyon mong | nyon mongs | ཉོན་མོངས |
| ösel | od gsal | ཨོད་གསལ |
| pungpo | phung po | ཕུང་པོ |
| salwa | gsal ba | གསལ་བ |
| sang gye | sangs rgyas | སངས་རྒྱས |
| sangye menla | sangs rgyas sman bla | སངས་རྒྱས་སྨན་བླ |
| sherchin | ser phyin | སེར་ཕྱིན |
| shinay | zhi gnas | ཞི་གནས |
| Tara | tara | ཏཱར |
| tonglen | gtong len | གཏོང་ལེན |
| tongpanyi | strog pa nyid | སྟོག་པ་ཉིད |
| yidam | yi dam | ཡི་དམ |

## *Namo Buddha Publications*

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Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery and from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two retreats.

At twenty-three he and Trungpa Rinpoche received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India during the time of the Chinese takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At the age of 35 he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek.

He was the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Asia, the US, and Canada. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries there. In Nepal Rinpoche founded a monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Bodhanath, a retreat center and college at Namo Buddha east of the Katmandu Valley, and a school in Bodhanath for the general education of lay children and young monks. In Kathmandu Rinpoche also built Tara Abbey offering a full Dharma education for nuns and also has a beautiful monastery in Sarnath, India a few minutes walking distance from where the Buddha gave his first teaching on the Four Noble Truths. In the US he established Vajra Vidya Retreat Center in Colorado and in Canada the Thrangu Monastery Canada in Vancouver.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is also a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

When the 17th Karmapa came to India in 2000, Thrangu Rinpoche was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the Karmapa.

*A Guide to Shamatha and Vipashyana Meditation*

This 74 page booklet gives a clear and concise overview of how to begin doing sitting meditation. Thrangu Rinpoche has spent the last 40 years teaching meditation and other Buddhist topics to both Westerner and Asian students and is an accomplished teacher.

The process of developing good meditation is to begin with Shamatha meditation which is to settle the mind and to gradually train in it so that we can rest without becoming overly distracted by thoughts and emotions.

The second step in developing good meditation is developing Vipashyana meditation in which we learn how to look directly at our mind and see its true nature. When we are able to do this, we can begin to diminish our disturbing emotions and thoughts and anxieties.

Both of these two meditations can be done anywhere and without special setting, implements, or empowerments. Rinpoche explains meditation in simple, non-technical language based on a meditation tradition that is over 1,000 years old and has produced many enlightened individuals.

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