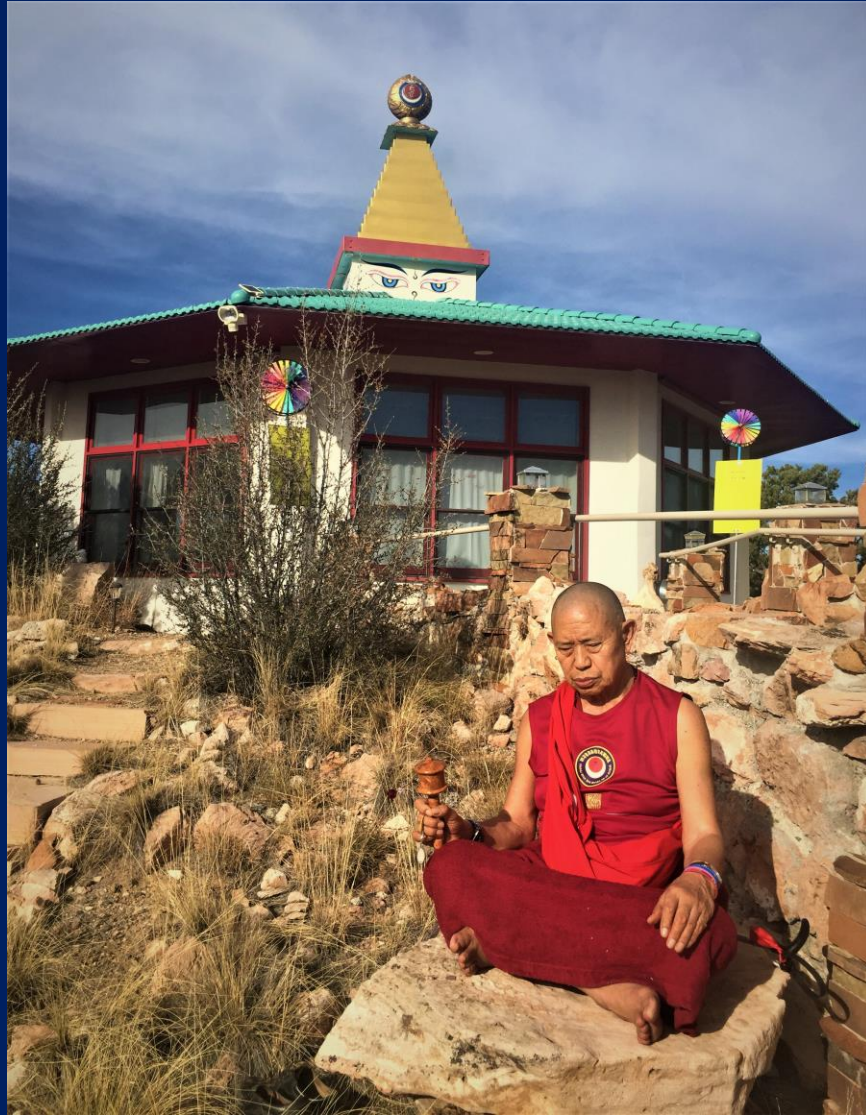


Meditation Pith Instructions



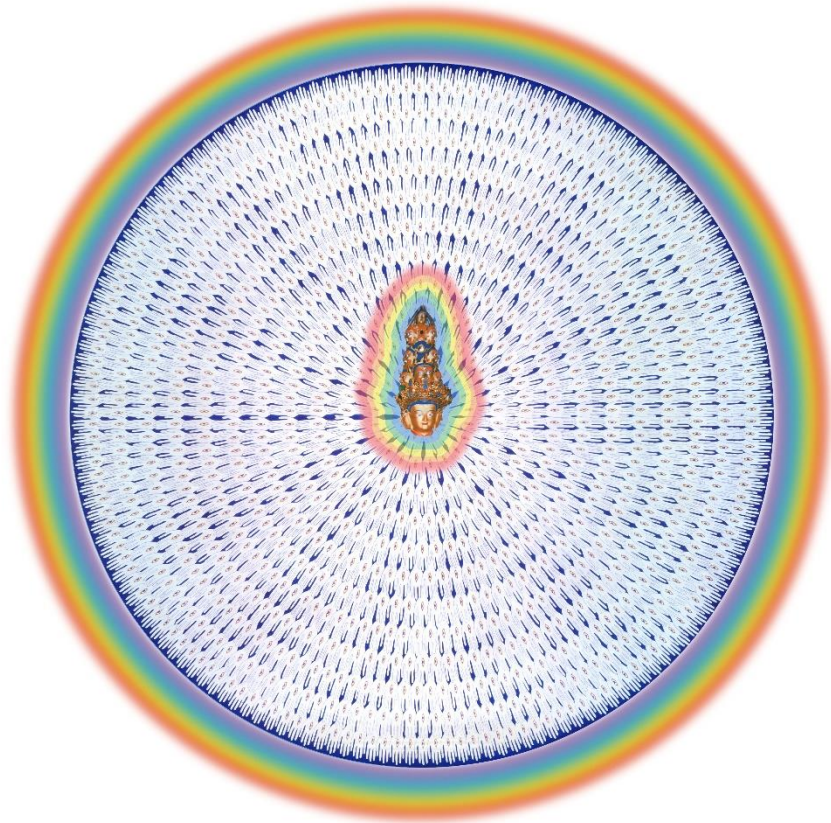
Eighth Garchen Rinpoche, Konchog Gyaltzen

Meditation Pith Instructions

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The 8th Kyabje Garchen Triptrul Rinpoche

Meditation Pith Instructions from Garchen Rinpoche
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Drikung Dharma Surya Center

FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book offers a rare view into the heart-to-heart transmission of oral instructions on meditation from His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche at Drikung Dharma Surya Center in August of 2015. The current, 8th, Garchen Rinpoche is a Tibetan lama, a realized yogi, a skillful teacher, and the beloved Guru of many of us. He is the incarnation of a 12th Century realized yogi named Gar Chodingpa, one of the heart disciples of the famed Jigten Sumgon, Kyobpa Rinpoche—founder of the Drikung Kagyu lineage, that can be traced back to the great translator Marpa Lotsawa, and the greatest yogi of Tibet, Milarepa.

The book contains an exposition of the practices of Shamatha and Generation Stage meditations, which have the nature of relative bodhicitta, and the practices of Vipassana and Completion Stage meditations, which have the nature of absolute bodhicitta—the ultimate nature of the mind. The practices of Shamatha and Vipassana are foundations for Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and Madhyamaka.

Although the book places greater emphasis on the meditation methods and practices from the perspective of meditative experience, this collection distills the heart essence of the Buddha's teachings and Garchen Rinpoche's guidance on the entire Buddha Dharma path—the infallible law of karma, emptiness, and bodhicitta as the basis of all Dharma practices. Garchen Rinpoche often says, *"Love is the only cause of happiness...Love is the sunlight of the mind...The Buddha is nowhere apart from your own mind...Whenever you meditate, our minds are one...When you have boundless love for all sentient beings, you naturally realize the nature of the mind."*

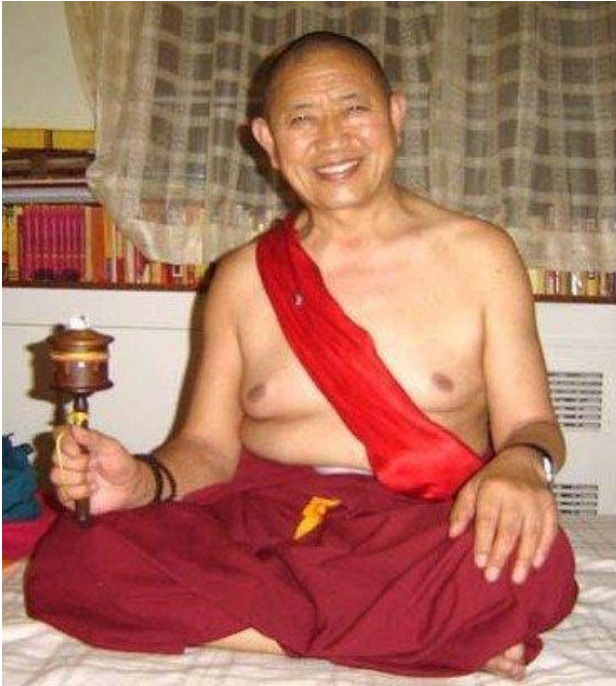
This book would not be possible without unconditional support from Ina Trinley Wangmo for the oral translation, from my children for transcribing and endeavoring to make a text true to Rinpoche's spoken words available to everyone, and from Kay Candler for diligently editing the transcriptions into book form. Our deepest gratitude goes to Khenpo Samdup for sharing his hard work on the *Stages of Meditation* book, and especially to Garchen Rinpoche for the precious teachings, personal experience, and profound instructions and advice that he has compassionately offered to us all.

Glorious, holy, venerable, precious, kind root and lineage lamas, divine assembly of yidams and assemblies of buddhas, bodhisattvas, yogins, yoginis, and dakinis dwelling in the ten directions, please hear our prayer: *"May this treasury of sacred Dharma spread far and wide with our sole wish to benefit all sentient beings without exception and bring peace and happiness to the world."*

Quang

*Drikung Dharma Surya Center, Fairfax, Virginia, USA
July 2018*

SHAMATHA (CALM ABIDING) MEDITATION



And so today, my Dharma friends, I am giving an introduction to the practice of shamatha, calm abiding. There are various books about it in different lineages. Many have received many different types of teaching on the practice of shamatha, but all the different lineages explain the same practice of shamatha, and also that of vipassana, special insight. This is how they are referred to in the Sutra Tradition, “shamatha” and “vipassana.” Shamatha, or calm abiding, is the mind without any thoughts; the completely pure mind without thoughts. Vipassana, or special insight, is to see the nature that one has not seen before, which is also called the

“wisdom mind.” In the Kagyu tradition, it is referred to as the view of “Mahamudra,” and in the Nyingma, “Dzogchen.” According to the scriptures and reasoning, it is referred to as the “valid cognition of dharmata” that basically establishes selflessness, and that is the view of the Madhyamaka, the Middle Way. This ultimate view is given those three names: Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and Madhyamaka. But, what is important to recognize is that all of them are really talking about the ultimate view of vipassana, special insight.

What is the benefit of practicing shamatha meditation? It is because there is not one of us who does not suffer. Everyone suffers; everyone has some suffering, but by practicing meditation, their suffering will first calm down temporarily, and then it will disappear. Therefore, there is the benefit of first temporary, and then also ultimate, freedom from suffering. Finally, we reach the ultimate state of great joy and great bliss that is free of all suffering.

What is the problem with not understanding this, not knowing how to meditate? It is that there will always be suffering. It is said that everything contaminated is the cause of suffering. In samsaric

existence as gods and humans, we do experience some slight happiness. But then, in the end, it always turns into suffering. Gods and humans experience the suffering of change. In the lower realms, beings experience suffering upon suffering. All beings have all-pervasive suffering. Everything is pervaded by the three types of suffering. If we understand the view and practices — the view of shamatha and vipassana — and meditate, then we can become free of such suffering.

The Purpose

What is the purpose, the meaning, of the practice of shamatha?

The Buddha said, “Completely tame your own mind.” This is really the ultimate Buddhist teaching. This is really the essence of all the different levels of the paths of the Pratimoksha-Vinaya, Bodhisattva, and Vajrayana Vehicles. The essence of all these different practices is that you have to purify your own

mind. Once the mind is purified, there is no Buddha, no enlightenment, to be found other than within your own mind. Attaining enlightenment means clearing away all suffering; and having cleared away all suffering, the mind achieves a state of unchanging great bliss. This is just to explain it in very ordinary language, so it is easy to understand for people like myself, who do not have much learning. For such people, it is good to put it in a very simple way. And, of course, the Khenpos, the scholars, can explain it in more eloquent Dharma language. But, for me, even that is also often difficult to understand, so I am explaining it in very simple terms so it is easy to understand.

“Completely tame your own mind.” This is really the ultimate Buddhist teaching.

This term “enlightenment,” what does it really mean, and how we reach it? First of all, in the beginning, we need to cultivate this mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta. That is the first syllable, *jang*, of *jangchub*. *Jang* means to purify. What is it that we need to purify? The self is the one that creates all of samsara, and therefore, it is the self that must be purified. It is an idea of a self, because within the mind itself, there is actually no such “self;” it is just that we don’t know that. In order to purify the self, we must cultivate a very strong altruistic mind that cares for others and becomes completely free of any self-concern. When you cultivate an altruistic mind that is always there, it will naturally clear away the self-grasping mind. All selfishness, all thought of an “I,” will be cleared away. That is the second syllable of *jangchub*. The *chub* is to completely master or

accomplish this altruistic mind. Before we engage in the practice of shamatha, it is necessary to cultivate such an altruistic mind of bodhicitta, of great compassion. The practice of shamatha also exists in other meditation traditions, but those other traditions do not have this *jangchub*, this purifying of the self and cultivating of altruism. This is special to Buddhist meditation practice, and when we practice shamatha, we must do so on the basis of an altruistic mind.

The Buddha taught the Two Truths. First, in relative truth, relative bodhicitta is the great altruistic mind that arises. When that has arisen, you have cultivated relative bodhicitta, and on that basis, you realize ultimate bodhicitta. The practice of shamatha actually has the nature of relative bodhicitta, and vipassana has the nature of ultimate bodhicitta.

So, what is ultimate bodhicitta? It is when you realize the non-duality of self and others — that within the mind itself, there is no duality. There is no separation. When you realize that, then you see that all those sentient beings in samsara have not realized it. And because they have not realized it, everything appears in a dualistic manner to them. They have a perception of self and others as separate. Due to that, they have many thoughts of attachment and aversion, and with those thoughts, they create a lot of suffering. They are confused by their dualistic perception, not understanding that there is no such thing as separation or duality. Because they're confused, they give rise to many thoughts of attachment and aversion, and create their own suffering.

The practice of shamatha actually has the nature of relative bodhicitta, and vipassana has the nature of ultimate bodhicitta.

But, because you know non-duality, you see that no matter how vast samsara may be, however many sentient beings there may be, their mind is exactly the same. The basis of our mind is the same. The minds of all the sentient beings in the three realms (the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm) — we learn in the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind that there are countless sentient beings — but no matter how many sentient beings there are, their minds and my own mind are exactly the same. There is no duality. There is only this one single basis of mind.

The Motivation and the Basis

When you realize that there is no duality, no separation, you realize ultimate bodhicitta. When someone has realized that, then whoever they encounter with their body, speech, or mind — all those who encounter someone who has realized it — can also realize non-duality. Whoever realizes it attains enlightenment. It is like a melting ice block in the ocean. Now, it is like there are many ice-blocks floating on the ocean; as they encounter the ocean water — the one who has realized non-duality — little by little, they all melt to become one with the ocean; and so ultimately, all those ice-blocks can become one with the ocean. When you realize that all sentient beings have the same basis of mind, that will naturally clear away all sorts of biased views, all sorts of differences between lineages or religions in the world. There will be no thoughts of self and other, no attachment and aversion. That serves to cultivate a great calm abiding, or shamatha. Shamatha must, therefore, be cultivated on the basis of first understanding this single mind, that we are all one within the natural state of the mind. Then, through knowing that, we naturally benefit sentient beings through our practice of shamatha.

When we practice shamatha, we must do so on the basis of an altruistic mind.

When you engage in the practice of shamatha in order to realize the nature of the mind, you do so on the basis of wishing to benefit all sentient beings, who are ultimately one. Therefore, in the beginning, it is necessary to understand this single basis. When we feel that it will benefit others, we feel inspired to actually engage in practice to really actualize the nature of the mind. This is how my own gurus explained the practice of meditation to me, and this is what has benefited me the most. We cannot really get such a deep understanding just by reading scriptures or books; but when the root guru points the essence out to us, then we understand, “Oh, this is how it really is.” Therefore, it is very meaningful to really understand the essence in this way. Once we understand it, we really will feel inspired and see the necessity of cultivating bodhicitta. Otherwise, we will think that we are practicing shamatha just to calm our own mind, more like with a lower vehicle’s attitude — like a hero — solitary realizer’s perspective, just cultivating emptiness. There are all kinds of incentives to practice shamatha. But, for it to become truly inspiring and beneficial, we must practice it on the basis of an altruistic mind. That is really the special quality of the Buddhist teachings — the two-fold bodhicitta.

In the beginning, we must cultivate shamatha on the basis of relative bodhicitta, with an understanding that all beings have one single basis of mind. That is why we always begin by reading the opening prayer of refuge and bodhicitta, because they are very precious. So today, this is how we start, with the wish to benefit sentient beings. That wish arises and is inspiring to us because we understand that there is a single basis of mind. This is a very important point to understand.

It is said that, first, we need to resolve that appearances are the mind — that the way things appear is our own mind. This means that everything in samsara and nirvana is created by our own mind. Normally, we think our daytime perceptions are reality. However, when we look at them, those experiences and feelings of happiness and suffering and the ones we have at night when we dream are actually exactly the same, because they're also created by the mind; it is just that when we dream, there is no physical body. Later, when we die, the experience will be the same, everything will be made by the mind. All experience is made by the mind. In order to first realize the non-dual nature of the mind, ultimate bodhicitta, we must develop relative bodhicitta, conventional bodhicitta. Anything can be created by the mind. When we look from the relative perspective, we can see that first, there is self-grasping. Self-grasping produces afflictive thoughts and emotions, and then our actions come out of those afflictions. So, we accumulate karma, and in doing so, we form the habitual imprints in our mind that create birth in the six realms of samsara.

All of it is made by our own mind. And so, when we really look at it, we can see how all of these experiences really come down to our own mind. How does the mind make all that? The mind first perceives a “self,” and then it perceives “others.” And then, due to this separation, this dualistic perception of others and oneself, it becomes afflicted and engages in action. It takes birth somewhere in the six realms, depending on the six afflictive emotions. When you follow this, you realize that everything really is just made by your own mind. And, since it is only made by your own mind, you have some control over it — because it is only your mind. Since it is only your own mind, you can close the door to worrying about it; that is actually a choice. So then, we look at the mind, this mind that creates all of that. We see a lot of thoughts in the mind; it is all those thoughts that create those appearances. Thoughts arise, and then we cling to those thoughts. First there is a thought, and we just follow the ideas in our mind and we act based on them. We

follow and we act according to our thoughts, and this is how our mind creates our suffering. Then, look at the mind and what it is like when there are no thoughts, when there is no thinking.

Shamatha Meditation with an Object



Cultivating a thought-free mind is the practice of shamatha, calm abiding. To begin with, there is shamatha with an object of support. We must first distinguish between and separate out the actual nature of the mind and the thoughts. Then, observe the mind: how is the mind when there are a lot of thoughts, and how is the mind when there are no thoughts? What is the difference? If we are able to develop a mind where there are no thoughts, a thought-free mind, then we are abiding in

shamatha. For any given period of time, there are different methods to develop shamatha, for example, shamatha with support.

The scriptures explain various criteria that are necessary for the practice of shamatha. Many outer criteria refer to the environment. For example, there are various outer conditions that are conducive to cultivating meditation, such as a place that is not dangerous, or a place where resources are available, and so on. There are many outer criteria, and it is very difficult to find a place with all those criteria together. What is actually more important than the outer criteria are the inner criteria. The actual criterion for cultivating meditation is to understand that this life really has no essence. There is no point in being attached to this life. If we continue to be attached to our worldly concerns, we will just continue to wander, over and over again, in samsara. The root of this is our grasping at our thoughts and afflictions. Then you will realize, “If I realize the nature of mind, I will attain freedom — so there is nothing that is more important. The most important thing is to realize the nature of my mind.” It is more important than any worldly activity.

The actual criterion for cultivating meditation is to understand that this life really has no essence. There is no point in being attached to this life.

And with this, you're actually closing the door on worldly activities within your own mind, on the inner level.

With this understanding, you can actually practice at home, in your own house. If you close the door in your own mind, that naturally fulfills all the criteria for meditation, because then the mind will be undistracted. When the mind is undistracted, no thoughts can affect you in one way or another. Then you can realize that it is those thoughts that create all the suffering. When there are no thoughts, there is no suffering either. When we practice shamatha, we realize that, ultimately, thoughts are actually empty. They don't truly exist, and therefore they cannot do anything to us. They cannot affect us one way or the other if we just let them be. Of course, if we grasp at those thoughts — if we hold our ideas to be real and we follow them — we accumulate karma, and we create samsara.

When we practice shamatha, we simply allow our thoughts to settle down naturally, on their own, and the mind just abides until it attains stability. When the mind attains stability in abiding, it becomes like hot water that naturally melts the ice-blocks of thought. Until we have attained stability in meditation, the mind is more like lukewarm water, not completely hot; and since it is not hot, it cannot melt all the ice-blocks that arise. If you understand shamatha in this way, then you will naturally want to engage in that practice, whether the criteria of the outer environment are complete or not. What is most important is that the inner criterion, the criterion within the mind, is fulfilled. On the outer level, it is sufficient to just assume the correct physical posture and then engage in meditation.

The spine and back must be straight, because running through the middle of your body is the central channel, the wisdom channel. When it is straight, then through the force of straightening your back, the wind energies will naturally come to rest within the navel chakra.

In terms of the physical posture, the scriptures explain all kinds of different points of the posture. But, for meditation, other things are more crucial. For example, it says in the scriptures that we should sit in a cross-legged vajra posture and so on. There are many different points for the posture, but the single most important point is that we definitely should assume a posture with a straight back. The

back should be completely straight. Apart from that, you can position your legs in whichever way is comfortable — you can stretch them out or you can sit cross-legged — in whatever way you don't feel any pain, because it is very important that there be no pain. If you are in pain — if your legs hurt and so on — then your mind cannot focus. What is most important in terms of posture, however, is to have a straight back. The scriptures explain that your eyes should gaze to the level of the tip of your nose, like gazing downward. The spine and back must be straight, because running through the middle of your body is the central channel. The central channel is the wisdom channel. If your back is completely straight, then the central channel will also be completely straight. When it is straight, then through the force of straightening your back, the wind energies will naturally come to rest within the navel chakra. That is why it is important to have a straight back. The text then explains other points of posture, such as gazing to the level of the tip of your nose, and also having your tongue slightly curled up toward your palate. But again, what is most important is the straight back.

As for breathing, you can just breathe in a relaxed and natural way. Many of the senior students have heard about this, but there may be some who are new to how we should breathe. According to the instructions, we inhale the breath through the nose, and then we exhale gently through the mouth, releasing the air so that it flows gently between the tongue and the teeth. The tip of the tongue rests near the back of the front teeth and the air flows out between the tongue and the teeth. The neck should also be straight, along with the straight back. The neck should be straight and not tilted back or hanging forward loosely. It should be straight and slightly tucked in, so the eyes are gazing to the nose.

For shamatha with an object of support, you can use any kind of support. For example, you can use an image of a Buddha, such as a statue, or any kind of other object as support. But, whatever the object, it is only a support for your focus, and you should not get involved in it or think about it. It is just that the mind needs something to focus on. In the scriptures, it is explained that one begins with an object such as a piece of wood, a pebble, a jewel, or a piece of stone and so on, because the mind needs something to focus on. But it also may need something more inspiring, such as a crystal ball, which is also a good object to focus on. So, using the object to focus in front of you, fix your gaze on that single point, and then remain within that state of gazing single-pointedly for a long time, so that the mind abides.

The practice at this time is to simply notice the thoughts when they arise in the mind. You become aware of their arising, but you just don't follow them. In the beginning, we just have to let them be. We don't pursue any of those thoughts. At this time, we need to develop the recognizing awareness, which just recognizes the arising thoughts, but lets them be and doesn't follow them.

We place an external object of focus in front of us, and then we fix our gaze on it. Different approaches here can be helpful for different people. For some people, it is easier to focus when their eyes are closed. For example, you can place the object in front of you and fix your gaze on it for some time, and then just close your eyes; and for most of your meditation, your focus remains on that object but your eyes are closed. You just keep it in your mind. Sometimes that is helpful for making thoughts dissipate.

It is also said that sometimes when there are no thoughts in the mind at all, you should gaze with open eyes. Gazing without closing the eyes but remaining without thoughts seems to be a stronger quality of abiding. But, sometimes in the scriptures, we hear that just the abiding factor of meditation by itself can be a flaw, a fault, and we should shatter that abiding; so simply abiding alone is not a good thing.

We often hear in the scriptures that we should avoid this fault of only abiding. But actually, this is not something that we should do. Abiding is a very good quality, and we should certainly not reject or shatter the state of abiding. In the beginning, we need to cultivate this quality, this factor of abiding. You can do it in whichever way suits you best. For myself, for example, I cannot just fix my gaze on an external object all the time, so I begin by looking at an external object such as a Buddha image, and then I soon close my eyes and just have that image appear within my mind. Then, it just appears in my mind as soon as I close my eyes — for example, a deity encircled by a rainbow-light sphere, or in some other way. In whatever way soothes your mind the best, that is how you should meditate. That is most important.

Very precise descriptions of this are in the scriptures, which explain how you should place the object — such as a pebble and so on — before you, and then focus on it. But you have to see for yourself what works the best for you. You can begin by focusing, fixing your gaze, on the object,

but then it is fine to close your eyes and just keep that object of support within your mind — to have that object of focus appear in your mind, even if you don't open your eyes.

Questions and Answers

Q1. You said it is very important that there be no pain. What if there is pain no matter what?

RINPOCHE: First, when you are in pain, you should move your body around a bit, stretch your body. Try to look at and observe the place where you feel the pain, and look at your mind. If it is unbearable, move your body. But later, if you can sustain an undistracted state of the mind, then you understand that actually it is the body that is sick, and it is the body that you identify with as the “self” that is sick, that feels pain. The mind itself actually has no pain. Another method is to visualize a small form of your yidam deity, like in a rainbow light sphere or something, in a very small form wherever you are feeling the pain. You can also just visualize a syllable where it hurts instead, such as a syllable “Hum” that has the nature of fire, for example.

Q2. How do you stay fresh and awake during the session?

RINPOCHE: What helps for clearing away sleepiness and feeling fresh is to straighten your body again, applying some force to straightening it. In the beginning, it is better to have shorter meditation sessions, because staying in meditation too long in the beginning will lead to sleepiness and lack of clarity. In the beginning, it is better to have a short session and then take a short break, and then come back again to the meditation. It is good to have shorter but more frequent sessions. Then you should look at your thoughts; let out a sigh, and then look at your thoughts. Also, you should open your eyes.

Q3. Is it okay if the object of focus is Guru Rinpoche?

RINPOCHE: That's fine. Actually, you can think of anything you like! In fact, when you focus on something that you like, it is easier for the mind to abide. So, if what you like is me, then you can think of me, Garchen Rinpoche. When we are without any thoughts, then the minds of all the meditators in the world who are resting in a state without thoughts actually become one during that time. It is like waves on an ocean; we are not dual, but all of us are like different waves on the ocean. When there is no wind so all the waves calm down, there is only one ocean. And that

is what we realize. All those in the world who meditate realize that we are just like this vast ocean—we are not separate from each other. And, on the basis of that knowledge, we also know how we can help each other through meditation, how blessings are received. There is actually no division between us, no duality. Those of us who meditate become one, because we realize that ultimately there is no distinction. We just appear separate, with different bodies, like two different lamps, but the nature of our mind, like light, is exactly the same — we are one within that. So, whenever we become free of thoughts, our minds actually become one, and then all those whose mind is one know how they can support and help each other.

There is actually no division between us, no duality. Those of us who meditate become one, because we realize that ultimately there is no distinction.

Q4. Why do we keep our eyes open during meditation?

RINPOCHE: You don't have to keep your eyes open. It is up to you; do whatever works best for you. These are just suggestions. For example, you can look at a support object for a long time, or you can close your eyes, or you can just gaze into space and use that as an "object." The point is, as long as your mind abides, it makes no difference. When your mind abides, you don't even actually need an object of focus at all. Later, you will hear about this during "shamatha without support." So, whatever works for you; if gazing, having your eyes open, doesn't work so well for you, you can close your eyes.

Q5. When we meditate, how and where should we position our hands and arms?

RINPOCHE: As for the position of hands, do whatever works best for you; it makes no difference. There are different positions. For example, according to the Six Yogas of Naropa, you must have your legs crossed and your hands either tucked in at your hips or one palm on top of the other and the thumbs touching each other, and so on. So, do whatever works best for you.

Q6. For those with chronic pain due to a disease of the body, is it okay to use painkillers to subdue the body, so the mind can focus more clearly?

RINPOCHE: In general, it is better if you do not use any medicine or painkillers. However, if it is really necessary for your meditation, then you have no choice but to take medicine. When you are really in pain, you don't have to sit in a cross-legged posture. You can even lie down, on your

right side for example, and just focus your mind. The mind can always meditate, no matter what your physical posture is. Ideally, you first try not to take medicine if you can, but if you really can't bear it, then of course, you should take the medicine. Later, when your meditation develops, you will come to a point where, no matter whether you are in pain or not, you will not have to take medicine. In terms of pain or illness or disease, first of all, we should really look at what it is that is really sick — is it the body, or is it the mind? It is the body that is sick, but because the mind identifies with the body, the mind experiences the sickness, the idea of the sickness. But actually, the mind can do anything independently of the body. So, whatever the mind does, it does not depend on the body.

You can send the mind out into space, for example. Think that in space, your yidam deity — whichever yidam deity you love the most — abides, and think that it is so big it fills all of space. Then, just direct your attention outward and into space, and if you do that, you will actually feel less sick. If you do this a lot, if you habituate to doing it, it can even help to cure your illness. I have a lot of illness and pain myself, but I am trying to practice patience and forbearance, and trying to avoid surgery if I can. For example, when I go to doctors, while they examine me, I always pray, "May they not find anything; may they not notice that I am sick." Now my body is becoming thinner and thinner, but it doesn't matter — one day we all have to change our bodies.

Q7. Sometimes when I meditate, there is a very unpleasant electrical feeling in my body.

What causes this, and what should I do about a very restless, creeping physical feeling?

RINPOCHE: What causes that is related to the winds — imbalance in the winds. For that, you should visualize a Hum at the navel, and even let out a forceful "Hum" one or three times, so you feel the force of the Hum at your navel. Then think that with the force of the Hum, those winds are expelled outside, leaving your body. However, you should do that when you are by yourself. When you are with a lot of people, don't shout out the Hum; just visualize the Hum and how the wind energy is sent out of your body like that. Another thing that helps is just moving your body a little bit, doing some prostrations.

To really practice like that, first we have to habituate to visualization, meditating on the Hum at the navel for many years. It is only when the mind always abides, without moving from the navel, that this kind of practice, this instruction, will actually be beneficial. It is difficult to accomplish it

successfully right away. But many of my disciples have practiced the Hum for a long time, so if you are one who has habituated to it already, when you visualize or exclaim the Hum, it is like a bomb exploding. It is like your entire body has been shattered into ashes in an instant by the Hum; like your entire body has transformed into a mass of fire. It is because we all normally consider our body to be so important, so precious — that is really what creates all kinds of pain and illness. It is because we have habituated since beginningless time in samsara to grasping at our body and its importance.

Therefore, what must really be destroyed is the grasping at a “self,” identifying with the body. We do not destroy our body; what we have to destroy is the self-grasping in our mind. This is the essence of Chöd practice, where we really cut through that grasping at the body. We let go of the importance of this body. But, of course, we should not commit suicide or kill the body. We must not destroy the body, we must destroy the self-grasping within the mind. Of course, we have to take good care of the body. What we have to destroy is grasping at it with the mind.

Q8. During meditation, do you always exhale through the mouth?

RINPOCHE: In the beginning, in general, it is better to inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. It is more conducive to the mind abiding in stillness. It supports the mind to abide in stillness. But, of course, if that is not comfortable for you, you don't have to do it. It is also fine not to do it that way. Just in general, for beginning practitioners, it is better to do it that way because it helps the mind to abide in stillness. You inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, the tongue lying almost between the top and bottom teeth, and then the wind flows out through the small gap between the tongue and teeth. One teaching explains that this is also beneficial in clarifying all the stale winds, and it makes their essence — the vital essence of the winds — dissolve into your body.

Q9. I often feel a pressure at the temples and ears, and warmth at the throat.

RINPOCHE: For the warmth at the throat, if it is uncomfortable, you should drink some water and relax. For the pressure at the temples and ears, you should direct your mind back to the navel or to your object of focus, and practice patience. Then, of course, if it is very itchy, you can scratch quickly and then go back to your meditation. Or if it is very uncomfortable, you should move your body a bit.

Q10. If you feel distracted, is it ok to stop and practice nine-round breathing or vase breathing, and then return to the original object of meditation?

RINPOCHE: Regarding nine-round breathing or vase breathing, you should not interrupt your meditation to do these breathing practices. These breathing practices are meant to be done first thing in the morning, before sunrise, actually. At dawn when it is still dark but the sky is very clear, just before the sun comes up, we should practice nine-round breathing. After the sun has already appeared, it is not of so much use anymore. It doesn't have the same power as before. The best time to do it is before sunrise.

When you start to feel uncomfortable during meditation, or you get very tired, that is when you should stop the meditation and just take a break. During the break, come back to thinking about death and impermanence and how difficult it is to find the precious human body. And think, "If I do not practice now, later, after I have lost this precious human body, I will not have another opportunity to practice, so I must practice now. Later, I could wander anywhere in the six realms of samsara." So, in the morning, you should think about how difficult it is to find a precious human body; and in the evening, before going to sleep, you should think about death and impermanence. And then, throughout the day, in all your activities, you should consider karma cause and effect, and also the deity and the deity's mantra.

Even when you are not in a meditation session, you should not just forget about the practice of the deity. For example, when you are driving your car, you should still remember the deity and the mantra, and recite some Om Mani Padme Hum mantras. If you do that, it is a sign that you have developed some wisdom in your meditation. If we just do some meditation sessions, and then throughout the rest of the day, we stay silent and forget about the deity — just leaning back and relaxing — we never really develop true meditation. When that happens, you should always remind yourself: "I should not waste my time like this." Actually, the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind should be your companions, your support for meditation. Because when you really think about their meaning, you will not get tired. When you really think about the Four Thoughts, you will want to practice.

Q11. Does smoking affect meditation, and how? What can meditation do to help someone quit smoking?

RINPOCHE: Smoking is very bad for your meditation. There is actually nothing worse than smoking. It really is the worst thing you could do to yourself. Not only for this life, but also for future lives, because it diminishes — it destroys — your wisdom. Smoking increases our afflicted emotions, it increases self-grasping, and it destroys our wisdom mind. It really is the worst thing for your practice. In order to stop smoking, you should think about its faults. Even in a worldly sense, it creates a lot of illness — for example, in your lungs, and it also harms your brain, and so on. You should read some articles and the warnings written by the best scientists that explain all the faults of smoking. From a Dharma perspective, there is nothing worse for your practice than smoking.

In the Dharma, it is said that smoking and drinking alcohol are both very, very bad, but smoking is even worse for your practice because of inhaling the smoke. When we burn something and it makes smoke, when we inhale the smoke particles into our body, they flow into our channels and block them. Especially, they enter our heart channel and block it. This is very destructive, and it is very dangerous for our health. Any kind of smoking, whether it is cigarettes or any other substance, such as marijuana and so on, all of it makes the mind heedless and unconscious, so the mind becomes very dull.

Q13. When I meditate, sometimes my back and spine become very hot, and the two palms become very hot and electrified. What should I do at that time?

RINPOCHE: There is nothing wrong with feeling warmth in your body. You shouldn't think much about it. The wind energies travel all over your body, and at times they can create all kinds of different sensations; it doesn't matter what the sensation is. You should not begin to think about the sensation; just let it be. Only if it is a pain or sensation that is unbearable should you stop or interrupt the meditation for a while. Other than that, anything that can be endured somehow is just a mental arising, like a thought. Just let it be and don't bother with it. Basically, whatever you are able to bear, you should bear it. Apply some discipline to bear all kinds of little discomforts.

When the mind abides in meditation, all kinds of feelings and sensations intensify. All kinds of physical feelings arise. Whatever feeling arises, visualize a fire at your navel and think that the

fire burns away your entire body. Whatever feeling or sensation arises, you should recognize it with mindfulness, and recognize that it doesn't do anything to your body. It is only because you grasp at your body as your "self" that all kinds of feelings arise in your body. Whatever feelings arise, practice patience. Just think that you can burn your body away by visualizing the fire, and if you meditate like that, you can tolerate anything. All kinds of thoughts will arise in the mind, and whatever arises, just let it go.

The only thing that needs to be sustained is the awareness that recognizes. There is a mind, and an awareness, that are always present, and, that is what is to be sustained. Everything else that arises in the mind — all the various thoughts — you have to just let them go.

The only thing that needs to be sustained is the awareness that recognizes.

The Meditation Belt



My Dharma friends, when we talked before about meditation, there were several questions about the physical posture, our object for support, our focus, and so on. Therefore, I want to show you this meditation belt that an old disciple gave me. This is a traditional meditation belt that we use in a retreat. Normally, we say it should actually be kept secret or hidden, but there's really no need to keep it secret. It is a traditional meditation belt that is used in retreat, for practice in a long-term retreat such as mountain retreat and so on. This is really the retreatant's only support, one of the very few things they bring into retreat. They don't have any bedding or pillows or blankets and so on. They just stay there sitting, supported by this meditation belt, and never lie down. With it, they can sleep anywhere, even somewhere that isn't so clean, and so on. Being supported by this meditation belt is also very helpful with sitting up through the night. It is also very supportive in the practice of dream yoga and recognizing the luminosity, the clear light.

Even though we might not have the time or opportunity to do such a retreat, we can still use a meditation belt. For example, it is very helpful for controlling our sleep. You have asked questions about back pain and so on, and it is actually a great back support too. It is something you can lean back into. It gives support to your back and helps with back pain. The correct size is twice the measure of one's arm span. This is what is used in our retreats; we would mainly rely on a meditation belt like this. Someone who could stay sitting upright in this meditation belt would be able to practice properly in the retreat. Traditionally, when we went into retreat, we didn't bring anything else — pillows, bedding, and so on — but we could still sleep using this meditation belt. It is also actually very helpful as protection from the cold — you don't get so cold. As you can see, my meditation belt is red and is made like a little pouch, so I can store all kinds of things in there. It is actually very practical. Even if you don't use it for practice or meditating at all, at least it's a very practical bag that you can use to store things. During the war, during the Cultural Revolution, my retreat was interrupted, so I didn't have the time or opportunity to practice in retreat. At that time, we obviously had no pillows or bedding; we really only had a meditation belt, and it supported my practice and sleeping during that time. It also protected me from getting too cold. I wanted to show it to you, since it might be beneficial.

Someone who practices the Six Yogas of Naropa in retreat definitely needs such a meditation belt; it is something that is very important during a retreat. There are always outer, inner, and secret meanings to everything; and for this meditation belt, there are also outer, inner, and secret meanings. For example, in the Vinaya teachings, the meditation belt can be worn instead of the Dharma robes; it can represent the Dharma robes. It is even more profound if you understand its meaning from the tantric perspective. But even if you don't really understand all its meanings, it is still very useful; for example, for controlling or supporting our sleep, and avoiding cold. It can also be made into a very useful bag for storing all kinds of things, as I have invented.

But the meditation belt was there before, so I wanted to show it to you. An old disciple gave it to me. My old disciple had many years of experience in practice, and this is what he used for those practices. Especially during a three-year retreat, which is when you practice the channels and drops, you definitely need such a meditation belt. Some people say it is secret and should be hidden, but actually, there is no need to hide a meditation belt. So, this is what I wanted to show you.

Shamatha Meditation on the Breath



Going back to the shamatha practice: There are many different levels of the meditation practice: shamatha with an object of support, shamatha without a support object, shamatha using the breath as support, shamatha not using breath as support, and so on. There are many different levels to go through, step by step. You may wonder, “So, I probably must follow each one of these steps?” But that is not necessarily the case. You should apply the practice according to your own experience with it. You should apply it in whichever way actually suits

you the best. It is not absolutely necessary to follow each of those steps.

For example, there are some people who have already habituated to some degree in past lifetimes, and for them, it is easy to just abide calmly, naturally, without needing any kind of method or support. They can simply remain in a still, even state. If that is not the case, we practice gradually, listening to or looking at whatever makes the mind abide. If the mind is not abiding, then we begin by using an object as a support. Then, when we find the mind can abide on it, we practice without any support, just looking at our mind. And then, you can sometimes close your eyes and try to abide like that. We can progress gradually in this way, seeing what works for us.

It is said that it is not about doing a certain type of meditation that is necessary; rather, the point is the habituating of the mind, training the mind to abide. In the beginning, the mind will find it difficult to remain in stillness without any reference point. If the mind cannot abide in stillness, then we have to find something to focus on. For example, one method to make the mind to stay still and not grasp at all kinds of things is to focus on our breathing and so on. This is called “shamatha using the breath as support.”

It is not about doing a certain type of meditation that is necessary; rather, the point is the habituating of the mind, training the mind to abide.

Whichever method you use, you really have to look at your own experience and see for yourself how it works for you. There's really no rule that says you must follow each of these steps exactly as they are explained. You need to use your own insight to see what really applies to you and how to apply it. What is certainly necessary, however, is to take refuge and cultivate the right motivation in the beginning of every session. Even if you do not have any prayers to read, you can just visualize it; you can just think to yourself, "I want to benefit all sentient beings. And who benefits all sentient beings? Ultimately, it is the Three Jewels — therefore, I take refuge in the Three Jewels." If you understand and contemplate the meaning like this, there is no need to always recite something. You can just visualize the refuge and the motivation, and then meditate. Then, at the end of the meditation, dedicate those virtues from your meditation; and once again, even if you do not recite anything, you can think "I am dedicating this virtue to all sentient beings." This is called a "conceptual dedication." The ultimate dedication is non-conceptual dedication because we see the ultimate nature of sentient beings. How can they receive our dedication? To understand that, it is important to understand that we all possess buddha nature; and, because there is buddha nature, beings can benefit just from our intention.

For example, if you love your friend, then naturally your friend will feel happy being around you. If you are angry with your friend, then naturally he will suffer. Even your cats and dogs and so on will feel your emotion. All of these who are close to you, who are around you, who are connected to your mind in some way, are also affected. You can expand that mind to reach all other sentient beings. Since it can reach some beings, it can reach all beings. In this way, you can develop trust in how your mind can pervade all beings. Then you will really understand how dedicating the virtue of your meditation can actually be received by all sentient beings. You can also perform a mental dedication like this. Even when you do not have any prayers to recite, you should still follow these three steps: 1) motivation and refuge in the beginning, 2) meditation, and then, 3) dedication in the end.

As for breathing: The cycle of breathing consists of three steps. There is the inhalation, the abiding of the breath, and the exhalation. So, we inhale the air, and then the winds should abide at the navel. It is not mentioned in our text, but it is mentioned elsewhere, that after someone has cultivated great stability and less grasping and can actually meditate without using the breath as support, there is a subtle wind that abides at the navel. In any case, we inhale the breath, then

the subtle winds abide at the navel for a bit. At that time, you retain the air at the navel for a little while. Hold it there by slightly pressing the wind down, keeping it in the navel. At that time, you should meditate for a short while, but you should not force yourself to hold the breath for long. You should just hold it as long as it is comfortable. With practice, the winds abide at the navel center for a longer time, and then, eventually, a feeling of well-being, of bliss, will naturally arise. Then, the mind will abide calmly and remain within the state of shamatha. For shamatha that uses the breath as support, there is no other object of focus.

It is a very profound point for the wind energies to abide at the navel.

In the tantric tradition, for example, in the Six Yogas of Naropa, the navel is considered a very special place; it is the main seat of all the warmth and energy of the body. It is a special place because the navel is where the vital essence of the red drops, which we received from our mothers, remains. It is also the point the body originates from — our birth began with being connected through the navel to our mothers. The navel center is like the stem of an apple, right in the center. It is the royal seat of all the wind energies. It is where all the vital essences of all the wind energies abide. Therefore, it is a very profound point for the wind energies to abide at the navel. In the context of practicing shamatha without using the breath as support, we must first develop some stability in shamatha. Then, when that is attained, we only focus on sustaining it by observing the breath. The breath will become more and more subtle as stability increases. For example, in Gampopa's case, it was said that throughout the six times of day and night — within a whole day and night — he only had to breathe three times. That is a sign of his strong habituation to meditation, of the abiding quality of his mind. As long as the mind is still controlled by various thoughts, our breathing corresponds to it — our breaths are shorter.

From the perspective of actual experience, it seems that first one habituates to shamatha by using the breath as a support. When that is habituated, then one naturally comes to shamatha without focusing on the breath, which means the breath almost seems to stop. That is when there is no more grasping at all — no more grasping even to the breath. This is when wisdom becomes great. This is what I believe happens, but I am not completely certain. But it seems to be that way; at first, we habituate, and then through habituation to observing the winds, our breathing naturally

slows and becomes more subtle. For example, some people have observed that great meditators actually don't seem to be breathing, so then people say they have stopped breathing. Even other people can observe it. The meditator does not really notice whether or not they are breathing — there is no grasping — but to other people it appears that the meditator is not breathing at all. This is what is meant by “shamatha without the breath as support.” It develops from using breath as support to without breath as support.

When we do a short meditation session, it is not necessary to recite a prayer of refuge and bodhicitta. You can, for example, just bring to mind the guru or the Buddha or whomever you feel devotion for. When you have habituated to doing this, the moment you close your eyes, they already appear in your mind. But, even if they do not appear, you should still cultivate devotion and faith in the guru, even if you do not recite the words of the refuge and bodhicitta prayers, the motivation prayer. You bring to mind the guru, and then directly engage in meditation practice. It is said that remembering or thinking of the guru in itself naturally includes the refuge and motivation.

It is good to drink water before bed because then we don't sleep so long. In order to meditate, we should not sleep, and so therefore we should drink water and also not eat too much in the evening. It is said that if you don't eat too much in the evening, or if you don't eat anything, then it is easier to recognize the dream state. However, we normally want to go to sleep after meditating. That is why we should drink water, so we don't go to sleep after meditation. In order to meditate, we shouldn't sleep. For lighter sleep, we should not eat in the evening. It is also good to do some prostrations and move the body a bit. Eat or drink some sheep yogurt in order not to sleep too much. Other kinds of yogurt — goat or cow yogurt — have a different quality; they have more of a cold quality, and sheep yogurt has more of a warm quality. It is also a little bit stronger. So, in order not to sleep too much in the evening, it is good to eat some sheep yogurt.

Questions and Answers

Q1. When we are instructed to watch the mind, which part of us is watching it? Is the mind watching itself with eyes? Could you explain?

RINPOCHE: When the mind watches itself, it's different from looking outward with the eyes. Looking outward with eyes, we see an outer object — we look at something. So, that's looking

outward. Looking inward is when the mind views itself. And so, in the beginning, there seems to be an actual duality of one who sees and something to be seen — a seer and a seen. These are just various thoughts in the mind. In the beginning, there seems to be this duality. First of all, what we see in the beginning is whether or not thoughts arise, and what thoughts arise, and knowing whether there are thoughts or no thoughts. Then, after we habituate that recognizing, we slowly habituate to keeping our attention on the recognizing awareness that observes all those thoughts coming and going. That awareness must be sustained. That's the one we habituate. We gain an experience of times when there are no thoughts, but that pure, knowing awareness is still there; it is always there naturally. When our attention on it is sustained, the duality of the seer and the seen slowly diminishes and disappears. Then the mind becomes very pure. That pure mind is non-dual wisdom. That is vipassana, special insight.

In the beginning, we have ordinary sight — we see a duality; one views the other. But when we gain special insight, we see that which we have not seen before, but which was there before. What we see is the non-dual mind that becomes just like space. When we look at space, we can gain an understanding. We can understand that there is no duality of space. For example, if you have two empty vases and they both break, the empty spaces of both vases become one. There is no distinction between the empty spaces in the vases. First, we need to habituate that understanding, and then through habituating the understanding, it eventually becomes an experience of non-duality.

Q2. What do “realization” and “experience” mean? What is the difference between these two?

RINPOCHE: First we understand something. Then, after we cultivate that understanding, we sometimes feel, “Oh, this is really how it is; this is really true.” This is gaining an experience of how something is really true, how it really is. Realization — to realize the mind, for instance — means you can always stay within its nature, you just naturally always remain within it. You always abide within the nature of the mind without a need for any deliberate meditation; you always naturally abide. That is the final realization. We go through these three steps: first we understand, then we experience through meditation and practice, and then we realize. Realization means that we become free of any doubts about this nature at all. Our trust and our abiding within this nature become unchanging.

In terms of the mind, when you realize — when there is no more doubt — that the mind has a non-dual nature, then you have realized the nature of the mind. Then you will always remain within that nature. On the relative level, “realization” means to realize the meaning of karma, cause and effect, for example. That means you have developed complete confidence in bodhicitta, in love and compassion. You are certain that love and compassion truly lead to the temporary happiness of the higher realms, and ultimately to the attainment of enlightenment. You realize relative truth when you have developed complete trust, confidence, in love. When you have that confidence, you know that the afflictions are what create all the suffering in the lower realms, and love is what creates all happiness. To resolve that and be fully confident in it, to really understand karma and know that there is no other cause for happiness than love — fully trusting in karma — is to realize the workings of karma, or the relative truth.

First, we understand the workings of karma, and then we understand that love is the cause of happiness. For example, if you have a friend that you love very much and you get angry at that friend, gaining “experience” means that in the moment the anger arises, you will immediately recognize it and think, “Now I’m angry, but if I fall under the power of anger, I will lose my love for my friend. So, what I really want to lose is the anger. The real destroyer here is the moment of anger, so that is what I want to get rid of.” Then, if you clearly recognize the destructiveness of anger, you will remain silent, for example, and not say anything and not react at all. You will practice patience. That is what it means to gain experience. One time, then a second time — every time you get angry, you practice patience. Whenever you are able to practice patience, you are gaining experience. Then, whenever anger arises, you always recognize it as the actual enemy. And recognizing it like that, you can separate the anger from your body and your speech. You detach it, which means you don’t act out on it. You practice patience. That is “experience.”

Then, in the end, you will eliminate all anger; there will be no more anger, and no matter what other people do or say, you will be able to sustain love and be patient. That is the perfection of patience. Ultimately, you realize that anger is actually empty — it does not truly exist. It exists only if we follow the anger and act out on it, when we use our speech or our hands to hurt others. But if we just leave it alone and don’t follow the anger, then it becomes emptiness. Therefore, although relatively karma is infallible, ultimately it is also emptiness. It is just like a wave appearing on the water. The final realization of an afflictive emotion is when you realize that it is actually

empty. At that point, when you realize that the affliction is empty, then it cannot harm or affect you in any way.

Experience applies not only to anger, but to any thought that arises with regard to any of the five sense pleasures, such as attachment. For example, when you are attached to smoking or drinking alcohol and so on, at first you think it is pleasurable. But then with wisdom, in the next moment, you can also remember all the faults and the destruction they cause. The same goes for all five afflictions: attachment, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and pride. There is actually a single antidote to all of them, and that is letting go of them through discriminating wisdom.

Q3. In the past, when I visualized the fiery Hum at the navel, I felt a great loss of energy, so much so that I have had flu-like symptoms: headache and joint pain; and I have even gotten cold afterwards, and felt disoriented. Do I need to clarify my mental concept so as not to become physically ill?

RINPOCHE: If visualizing the hot nature of the Hum creates discomfort, you do not have to think about it in terms of heat or cold. You can just focus on the Hum syllable without imagining it to be hot. Just visualize the Hum. If you still feel uncomfortable, then you can also let that be — you don't have to visualize the Hum. You can just do a general meditation that focuses on the breath, or even one without focusing on the breath. You can also try focusing on different places in the body. For example, you can focus on the point between your eyebrows, or your heart, or any other place in your body, any other chakra.

When we say that the winds and the mind should abide at the navel, we are talking about the subtle wind energies, which are the wisdom winds, or the life-sustaining subtle winds. These are not the coarse winds which are our breath, the air that moves through our mouth; that is not the kind of “wind” we are talking about. We are talking about a much more subtle wind — the mind itself, which is a wind energy. If we focus too much on the outer wind — the coarse air, the breath — that can lead to all kinds of problems. If you force yourself to hold your breath for too long, for example, that can cause all kinds of problems. You should just breathe naturally on the outer level. With the actual breath, you can just breathe the air naturally; but have your mind abide at the navel. The mind itself is a subtle wind energy, and the mind-wind abides at the navel.

Q4. Does eating meat affect meditation?

RINPOCHE: It depends on your habits. If you are used to eating meat and you suddenly stop it, that may not be so good for your body. But if you don't have such a strong habit of eating meat, then it's generally better for your meditation not to eat meat. In terms of meditation, the benefit of not eating meat is that you will sleep less. Animal flesh is related to the affliction of ignorance. You have to look at your own physical disposition — if you suddenly stop eating meat when you're used to it, it could be harmful. So, it depends.

Q5. When I meditate, can I chant mantras, or must I keep silent? Can I also do hand mudras like White Tara?

RINPOCHE: For beginning practitioners, we should at first only focus on meditation practice when we practice. During our meditation, we should not do anything else. At that time, we should not recite mantras or spin a prayer wheel and so on: only focus on meditation. But later, when we have grown accustomed to the practice, when nothing affects us or disrupts our meditation state anymore, then we can do all those practices such as the mudras, mantras, the prayer wheel, and so on, and all our activities. Then there is no harm. We can do the various sadhanas or mudras within our meditation state, and so on — and whatever you do, for example, when you're eating or sleeping or walking or sitting and so on, all activities. When nothing harms your state of meditation, no matter what you do, then you can apply those various mudras and different practices. But, in the beginning, it is better to separate them from your meditation and only focus on the meditation itself at first.

Q6. How many meditation sessions should the beginner do every day? How long should these sessions be?

RINPOCHE: That depends on yourself; you have to see for yourself. You should interrupt the meditation whenever you feel you are getting tired and your mind is becoming unclear. For as long as you are not tired or unclear, you continue your meditation. Whenever you feel like you're losing your clarity, then you interrupt it for a while, and then you come back to the meditation. You repeat this until you habituate. There is no set time or number, you really have to see for yourself. And then, ultimately, you have to bring that meditation into all of your everyday activities. In whatever you do, you should sustain mindfulness, always being mindful of what arises in your mind — what thoughts, what afflictions arise. At that time, when you're always mindful in all

activities and in whatever you do, you can also practice mantra, you can spin the prayer wheel, you can do other practices of virtue with body and speech, while at the same time always remaining mindful and undistracted. So, in terms of the number and timing — again, it really depends on yourself; but of course, the longer you are able to abide, the more you can meditate, the better it is.

Sometimes people like to meditate, and then they only want to meditate and they don't want to do anything else. They want to stop working, and they don't want to do anything else, only meditate. At that time, we need to discipline ourselves and be very disciplined in terms of our meditation time. Because we do have to work and fulfill other responsibilities, we have to be diligent with keeping to that time through mindfulness. For beginning practitioners, it is difficult to always recognize this state of mindfulness. What beginning practitioners can recognize is, for example, their guru, if they have a guru they are devoted to. So, think of your guru or your yidam or the Buddha, and then that thought of the guru is mindfulness. But you also have to be disciplined and do whatever work you have to do.

Q7. When I meditate, I feel some movement at the navel area. Is it normal?

RINPOCHE: When the subtle winds abide at the navel center, then one might experience a sensation that comes from the channels — a pulsating, vibrating feeling from the channels, the vitality of the channels pulsating. That is actually a natural vibration that gives off the sound Hum. Hum is actually the sound that naturally resounds when the mind abides in stillness. When that is achieved in meditation, then you will always be mindful, present in all your activities throughout the day. That develops into supreme mindfulness. When supreme mindfulness is achieved, then all sounds will appear as the mantra or as the syllable Hum, the resounding of the syllable Hum.

Q8. When meditating, I see lots of blue lights and trees. I wonder if this is normal, because no matter how much I try to focus back on my own self, the trees and blue lights still keep showing up.

RINPOCHE: Whatever appears, you should not wonder about it or even think about it. Anything that appears is just like a reflection in a mirror — don't investigate it, label it in terms of good or bad, this or that; all kinds of things can appear. Sometimes things arise, and sometimes they disappear and nothing arises. No matter what it is that appears, don't think about it; don't wonder

what it means or what it is. Let it all be. This includes all kinds of perceptions, whether it is something we might see, any sound that we might hear, or any thoughts or experiences that arise in the mind. Whatever arises, let it be and don't think about it.

What you have to recognize is the awareness that knows what has appeared, the knowing awareness — that is really what you need to look at, not the experience or what is arising. With each experience, whatever arises, there's always that one knowing mind that knows what has arisen. All kinds of things can appear, but there is only one that recognizes all those appearances. All those appearances, no matter how many there are, are the same in that we have to disregard them and just look at the one who's recognizing them: look at that one, and not at the experience. When you lose that recognizing awareness, then you have lost your meditation. As long as you have the recognizing awareness, you have not lost your meditation. Slowly, you will be able to let go of all kinds of thoughts that arise. Ultimately, that is your inner guru — that mindfulness is actually your inner guru, your guru of bodhicitta.

What you have to recognize is the awareness that knows what has appeared, the knowing awareness — that is really what you need to look at, not the experience or what is arising.

No matter what appears — for example, if a deity appears, or even if Guru Rinpoche appears — then you should just recognize, “Oh, there is Guru Rinpoche,” and then let it go again. If you begin to think about it, if you think “Oh, Guru Rinpoche appeared to me, this is so wonderful,” then, when you begin to feel very happy about it, you have already lost your meditation. The same goes for any other appearance — for example, if an evil spirit or something that is very frightening appears — just let it be in the very same way. The different appearances that manifest are related to the movements of the subtle winds through either the defiled or the pure channels. Depending on how our winds are moving at a particular time, all kinds of things can appear to us. But, what we actually need to look at is the nature of our mind, the buddha nature. That is the actual Buddha. That is the awareness that we need to recognize. Therefore, you should not have any hopes for positive, pleasant experiences, and you should have no fear of negative experiences or appearances. Because ultimately, both the good and the bad, all experiences need to become liberated.

When things appear, whatever arises, do not grasp at it. This is called “mirror-like wisdom” because in a mirror, anything can be reflected. There is no difference on the part of the mirror; the mirror does not grasp at anything it reflects. That is mirror-like wisdom. No matter what arises, good or bad, do not think about it — it is all the same. This is the wisdom of equanimity. Only within the state of mindfulness are the qualities of those two wisdoms complete.

Q9. When I meditate, I feel energy enter from the top of my head, and it makes my body move naturally in a circular motion. Sometimes the energy is very strong and feels like heavy rain. I can feel a very bright light, like the sun. The energy is very pleasant and peaceful, and at that moment, I am more aware and very mindful of my inhale and exhale. Is this normal?

RINPOCHE: This is not a good experience. It is only a sign that you have meditated in past lives, and that the crown chakra is opening. We similarly open each of the five chakras, and then, as they open, various things appear, various feelings arise. However, you should not think that it is good. Nor should you think it is bad. You should not think about it at all. Let anything that appears appear, and continue to meditate.

Q10. When I meditate, my hands, which are together in front of me, feel fused. They become heavy, and I can no longer feel them, although I can see them. It feels like an energy field, silent and heavy. Does this signify anything?

RINPOCHE: It is a quality of the abiding factor of shamatha, of the calm abiding. At that time, when the mind abides, the mind is also clear. But if you lose all feeling in your hands, then you should change the position of the hands. For example, you can stretch them out over your knees, kind of open like this on both sides. Think that all the subtle winds naturally move outside through the hands. There is no harm in your experience. But sometimes when the abiding factor is too strong, we lose sensation. It also happens in other parts of the body; for example, we can lose sensation in our legs. At that time, you should move your body a little bit, and then the feeling will come back. Whatever it is, again, do not think about it. Do not investigate it. Do not try to figure it out, wondering, “What does it mean? What is it?” It is just a part of your body, a quality of your body.

Q11. Can we wash our hands right after we meditate? Can we leave our hair still wet after taking a shower when we meditate?

RINPOCHE: Anything is okay. You can wash your hands or you can have wet hair when you meditate. It doesn't make a difference. There is only one thing we are not allowed to do, and that is to quarrel — to fight with others, to get angry with others. Apart from that, you are allowed to do anything.

Shamatha Without Support



This includes three types of shamatha: one without an object as support, one without the breath as support, and one without characteristics. What these three have in common is that they have no object of focus; the mind abides more naturally. In the context of meditation without a focal object, there are two methods that have to be applied as needed. One is to tighten the focus, and the other is to relax it. Depending on the state of

your mind when you're meditating, you always make adjustments. For example, when you get too focused in your meditation, that is not good. When the mind is too tense, you will feel uncomfortable, something almost painful, and so on. The mind will also get tired easily from a focus that is too tense. If you push yourself too much to focus, you get tired.

The other extreme is being too relaxed. If you're too relaxed, you can't really focus at all. You can't sit straight, and that leads to sleepiness. This is the worst kind of sleepiness. The sleepiness that arises from too much focus is a little bit better, because there is also some clarity. But the sleepiness that arises from being too relaxed will just lead to sleep and lack of clarity. Therefore, that is a worse form of sleepiness. We must apply intensifying focus or relaxation according to the need. At the times when you feel a bit sluggish and dull, you need to apply more focus. When you feel too tense, then you need to relax a bit. So, you have to keep making adjustments in this

way. You have to increase focus when necessary, and relax it when necessary, moderating between the two.

There is an example that comes from the Buddha's teaching on shamatha. The Buddha taught how to practice the perfect moderation between being focused and being relaxed. While giving instruction to a disciple who was a guitar player, he asked him, "So, are you really good at guitar playing?" The disciple said, "I am an expert in guitar playing." Maybe you can relate to that; there are many among you who are also musicians. Then the Buddha asked the guitar player, "What produces the best sound: strings that are pulled very tight, or strings that are very loose? What will produce the best sound?" The disciple responded, "There must be moderation. They must be somewhere between too tight and too loose." Then the Buddha said, "Meditation should be practiced just like that — not too tight and not too loose; just like the strings on a guitar." That is just an example, and it can apply with all kinds of instruments. Anything done to extreme will not produce a pleasant experience. For example, playing the drums too hard hurts your ears. There must be a right measure for the perfect sound to be produced. The same goes for any kind of instrument; there's always a right measure for it. Likewise, for our meditation, there must be the right measure in between too focused and too relaxed; something in between them. This is the most important instruction here.

In many of the questions that have come up, people said that they just cannot stop the thoughts

When we begin to practice shamatha meditation, we should stop the thoughts about whatever happened in the past, is happening in the present, or will happen in the future. We need to understand the nature of the three times.

in their mind when they meditate. It is said that when we begin to practice shamatha meditation, we should stop the thoughts about whatever happened in the past, is happening in the present, or will happen in the future. When we talk about stopping the thoughts, it is important to really understand how we should do it — how should we stop those thoughts? For that, we need to understand the nature of the three times. Then we

will be able to stop thinking about them and recognize the thoughts about them as an illusion, a confused state of mind. How can we stop thinking about the past, for example? Some people remember all those things that happened in the past; they say, "When I was young, my parents

abused me and that traumatized me for my entire life, and now I still have to suffer from this.” They carry that suffering with them through their entire life, even though it’s all over and there is no problem right now; but still, in their mind they carry the suffering with them, they keep remembering it. It can lead them to suicide, even though there is no outer problem.

We’ve heard about many cases like this, reported by disciples and so on. This is delusion, clinging to something that is not even really happening. It is said that if you wish to know what you did in the past, look at your present body. In the past, we have engaged in actions with an afflicted state of mind, but when we don’t understand that, we blame our parents, for example, for abusing us, and then, we keep thinking about it. But what is the benefit of continuing to think about it? That is the problem that comes from not understanding the Dharma, because then we don’t understand karma.

If you understand karma, it becomes very easy. Even if something very bad happened to you in the past, you will just think, “Now it’s all gone, so suffering isn’t actually very difficult. It was there before, and now it’s gone.” Then we can just let go of it — nothing of it is left here anymore. We can just close the door on it and stop thinking about it. That is when we understand karma. Such a person actually does not suffer, because they just let go of what happened. Actually, because they experienced some suffering before, they often really understand what happiness is. They really become aware of happiness, of well-being. Someone who has never experienced any difficulty before will be overwhelmed by the slightest problem, and will think it is the biggest problem. But somebody who understands suffering will not suffer so much, even if they encounter a really big problem. They will not think it is such a big problem. They will be able to let go of it easily. From their experience, they will have learned to appreciate well-being. Someone who never suffers cannot appreciate well-being.

For example, in Tibet, we have only three months of summer at most, and apart from that, you hardly ever see flowers, or anything green at all — it’s all like ice, desert, dirt. When I was very young, that was all I knew. As a young boy, I always thought, “Wouldn’t it be a wonderful place if the sun never changed, if it never turned to winter?” Because we only had winter most of the time in Tibet, I thought a place where it’s always summer and never winter would be like a pure land, the best place. That idea changed when I went to Taiwan, where it’s always too hot and it never

changes to winter. So there, you wish it would finally become winter, but it is always hot. Only when you experience that can you appreciate the changing of the seasons between summer and winter. Before you experience the discomfort, you never appreciate the well-being. You don't recognize it. What this really shows is that everything is only the way our mind sees things, it has nothing to do with what actually happens in the outer environment. It's only about how we perceive it. If we understand suffering, then we will also appreciate happiness and perceive happiness in a different way.

Understanding karma, we recognize that the cause of happiness is love, so we create more love. If we suffer, we know that it is the result of self-grasping and the afflictions. Then, recognizing that those afflictions are still present now in our mind, we can make sure not to create more of those causes of suffering for the future. And so then, no matter what happens, no matter what you do, nothing will overwhelm you. You will not hold on to anything at all. You will be able to let go of anything that happened in the past, just like throwing it into the garbage. That is about the past. This is how we can understand the past to let go of it.

For the future, how can we let go of thoughts of the future? We make plans for our future; that is a modern tradition. We must make some plans for our future. Although it's fine to make plans, the outcome of our plans really depends on our karma. We have no control at all over it. Whether the outcome will be well-being or of suffering, we don't know; it depends on our karma. Although it is fine to make some plans, we have no control over the outcome. Therefore, since we can't control it, it is more important to focus on the practice of meditation right now and in future lifetimes.

If you understand the three times in this way, you can close the door to all kinds of thoughts and just let go of them all, like throwing them into the garbage. That is why it is important to understand the nature of the three times.

Shamatha Without Characteristics

In shamatha without characteristics, the mind simply abides in its natural state, unaltered. Without doing anything to it, just leave it be as it is, without changing it in any way. That means without grasping at anything. Right now, when we meditate, there is grasping in our minds. Grasping begins when we want to meditate, we think, “I must abide in stillness, I must accomplish this stillness, this shamatha.” This is the first step of grasping that comes in meditation. Next, thoughts arise, and we do not want to have those thoughts, so we think, “I want to get rid of those thoughts,” and that is the second step of grasping. The real grasping is actually rejecting or following those thoughts.



When you meditate, you must be free of all kinds of grasping, so don't even worry about abiding or not abiding. If I abide, then that's fine. If I do not abide, then I do not abide. Whether the mind is moving or whether there are thoughts in the mind or no thoughts, it is all the same. As long as you sustain clear mindfulness, anything can arise, and there is no problem with thoughts appearing in the mind. When thoughts appear, you just recognize them. When there are no thoughts, then you recognize that and look at the mind, how it is then. There is no grasping at this stage of shamatha. There is no grasping at wishing to abide or wanting to get rid of thoughts and so on. There is no rejecting and no accepting. You just let the mind be naturally as it is, without changing anything, without doing anything at all. When small movements of thought appear, you look at them, you recognize them, and then you observe how they come and then go again, just like the waves on the water. That is an experience that you gain. You gain the experience that there is actually no harm in the thought — it just comes and goes. You witness its arising, and then it goes away again without affecting you in any way. That is the experience you gain. When you grasp — that is, when you want to let go of the thought because you want to abide — then it will only make your mind become exhausted. When the mind looks at the mind itself, then it will just remain in its completely pure natural state, without grasping at anything at all.

The ultimate grasping is to reject and accept the thoughts in the mind. The grasping thought of “I must meditate” is also a confused state of mind. Eventually, as we reach these stages of meditation, we will be able to let go of even these forms of grasping. But in the beginning, when we start with our short-term meditation sessions, we need some accepting and rejecting. In the beginning, we must have a wish to meditate; we must want to meditate in the beginning. We must also want not to have those thoughts. As we habituate, we gain the experience that there is actually no harm when the thoughts arise; they just come and go like waves. You will then become naturally free of grasping at them, or wanting to reject them. Then the mind will be very relaxed. The mind will be in control and it won't become exhausted. That is when we come to shamatha without characteristics.

You can practice meditation at home; early in the morning is especially good, although many of you might have to go to work in the morning. You can meditate whenever you have time. Even if you only have five minutes at a time, use that time to meditate. If you're very busy, then you can also meditate when you go to pee in the restroom. When you pee, you will have the best experience of meditation; this was actually my own experience in prison. Most of the time we had to work very hard, and I was only able to meditate when I went to the toilet to pee, but I had the best meditation at that time. That was my greatest experience of meditation.

Questions and Answers

Q1. What is the best way to re-focus in meditation when you feel regret and sadness for something you have done, and for being without diligence as a practitioner?

RINPOCHE: You can think that, even though you did not meditate in the past, now you're meditating, and so therefore, there is no regret because now you are meditating. Buddha nature is always there, so there is no need to regret anything. You can meditate at any time. You have to let go of those thoughts and just focus on the present meditation, “Now, I must make an effort.” You should meditate during all the things you do throughout the day.

Also, you can meditate when you eat. When you meditate while you're eating, then eating becomes a kind of ganachakra, a feast offering. When you just think of the Hum, you're meditating. When you think of the lama — the guru — you're meditating. At those times, there is no thought of an “I”, so as Milarepa said, “When you're eating, it becomes a feast offering, a kind

of ganachakra. When you're walking, it is a circumambulation. When you're sleeping, it is to sustain the clear light of the dream state.”

Q2. Can you explain more on letting go of the five afflictions?

RINPOCHE: There is nothing to do, apart from meditating. All you need to do is meditate and not do anything. By just meditating, you have already let go of the afflictions. All that needs to be done is to recognize there is affliction and then just meditate. Don't do anything else. Don't do anything with your body and your speech. Just meditate, and the affliction will go by itself, just through the power of meditation. There is no need to reject it. If it does not go away, even through the power of meditation, then you can also rely on the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*. There are different antidotes to all the afflictions. For example, for attachment, you practice ethical discipline; for anger, patience; for greed, generosity. Diligence and meditation — mindfulness — are the antidotes to all of the afflictions, so put on the armor of mindfulness. The most crucial affliction to get rid of is hatred or anger. For that, you practice patience. In fact, patience can overcome all the other afflictions too, all five afflictions. The best method for letting go of any of the afflictions is to be patient and diligent.

As for the two types of truth: On the ultimate level, it is sufficient to only have special insight, vipassana. That is the understanding that there is no distinction between self and others; self and others are non-dual. Nothing else is actually necessary — that in itself will destroy all the 84,000 different afflictions. It will melt them like ice. If you cannot practice in that way, but you can cultivate love and compassion, then you can follow the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*.

Q3. When there are so many thoughts arising, one after another, should one try counting breaths?

RINPOCHE: That can also be beneficial. You can do that. You can also practice the Om Ah Hum recitation; that will naturally stop thinking. In general, the sound of mantra is beneficial to bringing an end to thoughts. In reality, it is sufficient just to recognize the thoughts that arise. Then, having recognized them, just let them be. Experience how they naturally dissolve. That is actually the best sort of meditation.

Q4. First thing after I wake up, I do nine-round breathing and holding of the breath, the treasure vase, eventually up to several minutes, with some movements. There are a few inhalations and some uncontrollable minor leaking as exhalation. I guess I need to be connected by Rinpoche.

RINPOCHE: You shouldn't force yourself to hold the breath at all. Just hold it for as long as you can hold it naturally, without discomfort. You should not push yourself to hold the breath to a point where it is uncomfortable.

Q5. When I meditate without our teacher, is it okay to meditate by myself?

RINPOCHE: Your teacher first explains to you how to meditate. Once you have learned from your teacher how to meditate, then you can meditate without the teacher by yourself. The mind

In the end, we rely on our own mind as the guru. That mind, which is the inner guru, is the mind of bodhicitta, of love and compassion and mindfulness.

of the teacher and your own mind are the same. The actual teacher is your inner mindfulness; it is the mindfulness that recognizes whatever arises, all the thoughts in the mind. That is your actual teacher. It is said that in the beginning, we rely on the outer teacher as our guru; in the middle, we rely on the Dharma scriptures as the guru — we read various

Dharma books and so on; then in the end, we rely on our own mind as the guru. That mind, which is the inner guru, is the mind of bodhicitta, of love and compassion and mindfulness. That is the ultimate guru. It is the mindfulness that recognizes all the thoughts that arise, and that is what must be habituated. When it is habituated, the answers to questions often arise naturally, just through the power of your meditation. That mindfulness has the power to destroy all kinds of thoughts. It is like a teacher. It knows all, and it destroys all thoughts. For example, if you have a question and you think, "I have this question today," and then you practice mindfulness, when the mindfulness is very clear, sometimes the answer just naturally appears in your mind. That is due to the quality of your own mind. It is the wisdom that is inherent in your own mind.

Your mind is the basis of all phenomena of samsara and nirvana. You can know anything, because wisdom is perfectly complete within your mind. Often, when this quality, this expression of wisdom arises, just naturally you know the answer to a question. That is the power of meditation. This is often recognized at a moment when very powerful devotion or very strong

compassion arises. That is when the mind is completely clear, especially when strong compassion arises. That is most important. You should recognize that the actual teacher is your own mind.

As we progress through the different levels of practice and gain more and more experience, different feelings arise. In the beginning, when there is still self-grasping and we perceive a duality of self and other, we need to rely on the outer form of the guru. We are attached to seeing the form of the guru, and people think, "I must meet the guru in person, in bodily form. When I see the guru in person, then all is well. When I do not meet the guru in person, things do not go so well." We perceive the guru in this dualistic way, as separate. Then our practice is still on the level of the Pratimoksha, the individual liberation. We practice on this level long as we still perceive a duality of self and others. Gradually we progress and cultivate bodhicitta, and when we have developed the vast mind of the Four Immeasurables, we realize that the body of the guru is not so important. It is actually the mind of the guru, the bodhicitta of the guru, that is important. The bodhicitta of the guru and your own bodhicitta are the same.

The mind is what is most important; we recognize love and compassion as the mind of the guru. This is to see some higher form of the guru; this is to see the guru as the deity. Then you recognize that the guru doesn't actually ever really die. The guru is beyond birth and death because the guru is the mind. On the ultimate level, when you realize non-duality, you realize that your own mind, the guru's mind, and the Buddha's mind are one; you attain the kingdom of the dharmakaya. You then realize that the guru is never born and never dies. At that time, you see the guru as Vajradhara. You recognize that there is no difficulty when the guru's form dies, because you know that the actual guru can never die. In this way, as we gradually realize the view, we will have different perceptions and ways of seeing the guru, but now these are only words, only an intellectual understanding. It explains to us in words the stages of how we perceive the guru. In the end, finally, we will see the guru as the mind, and not separate from our own mind. Then, there is no difficulty when the guru dies, and also none when you die, because you have also recognized that you yourself actually never really die — the nature of the mind is beyond birth and death.

Q6. I started to have heartburn or acid reflux when saying mantras. It only happens when I have eaten something before. I want to continue reciting mantras, but I have anxiety about it.

RINPOCHE: Actually, you become aware of this feeling because the mind is abiding in stillness, and that makes you more aware of what is happening in your body, the feelings in your body. At other times, you're more distracted to the outside, with various delusions, and you don't know what is actually happening in your body. Whenever you feel any kind of discomfort, try to bring your focus back down to the navel. Focus your awareness at the navel, and you can visualize, for example, the mantra garland there. At the navel you can visualize a small moon disk, and then the seed syllable with the mantra garland — for example, Om Mani Padme Hum, the short mantra — surrounding it. Then you can think it begins to slowly rotate, and then it becomes faster.

For example, there are prayer wheel necklaces with very small prayer wheels that spin, and then they spin faster and faster, until they go so fast that you do not even see the rotation any longer. That emits a naturally resounding mantra. When you focus on that single-pointedly, the feeling of discomfort will go away.

Q7. One feels pulled in many directions, with obligations and meditation and activities. How does one determine how to best direct one's actions in work, donation, meditation, volunteering, etc. and family?

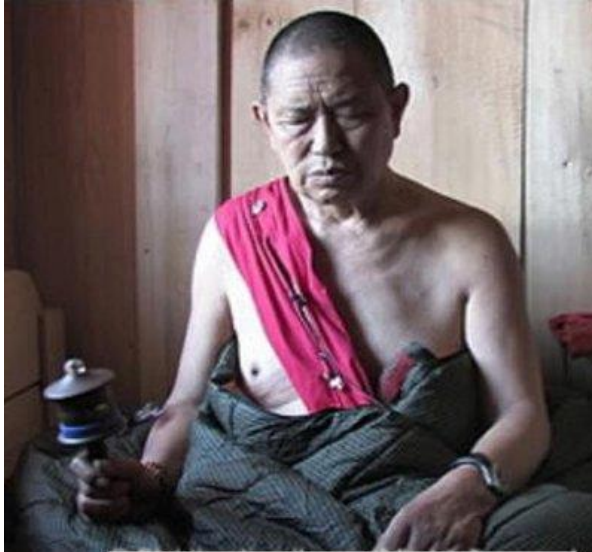
RINPOCHE: For setting those priorities, it really depends on your circumstances. There is no absolute order of priority. But, for example, if you are more wealthy, of course, you can practice more generosity, and help out with your wealth. Or if not, you can offer your services as a volunteer, or you can offer your practice. The benefit of all of these is actually the same, whether you have the opportunity to help financially, or serve, or meditate. Whatever good you can do actually has the same benefit.

Q8. What is the role of prayer and chanting in relation to meditation? What should we focus on and practice?

RINPOCHE: In the beginning, it is best to separate the practices of meditation, mantra recitation, and reciting prayers. That means that when you're doing your prayers, you only focus on the

prayers. If you have a short time to meditate, you only do the meditation. If you have more time, you can also do longer prayers. You should do mantra recitation in all of your activities, in whatever you do. You should always recite the mantra continuously while you do your ordinary job, you drive your car, and so on. You should not stop reciting mantras at any time; you can just recite a short mantra or any mantra. If you have the time, the best thing is to meditate, and then only focus on meditation.

VIPASSANA (SPECIAL INSIGHT) MEDITATION



Yesterday, my Dharma friends, I gave only a brief introduction to shamatha, calm abiding practice, because we are so very short of time. But, to give just a general summary: when you are in a state of calm abiding or shamatha, then you will feel very happy in that state, and there will be no thinking at all. You will feel very happy and peaceful while you meditate, but then later when you are not meditating, the mind will begin to grasp at the outer appearances again. Due to the habitual imprints in the mind, the same feelings

as before will come back. So, once again you will experience the same feelings of happiness and suffering and so on. So again, we will suffer, just as before. Once Milarepa asked his disciple Rechung Repa how his meditation was going, and he replied, “When I’m meditating, I feel very happy, but when I’m not meditating, the suffering is just like before.” Then Milarepa replied, “Well, that means you have to meditate more.”

Various feelings arise when we come out of the state of meditation, and for that, there is a method called “analytical meditation.” It is done according to the scholarly practices of the pandits who studied the scriptures and analyzed on the basis of logical reasoning, and then resolved, for example, that there is no “self” — that everything is empty of the two types of “self,” the “self” of a person and the “self” of phenomena. So, there is certainty based upon logic and scripture.

There are different types of individuals. Some individuals like to investigate and analyze, so they look at their mind and analyze it and all the thoughts that arise and so on. There are also others who fall into a state of meditation in a very direct way. Due to previous imprints from the past, they just naturally know how to meditate, and they just naturally understand the nature of the mind. The practice that they engage in is called “placement meditation.” There is analytical meditation and there is placement meditation. So first, someone who does placement meditation

first recognizes the thoughts and also knows the thoughts are what have created all suffering, so they just directly place themselves in the nature of their minds.

Analytical Meditation

There are two types of approaches to meditation; you have to see for yourself which one suits you the best. Whatever kind of individual you are, you have to make a choice as to which of these actually suits you the best. If you are able to take various outer appearances and circumstances onto the path through meditation, then placement meditation — just resting in the mind — is suitable. But, if you have many thoughts, if there's a lot of thinking, then perhaps analytical meditation is more suitable. In that case, you should read more scriptures and ask questions of those who know about the scriptures, so then you can engage in analytical meditation. Depending on which one suits you best, you can apply either approach.



It is explained that there are two types of “self:” there is the “self” of a person and the “self” of phenomena. The “self” of a person is this notion or thought of an “I” that truly exists. Normally, we look at our body and identify the body with the “I”. We think that this body is “me,” but then you have to investigate; here, you analyze the body: If this body is “me”, then where exactly can we locate it? We have to find it somewhere in the body. When we look into the body and look into the mind, then ultimately, we cannot find any “self” there.

From an impure perspective, there are five afflictions within the mind, and the five afflictions are naturally connected to the five elements that make up our bodies. The afflictions are like the subtle essences of the core five elements. Self-grasping is the basis of it all; it is like a magnet that naturally pulls this heap together into a body. The basis is self-grasping, like a magnet; and then the conditions that arise from it are the various afflictions. Or, it is like water that has temporarily frozen into ice. So, because the basis is self-grasping, the body made up of various particles is

just naturally created, like a magnet attracting different particles. The body is actually just a compound of various particles, and since it is a compound of many things, there is no “self” to be found within the body.

We cannot actually find a “self” in the body. So then, if it is not in the body, where is it? Where is its abiding place? Where does it come from? There are many explanations of this in the scriptures, but in brief, it is explained that if we dissect the body down to the smallest atomic particles, we cannot find a “self” there — not even in the smallest particle. We cannot find it in the body, so it must be the mind. Next, we look into the mind, and we find that what we call the “self” is just an idea, a thought in the mind that perceives this idea of “I.” Next, we analyze the mind and recognize that that, too, is just an idea in the mind.

For the practice of analytical meditation, we use our capacity for analysis, our reasoning, to understand it. You can read various scriptures and also ask the scholars questions and so on. Also, I want to mention this book, *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup. It explains the stages of meditation in a very concise way, in a way that is easy to understand. Actually, many questions can arise about the stages of meditation. There are many very detailed scriptures on this. Often a text contains so much that we don’t even know what to ask about it, and then we don’t really know how to answer either, because there is too much material. That is why Khenpo Samdup worked very hard to compile this book, to really pin down the key points of the stages of meditation. It is very convenient for practice, and also for asking questions. It is also easier to base the answers to questions on it. It is very precious; it is very concise in words, yet complete in meaning.

This book is in two languages, English and Tibetan. It is very suitable for anyone to practice; no matter what lineage or philosophical system one comes from, the view on shamatha and vipassana is actually always the same throughout all the different Buddhist lineages; it is exactly the same. There is no difference, and therefore, it is useful for any of the lineages or tenet systems. It has been translated into English and Tibetan, and it is written in a very accessible way. Also, for those like myself, those who do not have much learning, it is easier to find answers in, and if it is difficult to find an answer, you can ask scholars and so on. It is a very important book, because normally it is difficult to understand the technical Dharma vocabulary, but this book

is actually in more common terms that are easy to understand and accessible to anybody, like me, for example, who does not have much learning. The Tibetan is written in a very accessible way, so it is very convenient for practice, and I am actually teaching on the basis of this book, to the best of my ability.

Once in the past, a disciple requested instructions on the nature of the mind, and his teacher said, “First, before I can give you those instructions, you have to offer me your ‘self.’ Find your ‘self’ and give it to me.” Then the disciple said, “How can I find this ‘self’? I cannot see it.” The teacher said, “Don’t worry. You can take your time until tomorrow morning. You can look for it, and come back tomorrow morning and bring me your ‘self.’” So, he looked the whole night, until morning, for the “self,” but he couldn’t find the “self” anywhere. Then in the morning, he went back to his teacher, who asked him, “So, have you found it now?” He said, “I couldn’t find it at all. I couldn’t find the ‘self.’” Then the teacher said, “Then what are you doing here?” He said, “I’m here to receive teachings,” and the teacher said, “There it is, there is your ‘self.’ You are here to receive teachings, so the ‘I’ comes from thinking, ‘I am here to do something, to accomplish something.’ That is the ‘I.’ That is the ‘self.’ It is something we cannot see; it is not an object that we can perceive with our senses, but it is the basis that creates all suffering.”

So, how does that happen? First, there is a perception in the mind of a separate “self.” And once that is present, then naturally there is a perception of “others.” For example, if you have a house, you identify with it. You say it’s “my house,” and then, whatever good or bad thing happens to that house, it affects your mind. For example, it creates suffering in your mind, because you possess that house, you hold it to be “mine.” That is the inner grasping mind that grasps at other objects as being separate from itself. For example, I think this is *my* tea, and that is *his*, not *mine*. This is this perception of duality, of self and other, although the mind itself is actually just a single one. But once there is the perception of a “self,” the “other” has already appeared. Then dualistic grasping in regards to everything is created.

When you know that the “self” doesn’t inherently exist, then things still appear, but they just appear like illusions or in an illusory plane. You see different things appearing, but you know that in reality — on the basis, by nature — there is no “self.” There is only a single basis, like one tree that has many branches, for example. Here, you resolve that all appearances, the way things appear to

you, are your own mind. Everything is created by this mind, and the mind of all beings has a single basis. If you understand this, then you also understand how you benefit others when you give rise to love. When you give rise to love, all beings naturally benefit from it. If you are angry and resentful, then all beings are naturally harmed by it, because the mind has a single

Everything is created by this mind, and the mind of all beings has a single basis. When you give rise to love, all beings naturally benefit from it.

basis. It creates all beings. If you understand this, you will be able to let go of various thoughts of yourself and think about others. This is what the Buddha realized in order to realize selflessness; therefore, he explained it in this way. Recognizing that turning your mind towards others — cultivating love for others — is the way to recognize that there is no “self.”

This “self” naturally creates the aggregate of our body and all the other aggregates. First, because there is the perception of a “self,” it creates the five sense powers; it creates the consciousnesses related to those five sense powers — the consciousness that perceives form, and the ones that hear, touch, smell, taste, and so on. The consciousnesses that perceive the five sense objects are created first, and then on the basis of these five or six sense consciousnesses, the perceptions of their objects, and then karmic formations arise on the basis of the sense “doors” (eyes, ears, nose, etc.). Because there are sense “doors,” we perceive objects, and then because we perceive objects, we create karmic formations. All of those “doors” arise from a single basis of mind. And then, because we perceive various objects, when we perceive pleasant or nice objects, we are attached to them; when we perceive unpleasant objects, we have an aversion to them. In this way, thoughts of attachment and aversion arise in our mind continuously and uninterruptedly, like rain falling down continually, or a magnet naturally attracting and pulling the various thoughts to it and accumulating them in that way. The mind accumulates these thoughts of attachment and aversion without being aware of them, without recognizing that they actually always arise. That is ignorance, unawareness.

Unaware, we don’t take notice of those thoughts arising, but they form stronger and stronger imprints in our mind. If the imprints of hatred or aggression and ignorance are predominant, then that manifests as an animal; and if we have made some connection to love, then that manifests in the forms of gods and humans. Just as the seed of a flower gives rise to a very specific kind of

flower, with a certain shape and color, each of the afflictions creates a certain manifestation that corresponds to that affliction. The basis of all that, the basis of all suffering, is the “self.”

And so, when we investigate the “self” — the “self” of a person, the “self” that we identify with — we must first look into the mind and try to find that “self.” For example, when you sleep at night, your body just lies there sleeping in your bed, but your mind dreams. In the dream, you experience the same kinds of feelings as before, feelings of happiness and suffering, sense perceptions, perceptions of enemies and friends, attachment, aversion, and so on. For as long as a “self” exists — or this perception of “self” exists — there will always be samsara. There will be no freedom from samsara. In the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*, it says that all suffering without exception comes from wishing for one’s own happiness.

So, that is the root of samsara: It is the idea that there is a “self,” and that is a confused idea. We grasp falsely at a “self.” Buddha says that the confusion is that beings grasp at a “self.” They

The confusion is that beings grasp at a “self.” They perceive a “self” when, actually, there is no “self”; it is a mental fiction, a creation. In the actual mind, there is no such distinction between “self” and “other.”

perceive a “self” when, actually, there is no “self”; it is a mental fiction, a creation. If you understand that, you know that, although we appear in diverse forms and in different bodies, in reality, in the actual mind, there is no such distinction between “self” and “other.” Within the mind, they are all the same. Only on the outer level, due to our individual karmas and afflictions, there temporarily appears to be this duality in bodies, in forms. When you really understand the

basis of the mind — when you understand the view of vipassana, the actual nature of the mind — you know that within the mind, there cannot be such a separation, such a division between self and others. And so, this is what we find when we engage in the practices of analytical and placement meditations.

Yesterday, we practiced shamatha, calm abiding. We learned that when the mind abides calmly in stillness, it becomes very relaxed, free of all thinking, empty, and without thoughts. And then, when the mind is abiding like this, we should clearly understand what arises in it. We analyze this mind then. Once the mind is abiding in such stillness, then we observe what happens when a

thought suddenly arises. When a sudden thought arises, you recognize it. Then, you should observe the feeling, and investigate the different forms of feelings. How does the mind feel, what kind of state is the mind in when an affliction arises, when an emotion arises? How do I feel? How do I feel when I love? Look at each feeling, and then what happens if you follow that feeling. If I react to that feeling, how do I act out on that feeling? What kind of things do I do? What happens then? So, we analyze in this way, and then we analyze how it is if we do not grasp at the thought. If I just let it be on its own and do not pay attention to it, how is the mind then? And how is the mind if I do grasp at the thought? What kind of feeling arises then? How is it when a feeling arises and intensifies, and I grasp at it and keep thinking about it again and again? How does that feel? What kind of feeling is that? And then those feelings, if we follow them, we see how they begin to manifest in corresponding ways. And thus, we see that the six realms of samsara are manifestations of the six afflictions.

It is said that emptiness and karma, cause and effect, are a union. Karma is like the radiance of emptiness. Because there is karma, things are empty. This is how we resolve, first, that appearances are one's own mind. When you understand the single basis of mind, you understand how that mind really has created all of samsara and nirvana. This is the quality of understanding that single basis. What happens if you do not understand it? What kind of feeling arises when you follow your thought? When you cling to your thought? What kind of feeling would arise if you just let them be and did not follow them? Then you gain the experience that, if you just let them be, the thoughts will naturally dissolve like a wave in water. Then, you realize that the afflictions are ultimately empty.

Emptiness and karma, cause and effect, are a union. Karma is like the radiance of emptiness.

We say that karma is infallible on the relative level. Depending on the actions we engage in, there will be corresponding results of happiness or suffering. For example, all the suffering and conflicts in this world are created by hatred and jealousy and so on. This is how we can resolve that appearances are one's own mind. We resolve it by analyzing and observing how our own mind works.

So, from a practical perspective, how can we apply this understanding of the selflessness of a person to actual practice? For example, you can meditate together with a companion or friend, looking at one another and analyzing. Look at each other and analyze: Who is that person, really? Who is that other person? At first you might think “This is me, and that’s him.” This is the “self”; that’s the “other.” And then you look closer; you look first at the body of the other person, and you cannot find a “self” there. In the end, the body will pass out of existence; it will perish. Actually, everybody knows this, but nobody investigates it; nobody really thinks much about it. Then we look at the mind; we think the person is in the mind. But when you look at the mind, you cannot find anything there. There is no color, no shape; there is no self that can be identified there. If you have some training in meditation and calm abiding, then at this point you will just rest in the natural state of the mind; and as you just rest in that state, thoughts just naturally stop sometimes. So, all the past thoughts have ended, and no next thoughts have arisen yet, and sometimes you can just naturally abide within that thought-free, space-like nature. In that moment, in that space between thoughts, you see the actual mind. That is the actual mind as-it-is. It becomes like space just naturally, simply by abiding calmly.

As you continue to meditate and stay within that calm state, sometimes you just naturally abide in the space-like nature. That nature cannot be conveyed to others; it is nothing that can be explained in terms of existence or non-existence. It is free from all conceptual constructs. It cannot be said to exist, to really be there, because it is like space. It is unidentifiable; there is nothing to grasp at. It also cannot be said to be non-existent, because things arise within space. Because there is space, there is also room for movement, for arising. If there were no space, there would be no movement, no arising.

The nature of the mind is simply not an object of investigation; it is something that one must understand through one’s experience. In the beginning of Mahamudra, it says that, ultimately, the nature of the mind cannot be explained by others; it can only be understood through one’s own experience. When you meditate and look at the mind, on the basis of that space-like nature, you can understand that there is, really, no duality. Although

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there are two different people, there is no duality in the mind. There is no division within space. You can understand this non-duality of the mind on the basis of understanding that within space, within the sky, there cannot be a separation, a distinction. Then you resolve that the self, the so-called “self” is therefore a mental fiction, something that is just a fabrication of your own mind, but it doesn’t really exist anywhere. When you understand that, you understand that the “self” of a person does not really inherently exist; it is a mental creation. When you realize that, you see it all like a wave appearing on water, or like ice-blocks appearing in water; although there are temporarily two blocks of ice, they are, on their basis, actually still water. When an ice block melts, there is only one water. If you understand this, then you can easily understand the nature of selflessness from a practical perspective. Then, you should habituate this understanding through your practice, over and over again.

The Buddha said that the confusion of sentient beings is that they grasp at a “self” when there actually is no “self.” That’s their confusion. At this point, we must understand that; and then, once we understand that our perception of this “self” is just a confused perception, we can gradually let go of that grasping. Or, if that is too difficult, you can also engage in analytical meditation and really investigate it more, analyze it more by reading books and various scriptures that explain it extensively, and you can also ask scholars questions and receive their answers. According to their system, this nature is resolved on the basis of logical reasoning, so use that system if you don’t really understand and you have many doubts and thoughts in your mind.

But, if you are able to let go of thinking just through the power of meditation, then that is sufficient in itself. For example, when you encounter another object, on the basis of this other object, an affliction arises in your mind. Then, if you immediately recognize it with discriminating wisdom or mindfulness, then that feeling created by the object will just naturally disappear. In this way, you resolve it just through the power of your meditation. This is actually the best experience, the best way to practice.

Khenpo-la would like me to read you the analytical meditation here. So, I’m going to read this, and you don’t have to read it. You can just listen to it and meditate, but it is from page 56 to 66 of *The Stages of Meditation: Awakening the Mind* by Khenpo Samdup.

How to Meditate on Vipassana. The second part of this teaching is an explanation of vipassana (Tib. Lhag mthong).

In Buddhism it is taught that we need to learn from a realized master, and this points to the importance of seeking teachings. It is through listening to many teachings and reflecting on their meaning that we derive the pure view we will be integrating in our vipassana meditation. It is the lack of sufficient knowledge of the teachings that presents an impediment to vipassana, literally, “seeing beyond.” Vipassana, or seeing beyond, means looking deeply into the suchness-nature.

There are two aspects to vipassana: analytical, or discursive meditation, and non-conceptual meditation, or resting the mind.

Discursive meditation has two subcategories: meditating on the selflessness of the person and meditation on the selflessness of phenomena. The yogin or yogini probes the selflessness of the person as follows:

The “person” is just this continuum of our aggregates, including our mind, or rather this sense of a thinker, a person who is feeling and emoting, this movement of mind.

Fixating and clinging to the person as being a permanent, singular entity, as being “me” or “I,” is what is known as the self of the person, or “subjective mind.” From the construction of a self, come the emotional poisons. From the emotional poisons comes karma. From karma comes suffering.

Therefore, the root of all suffering and all negativity is the self, or the subjective mind. In other words, it comes down to an erroneous mental state. The self is what we call the body, the constitutional elements, and the sense fields. But the person is not the essence of the aggregates and the like. This is because the aggregates and constitutional elements are impermanent and are a combination of many parts. The person is seen as permanent and as a singular entity, a concept which we impute onto something else. However, this person cannot really be said to exist as what we think it

to be or as anything else. This is because the person is not any other thing or entity. It is, therefore, like this: The unquestioned assumption of “me” and “mine” is nothing but a delusion. We should investigate in this way.

In the same way, we should try to understand concepts and emotions, which are the expressions of the inner subject, of mind. Look directly at the concept or emotion itself. Try to see if it has a form or a shape.

Deeply and carefully look to see where the emotion came from, where it can be located, and where it goes. First, in this present awareness you have mind, and suddenly out of this mind a thought or an emotion arises. Try to see the following: did it come from mind or something outside of mind? Is it one with the mind, or is it separate from the mind? If you conclude that the thoughts or emotions are to mind as sunbeams are to the sun, it is a fallacy, because the sun and its rays shine simultaneously. If you conclude that mind and thoughts, mind and emotions, are one, how are they one? Is it that mind appears as a thought? Is that how they are one? Or is it that thoughts are merged with mind? If you conclude that mind and thoughts are not one, try to investigate. Try to examine how they are different, and so forth.

Now, try to see where the forms that appear to you come from. Do they come from the mind? If they come from the mind, then it would follow that forms should always follow you wherever you go. That is thus a fallacy. On the other hand, if they do not come from mind, form should also continue to appear and be perceived by your corpse even after you die. Examine in this way, and apply a similar existential analysis to sound, smell, taste, touch, and the rest.

Next, do not look at thoughts, emotions, or any of the appearances of the six sense objects. Instead, just look directly and nakedly at the very essence of mind itself. Is there a vividness, a presence? Is there this emptiness? Is it more of a clarity or more of an emptiness?

Which seems to be more predominant? Or is it an inseparability of clarity and emptiness? It is important to really probe, really examine in this way. By investigating and examining in this way, the great meditator will eventually reach the point where he or she will not get trapped in the web of doubt or skepticism and will make great strides in his or her practice. This is the reason why we should examine in this way.

Second, for the selflessness of phenomena, meditate in this way: Phenomena refers to the outer phenomena and to the inner subject — mind. That being so, it is the grasping and fixation to a subject-object duality of inner subject and world “out there” that it is known as the self of phenomena. Everything that falls into the sphere of the self-nature of phenomena is, according to ultimate truth, nothing outside of or apart from mind. This can be shown when you try to deconstruct any phenomenon down to the subtlest atomic level. Each time you deconstruct it into parts, when you examine the subtlest level of phenomena to find an inherent essence, you can never find any essential nature. From time without beginning, however, though forms and such are not truly real, we have grasped onto them as though they were, whereas forms and other phenomena only appear as if in a dream. To childlike beings, mind itself is appearing as forms and the like, as if these were outside of mind. In reality, however, forms and the like are not anything other than mind’s projection. Examine in this way. Forms and everything else are unreal, and since mind is not separate from this, it also is unreal.

Forms and the like appear as many different things, yet they are essentially not one entity nor are they many entities. Since mind is not separate from or outside of forms and the like, mind, too, in essence is not a singular entity, nor is it manifold. In this way, when we use wisdom to look deeply into the essential nature of mind, in its ultimate nature mind cannot be found internally nor can it be found externally. It cannot be pinpointed anywhere else either. There also is no past mind, no present mind, and no future mind that can be pinpointed. In its arisings, mind does not come from anywhere. In its cessations, mind does not go anywhere. When looking for mind, there is nothing to be located, nothing to show, no form to it at all.

Just look directly into the true essence of this mind — this vividly present awareness. What exactly is it that is there? Is it body or is it mind? If there is a mind, if mind exists, there must be something there, right? What is it like? Does it have a form, a shape, a color, and such? Where in your body does it reside? Is it outside, inside, or in between?

Mind's beginning, middle, or end cannot be seen, cannot be identified.

Thus, when you are investigating with wisdom, and you do not see any real essential nature of all phenomena, do not get caught up in the conceptualization of this not seeing by thinking, "Is form permanent or impermanent? Is it empty or not empty? Is it defiled or undefiled?" and so forth.

Avoid conceptualization of feelings, perception, and the rest as well.

Like that, use your wisdom to deconstruct. Whatever the object of the investigation, when the yogin or yogini comes to the point in which no essential nature of the object can be apprehended in the ultimate nature, that is the time to enter into nonconceptual samadhi.

After you have used your wisdom and intellect to look deeply into the true essential nature of any object of focus, such as form and so forth, then you enter into meditative stability. What is meant here by meditative stability is not abiding in form or anything. Meditative stability is not abiding in this world or anywhere between this world and the next. Since there is no point of reference that can be identified as form or anything else, this is the meditative stability beyond reference point. This is why it is known as the meditative stability of sublime wisdom.

Questions and Answers

Q1. Is there an empowerment or transmission for dream or sleep yoga?

RINPOCHE: There is no separate empowerment for that. The empowerment of any yidam deity would have the same meaning.

Q2. How can we say that there is absolutely no “self” if the single basis is still a mirror of itself and perceives itself? If there is no “self,” who then is perceiving the non-dual state?

RINPOCHE: We can conclude that there is no “self” because when we try to investigate it, we cannot find it; we try to look for it, and we cannot find it. But also, we cannot say that it doesn’t exist. It is true that we cannot say it does not exist. So, the nature of the mind is beyond that, beyond those limiting concepts of existence and non-existence. In the beginning, when we still

The rational consciousness perceives a dualistic world of “self” and “others.” The nature of this rational consciousness is primordial wisdom.

normally perceive a “self,” we don’t meditate and so on, our mind is called the “rational consciousness.”

The rational consciousness perceives a dualistic world of “self” and “others.” But then, when we look at the nature of what perceives that, then we cannot say that there actually is a “self” or an “other,” because nothing can be found or identified. If there were, then

we must be able to identify it, but it cannot be identified. Therefore, first, it seems that there is no self; but then in the end, it is also not the case that it is nothing. Grasping to its non-existence must also be eliminated.

Ultimately, we must become free of all these concepts of existence and non-existence — all grasping. Once we become free of that and there is no more thinking “It is this” or “It is that,” there are no more limiting concepts in the mind, then that is called “non-dual primordial wisdom.” The nature of this rational consciousness is primordial wisdom, but it is given that name when it doesn’t realize its own nature.

In the beginning, the way we realize is that we must first understand the non-existence of a “self.” First, we try to look for the “self,” and we can’t find it. Then, after we have resolved that there is no “self,” we free ourselves of that thought too, the idea that there is nothing. So first, you must really look for a self and resolve that it cannot be found or identified, and because it cannot be identified, it almost seems that nothing is even there at all.

Q3. You mention to visualize the Hum as the fire element in our navel when we meditate. What are seed syllables for the other elements, and would it also be helpful to visualize them at our other chakras or in the navel?

RINPOCHE: The visualization of the Hum at the navel is a method for the mind to abide at the navel. The Hum is not necessarily the fire element; it doesn't only correspond to the fire element. The Hum is a method for the mind to abide — like a reference point, a focal object for the mind to abide at the navel. It is good to visualize anything at the navel, because one's life-force heat abides at the navel. Therefore, the feeling of warmth arises and emerges from within the navel, so we visualize at the navel. So actually, what we call "life" or "being alive" is the state when the consciousness is not separated from that warmth. The consciousness and the warmth are united; that is what we call "life," "being alive." What we call "death" is when the consciousness separates from the warmth. The consciousness does not actually die, but when it separates from the body — its warmth or heat — that is what we refer to as "death;" that is when the body is dead. When we visualize at the navel, it is also very good for health; it increases vitality, as the navel is the main center, like the kingdom of all our wind energies. Therefore, focusing on the navel can also prevent and eliminate all sort of illnesses. Especially when you're ill, it's good to visualize at the navel.



If you have no health concerns, you can visualize at the other chakras in all the various four or five places. But if you have problems with the heart — for example, winds in the heart, or emotional instability or other issues with the heart — then you should not visualize anything at the heart center. Also, if there are issues with the brain in the crown, if you're not stable, then it could lead to all kinds of problems if you visualize there. Visualizing at the navel can never create any harm or problem; it is a very stable place to visualize. The life-warmth abides at the navel, so it is an important place. In the Six Yogas of Naropa, the navel is the principal place of visualization, where all the winds originate. The Hum is not actually the syllable that designates the element of fire. It just has the nature of fire when you visualize it at the navel, but it can be used for any other element by changing its color.

The nature of the Hum, the sound Hum itself, is a wind quality and a syllable of emptiness. Also, the sound "Hum" has the power to shatter all thinking, so therefore, the principal syllable of all

syllables is the Hum. When you visualize the Hum or say the sound “Hum,” all thoughts are shattered, so it is called the “sound of emptiness” or the “king of all syllables.” There are also other seed syllables at each place, and you can visualize them too, but the essence of all the deities is actually the Hum. The enlightened bodies, speech, and mind of all the buddhas is represented by the syllables Om Ah Hum. Om represents enlightened body; Ah, enlightened speech; and Hum, enlightened mind. Therefore, the Hum is the ultimate syllable, because it represents the mind, and the mind is ultimately empty. Therefore, Hum is the sound of emptiness. When you say a syllable Hum, it shatters thoughts and the mind naturally becomes like space.

Q4. What is the function of the “self” in this plane of existence? How is it created, and what is its purpose?

RINPOCHE: Because there is the thought of a “self,” the “self” is what actually creates this existence; it creates this world, samsara, and it is the basis of all suffering. Therefore, our purpose here in this life is to destroy this idea, let go of this idea of a “self.” We do that by first, understanding karma — by understanding, for example, that virtue is necessary, and so on. It still begins with an “I,” an “I” that wants to become liberated. There is still grasping at “self” and “other.”

We think that whatever appears really exists, that the “I” is really there. Actually, such a “self” does not really exist.

The method for separating from the idea of a “self” is altruism. Actually, such a “self” does not really exist. We are only falsely grasping at the idea of a “self.”

The main purpose is to understand karma, cultivate an altruistic mind, and then with that, destroy the thought of a “self,” because actually there is no “self.” We are only falsely grasping at the idea of a “self.” Actually, what creates this existence is that idea of a “self,” and the purpose of this existence then becomes the elimination of this idea of a “self,” because for as long as there is that “self,” there is no freedom from samsara. For as long as there is a “self,” there is a perception of “others.”

As long as there is a “self,” or the perception of a “self,” true wisdom cannot really arise. One won’t be able to completely transcend suffering because the nature of a “self” is suffering; that is just its nature. As long as you perceive a “self,” you are bound to suffer. It is like water frozen into

ice: as long as they are frozen, ice-blocks are always in conflict, bumping into each other; but in reality, there is no real ice. It is only ice due to the temporary condition of freezing. For however long as there is a “self,” until we separate from that “self,” we will never separate from suffering. The method for separating from the idea of a “self” is altruism. Only understanding that the “self” is just an idea is not sufficient; that will not destroy the “self.” The method for destroying the “self,” the grasping at a “self,” is an altruistic mind, which is like the sun that melts the ice. This is extremely difficult; it is easy to understand the meaning of these words, but to really grasp the deeper meaning is extremely difficult.

Q5. When I practice Om Ah Hum, which state do I visualize myself in? Should I visualize myself as Chakrasamvara? Is there Chakrasamvara with two arms instead of eight arms?

RINPOCHE: During the practice of the Om Ah Hum, you don't have to visualize yourself as any deity form at all. The only visualization is to focus the meditation on the Hum. It is only in a different context, when you are practicing a different sadhana, that you can visualize yourself as the deity of that sadhana.

Q6. When I breathe in, I breathe in through my nose. When I breathe out, do I breathe out through my mouth or my nose?

RINPOCHE: In the context of a beginning practitioner, we inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Later, once we habituate to the practice, it actually makes no difference. In the beginning, when the mind is not yet stable in abiding, you exhale the air through the mouth, with your tongue resting near the back of your top front teeth. Your tongue slightly blocks the airflow between your teeth, so your breath flows out very slowly between the teeth.

Q7. I'm confused as to what I'm supposed to do with my mind during vipassana meditation. Is it pondering? Am I having a dialogue with the voice in my head? If so, how is that different from just thinking about something?

RINPOCHE: So, it depends; actually, you don't have to think. First, we need to understand that there is no “self.” In order to understand it, we analyze intellectually whether it really exists, so we do that with the intellect which analyzes; this is called “analytical meditation.” If you are able to just abide naturally without any thoughts, then you don't have to do the analytical meditation; you

don't have to analyze and think about it. For example, if you naturally have great love in your mind and your mind is very calm, you can just meditate, and you don't have to analyze and think about anything. It's only when there are many doubts in your mind and you don't really understand, for example, whether the "self" exists or not, that you have to think about it — how it exists or does not exist. Then you should read books and ask scholars questions until you can resolve it in your mind. You have to inquire into it until you understand that there is no self. But if your mind is naturally free of much thinking and you can just abide, then you can just meditate.

Personally, I myself have not actually done much analytical meditation; I have not really analyzed much. I never studied much of the scriptures. I, personally, found that if I just meditate and am free of thoughts — if I can let go of thoughts — then that is sufficient. This is how I personally practice.

Q8. I can intellectually understand that the mind and thoughts and emotions are empty, but it is difficult to fully realize this. How can we realize it?

RINPOCHE: We have to habituate in whatever we do. We understand, but this understanding must be habituated in all activities. That means we habituate to recognizing all the thoughts that arise in the mind, and by recognizing them, we are able to let go of them, so they become emptiness. The feelings of the thoughts disappear. For example, when you get angry just a little bit, but you then immediately recognize it, then, through recognizing it, you do not follow it, so that feeling of anger goes away. It is like an ice block melting. Later, when you have habituated to this in all the various things you do, you will also be able to overcome more intense emotions that arise. What that depends on is your own diligence; only if you practice on an ongoing basis will your wisdom and awareness increase. It is said that you should increase the little spark of mindfulness again and again, so it becomes a large fire.

In the beginning, your mindfulness is like a spark; it is very weak. But gradually, as you recognize your thoughts, one after another, one by one, it grows; the more thoughts you recognize and let go, the stronger it becomes. In the end, it becomes like a blazing fire, and the more wood you throw into it, the stronger it becomes. What make the fire grow strong are mindfulness and compassion.

Q9. During Ngöndro prostrations, do you count the prostrations or the refuge prayers?

RINPOCHE: What you count or accumulate are the prostrations. We accumulate 100,000 of them, and the point is that, for that duration of accumulating the 100,000 prostrations, you should always keep in mind the qualities of the Three Jewels. That means you know that the Three Jewels are your trustworthy refuges for temporarily achieving birth and happiness in the higher realms, and ultimately, enlightenment. You bring to mind the qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. After having completed the prostrations and refuge, you should have come to a state of mind in which you are completely confident that the Three Jewels are your trustworthy sources of refuge, and that they will protect you in all future lifetimes. What will actually protect you is the Dharma, which is your own love and compassion. So that is the result that should be achieved by completing the prostrations.

Q10. There is no space between thoughts. My meditation is unceasing words, mostly questions or conversations like this. I feel like I'll never succeed at this. I'm sad. Is it fear of loneliness or death, or is it just that I'm a beginner?

RINPOCHE: The reason is just that you're a beginning practitioner. In the beginning, there is an ongoing stream of thoughts in the mind. So first, you should understand that all those thoughts about the past and future and so on have no essence. They are pointless thoughts; it is more important to see the nature of the mind than to follow those thoughts. In the beginning, you should make an effort to develop the Four Immeasurables, especially love and compassion.

And when you can really meditate and look closely, there is actually sometimes a very short moment in between the thoughts. It's not going to be a big moment in the beginning, but there are flashes of moments in between the thoughts; but because they are very brief instants, we don't usually recognize them. Still, when those moments do arise, there is a moment of emptiness.

By observing, you will gradually recognize that more and more. Another thing that is helpful is to practice your yidam deity in all your activities. Always recite a mantra, or practice the Om Ah Hum vajra recitation, then you will slowly begin to recognize.

That is why it is good, for example, to have a yidam deity appear in your mind; because when a yidam appears in your mind, all other ordinary or negative thinking is interrupted for that time. So, look at an image of the yidam, close your eyes, and have it appear in your mind. Actually, this is

what we call “shamatha with a support.” That is the visualization of a yidam. You look at the yidam, you close your eyes, and that will slowly bring an end to ordinary thinking.

Non-Analytical Meditation



This morning, my Dharma friends, we talked a bit about analytical meditation and the two types of selflessness: the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena. We have said that analytical meditation is suited for those who have a lot of thoughts and many doubts in their mind. For them, it is good to analyze and examine all those points that we have mentioned. It is primarily our grasping at an existence — we believe that things really exist — and that is what creates samsara. Therefore, we should analyze whether things actually exist. This is resolved through logical reasoning, for example. Through following the reasoning, one comes to the point that nothing can actually be found to truly exist. For example, the “self” of a person can’t be found, and the mind of a person has no color or shape. It is nowhere to be found. So, that belief in their existence is something that we fabricate in our mind, and holding it to be true is what creates samsara. This continuous grasping at existence is what perpetually deepens samsara. The problem with this is that it creates a lot of suffering, because due to this grasping at reality, many afflictions arise, and then we engage in actions that accumulate karma.

Dualistic Grasping and Emptiness

First, there are the obscurations to omniscience: we do not recognize that there is no “self” in the mind. Due to that obscuration, we perceive a duality of “self” and “other.” Due to that, we give rise to afflictions, so they are the obscurations from afflictions. Then we hold those afflictions to be true and valid, and therefore we accumulate karma. We engage in actions over and over again. The afflictions are really what make the karma accumulate, and then, by accumulating karma, we form habitual imprints in the mind. These lead to the great variety of appearances in the six realms of samsara. There are sentient beings; some are as large as a mountain, and others, as small as

a drop of water. They are all together in samsara. Samsara becomes very deep and vast, and the fault that has created samsara is grasping at an existence. That grasping is what we have to become liberated from. In order to become liberated from it, we first need to understand that things do not actually exist in that way.

Therefore, we first understand and then resolve the meaning of emptiness. When we understand emptiness, we can see that although things appear, such as the things we see with our eyes, they are only like an illusory plane. They do not actually exist. It is difficult, of course, to see everything like we are watching a TV show, but we can at least understand that things, although they do appear, are actually delusions and do not really exist that way. The benefit of knowing this is that, when you understand things are illusory, you can put an end to your afflictive thoughts. Then we understand that, first of all, “self” and “others” do not inherently exist, and therefore the afflictions are also only a confused state of mind. And in reality, there are no afflictions; they are actually empty by nature. We can create our own temporary happiness by taking the afflictions onto the path, and ultimately and slowly, we attain enlightenment. We attain enlightenment gradually, over several lifetimes; it is difficult to melt the ice block instantly and thus attain enlightenment immediately.

Liberation is a slow process that takes several lifetimes. First of all, we have to understand that the real cause of samsara is grasping at an existence, and you still have this grasping. Things really do appear to us, and so we think things really exist in that way. However, there are also some people who have a greater understanding of emptiness, but then they fall into the fault of nihilism. We must investigate and really analyze the texts here; read very carefully to get a really clear understanding. It is important to analyze this very carefully.

We have already talked about the section on analytical meditation in *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup; we read it out loud. So, just to clarify a few points: it is because we do not understand the selflessness of outer phenomena that we encounter so much difficulty. The selflessness of phenomena relates to the entire outer universe and all sentient beings. Those outer objects are perceived by the inner grasping, the subjective mind. For example, we perceive this world, and then within that, the mind also perceives various countries — our own country, different ethnic groups, nationalities, and so on. Within those, we sub-divide further and further:

happiness and suffering. Everything appears in this dualistic way, and this dualistic perception that labels things is what creates samsara.

Actually, the Dharma is a creation of the mind. There are two types of dharma: there is the worldly, or samsaric, dharma; and then there is the nirvana Dharma, the holy Dharma that we practice. Both of them are created by the mind. For example, within the Dharma that we practice, the religious Dharma or Buddhadharmas, we create such labels as “I am a Gelugpa,” or “He is a Gelugpa and I am a Sakya practitioner.” We label each of the lineages, and each of the lineages has a different opinion, different ways of ascertaining the truth, and so on. However, if you really look closely at the inner meaning of the various teachings in the different lineages, they are all actually the same. They all begin with the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind and lead up to shamatha and vipassana. They all practice bodhicitta as the basis; if you understand that, then you can really resolve the biased view.

On the outer level, the great scholars are upholding their individual lineages through various debates and conventions. However, we have to understand that while they do that verbally, at the same time, the mind is still non-dual. Verbally, they uphold the lineage on the outer level; but within their mind there is no division. You should understand that their differences are just on the outer level; but on the inner level, ultimately, they all lead to the same result, no matter which practice path you follow. If you look at it like this, then practice becomes very easy. On the other hand, people who grasp and cling to their own lineage often create a lot of politics around the Dharma. They label, thinking they are good and the other ones are not so good. For example, we think that we are Buddhists: we are exalted, we are the best, and those other ones are not so great. Then, in response to that, other people criticize the refuge vow, for example, and so on.

All of that outer labeling and holding the “other” to be bad — for example, thinking “We are Buddhists, and those others are bad,” creates a lot of discomfort and unhappiness within the mind. So, we can see that the various tenets and views of the Dharma and so on have all been created by the mind. We must become liberated; our mind must become liberated. The Buddha said that, ultimately, everything comes from buddha nature; everything is created from it and arises from it. The various paths of the worldly system and the Dharma system and so on — all of them are created by that mind. And so, although they are created, at the same time, if you

understand that everything is like an illusion — if you do not hold it all to be so valid and true, but see it more like a temporary illusion — then the mind will become more relaxed and there will be less grasping in the mind, so you will understand the essence of what is taught. Those who grasp at any kind of view, even a philosophical view, are ordinary when it comes to grasping. Clinging to the truth and the reality of anything at all, even if it's one own lineage or religion, is a fault.

For example, we practice Mahamudra and Dzogchen, and some people say that Mahamudra and Dzogchen are worlds apart from each other. Maybe when you explain them in words, you could actually make a case for that, but then, ultimately, they both talk about realizing the nature of the mind. They have slightly different approaches on the path, but ultimately the final result, the nature of the mind, is always the same. There is only the nature of the mind and nothing else. If we don't understand that, then we grasp at our own high view and engage in the practice of Mahamudra, for example, but ultimately, our biased view will cause harm to our practice. So, when it comes to the path, there are slight differences, but ultimately there is one single essence. If you understand this essential point, your mind will be more relaxed.

Now we will return to placement, or resting in meditation: Ultimately, what we must become free

From a dualistic perspective, there seems to be a duality: a clarity and an emptiness. Through meditation, you realize that, in reality, it is one single union. The nature of clarity is emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is clarity.

of is our dualistic grasping. When we practice meditation, we free ourselves from that dualistic grasping. On the inner level, there seems to be duality of the one who meditates and that which is meditated upon, or the seer and the seen. When we free ourselves of all that grasping at duality, we realize non-dual primordial wisdom through our meditation practice. For example, the nature of the mind is a union of clarity and emptiness. From a

dualistic perspective, there seems to be a duality: a clarity and an emptiness. Through meditation, you realize that, in reality, it is one single union. The nature of clarity is emptiness, and the nature of emptiness is clarity.

Ultimately, we become free of all such dualistic grasping. There is no grasping at any existence because everything is empty; and no grasping at non-existence, because everything is clear, the

mind is clear. It is like a lamp or a flame; it is clear but empty. If you understand the view as it is explained in the *Stages of Meditation* book, then you will really be inspired to engage in practice. Then, understanding the crucial point, you can still enjoy in the various pleasures of this world, but at the same time — and especially when you encounter difficulties — you will understand them to be illusions, not truly existing. Finally, you will be able to overcome any difficulty, and that is the temporary benefit of meditation.

The first benefit of analytical meditation is that we can resolve that all appearances are the mind. We understand that all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are created by the mind. Then we also understand that the minds of all sentient beings and our own mind have a single basis; they are one single mental continuum. If you understand that, you know that we only temporarily appear in this distinct way, but actually your mind, your “self,” and the self-grasping of all of the

All phenomena of samsara and nirvana are created by the mind.

sentient beings in these three realms are actually the same. They are all pervaded by the mind. Someone who does not really understand this will deny it and think that it makes no sense, because samsara and nirvana and the three realms of

samsara are so vast and so limitless. How can it all be just one’s own mind? We can’t even comprehend or see all appearances in samsara and nirvana, in this entire universe. How can it be my mind if I can’t see it all?

So, this is the wrong way to think about it. The mind is like space. It pervades everything, and if you meditate and have habituated meditation somewhat, you see how the mind becomes like space. Then you can understand that there is nothing in samsara and nirvana that does not fit in space. Everything can fit in space. In this way, you will gradually become free of grasping. The grasping is like a block of ice, or a vase: If you have two empty vases and then you break them, the empty spaces of the two vases and the outer emptiness of space all become one. There is actually no distinction between the outer and inner empty spaces. There has never been a distinction. We have only fabricated that distinction through the grasping in our mind, but really, there never was a distinction. When we become free of all grasping, it becomes just like that merging with space, merging with emptiness.

In order to become free of grasping, we practice analytical and resting meditations. Then, at the same time, we can still enjoy the various appearances in samsara and nirvana. The countless, limitless pure lands of the Shambhala deities are still there, and also the dharmakaya. The six realms of samsara created by self-grasping also naturally exists. If you understand this as it is explained in the *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup, then you will truly be inspired to become liberated. The book explains how we gradually follow these stages, from beginning with the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind, up until we attain the state of enlightenment, until we realize the royal seat of the dharmakaya. When you understand the various steps that lead to the state of enlightenment, you will also cultivate a wish to engage in practice.

If you ask many questions in the beginning, that is very good. Also, it is good to clarify the stages of meditation; some have different experiences. Some people have experiences of seeing colors or light rays and have all kinds of feelings and sensations; others say they see a lot of thoughts, an ongoing stream of thoughts in the mind. When we are first introduced to Mahamudra, thoughts in the mind of a beginning meditator are like a waterfall, like water rushing forcefully down a steep mountain. At that time, we have not yet habituated to the meditation and there are many thoughts in our mind. They create a lot of difficulties, but we cannot stop them. Those thoughts are very fierce and powerful. When we look at the mind, that is what we see. And then, when we first see them, we recognize that those are the thoughts that have been arising in the mind since beginningless time. Now we begin to see. What you are really seeing is the awareness that sees all these thoughts arising. So, you're seeing what you have not seen before.

The Awareness that is Always There

Seeing all those countless, limitless thoughts in your mind in the beginning is a good quality of meditation. It is the beginning of seeing. You did not recognize that before; there was still an ongoing stream of thoughts, but you never actually looked at them. You were never truly aware, of them, but they created a lot of suffering. It is like a sunray shining in a building; when a sunray shines into a building, you can see countless dust particles in it. If there is no sunshine, it seems that the building is completely empty; you don't see any dust. Looking at the mind is similar. When you

What sees those thoughts is an underlying mind, which is always there. It never comes and goes. That is buddha nature.

first look at the mind, you see many coarse and subtle thoughts with the mind that sees or recognizes the thoughts. First, you recognize, then you look at the thought. The thought is a confusion; it comes and it goes. But then, what sees those thoughts is an underlying mind, which is always there. It never comes and goes. That is buddha nature. Thoughts always arise, but then they disappear again. There are many thoughts that arise continuously, but there is only one awareness that recognizes them, and that always remains.

When you meditate, you must focus on that one awareness that is always there. Do not focus on the thought, but focus on the awareness. In the beginning, there is a rational, ordinary consciousness that projects outwards and discerns various objects, experiences, feelings of happiness and suffering, and so on. It is the consciousness that cognizes everything on the outer level. When you turn inward and investigate the nature of that consciousness, you see there is a consciousness that is always there, whatever thought arises. Then you should let go of the thoughts and focus on that consciousness. For example, when you go out to the street and look, many cars drive past, but you do not grasp at them. If you don't get involved with any individual cars, you just see the series of cars as they go by, then they do not affect you in any way. No matter how many cars drive by, it makes no difference. But if you begin to focus on the cars, for example, if you want to figure out the license plate numbers and they drive by too fast, you get tired very quickly. That shows the fault of grasping. If you do not grasp, they do not actually harm you; they do not affect you in one way or another, as long as you do not grasp. What you need to hold onto is the awareness that recognizes all of those thoughts. You have to become aware of the one who observes the cars, or the thoughts, that go past. That's the one you look at.

Like that, do not pay attention to all the great variety of thoughts that arise, but pay attention to the one who sees those thoughts. This is how you meditate. At first, there is an endless stream of thoughts arising, but if you train by only watching the awareness that sees those thoughts, then eventually you will gain more stability. Then you can recognize that that awareness is always there. There is an awareness that recognizes all the thoughts and it is always there. That is the actual view you need to recognize. Once we have gained some stability and recognize this view, then we can begin to examine it. Analyze it and look at the nature of this awareness.

Although many thoughts arise in the mind, you should not have any hope or wish to be free of all those thoughts. You should not wish to have a thought-free mind; that is grasping. You should be free of accepting and rejecting, of trying to create or reject. For example, even if an object of devotion, such as Guru Rinpoche, appears to you, you should not grasp at it as being good. Even if something negative, such as an evil spirit or affliction, appears, do not grasp at it as negative. Do not grasp at either good or bad appearances. Just continue to meditate. Do not invite the good or reject the bad. The only thing to do in meditation is sustain the knowing awareness and recognize the many thoughts that appear. This is the way we have to meditate.

When it comes to meditation practice, you should be free of accepting and rejecting.

Then, when we meditate, no matter what we practice in the middle, beginning, or end — whatever Dharma we practice — we must always sustain continuous mindfulness. Sustaining a continuum of mindfulness — that itself is meditation. That itself is awareness. In our day-to-day activities, we must sustain love and compassion, and we must actually reject thoughts of anger, jealousy, or any other affliction that arises. But when it comes to meditation practice, there should be no rejection.

Sustaining a continuum of mindfulness, that itself is meditation. That itself is awareness.

In the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*, it talks about “the weapon of mindfulness” being an antidote. There is an antidote to each of the afflictions. For example, when anger arises, we should be patient, and so on. Depending on the circumstances, we should remember the proper antidote. When mindfulness is sustained, then we have finally begun to meditate. We have established the basis of all meditations. When mindfulness is sustained, we have begun true meditation practice. For the time being, mindfulness is not there all the time. Sometimes we are mindful; sometimes there are no thoughts in the mind and we just abide in the natural state, which is like a mirror and completely empty, and we just remain in that nature. And then thoughts arise again, and we lose that clarity. When a difficulty arises and you can come back to that nature, the mirror-like nature, then you see that whatever arises is just like reflection in the mirror. It does not affect you. Even though a thought arises, you can think that it is your mirror-like wisdom and rejoice in it.

Those who have more habituation to meditation, when you meditate, you assume the physical posture with a straight back. If you have some habituation to meditation practice, just assuming this posture will make all coarse thoughts naturally dissolve; subtle thoughts might still arise at

First, there is bliss; and within bliss, you realize emptiness. When you look at emptiness, you find clarity. That emptiness is like the space-like nature of the mind. When the view is resolved, you should not grasp at it, thinking, "Now, this is the view." You should be free of all grasping.

that time. When there are no thoughts in the mind, you experience a state of blissfulness. When you look at the nature of that blissful experience, you find it is emptiness. There is nothing there whatsoever. This is how we understand the indivisibility of bliss and emptiness. That itself is the nature of the mind. That blissful experience is a quality of the mind; it is the nature of the mind, and the one who knows it is the clear awareness. Milarepa said that first, there is bliss; and then within bliss, you realize emptiness. When you

look at emptiness, you find clarity. That emptiness is like the space-like nature of the mind. This is how you gradually resolve the view. When the view is resolved, you should not grasp at it, thinking, "Now, this is the view." You should be free of all grasping.

The Nature of the Mind

The nature of the mind is clear and empty. The nature of clarity is emptiness; it is naturally empty. In the Samantabhadra Prayer, there is an image of the deity Samantabhadra with a consort, yab-yum (male-female). Many deities appear in this aspect of yab-yum, with a consort. The image of the union of the yab (male) and yum (female) is an outer representation of bliss, and when we see the union of the two partners, it makes us understand the nature of bliss. The essence of this bliss is emptiness, and the nature of the mind is naturally blissful. The aspect of clarity is the yab, the male, and the aspect of emptiness is the yum, the female. What they represent together is the union of clarity and emptiness, which is the nature of the mind. When you realize the nature of mind, you attain an unchanging state of great bliss. Once you know it, you will always want to stay within that nature, and staying within that nature is beyond birth and death, beyond rising and declining. When it is habituated, when you attain realization of that state, you become what is called in the Nyingma tradition an "immortal Vidyadhara" or "awareness holder."

In the new tantric system, the Vidyadhara represents the nature beyond life and death. On the outer level, this image reminds us of bliss, but its inner meaning is that this bliss is empty, and together the couple represents the union of clarity and emptiness. The yab is the clarity, and the yum is the emptiness. Another outer image to illustrate this is a flame. It is clear, light, and warm, but it is also empty, ungraspable. The clarity is the natural clear awareness of the mind; it is naturally present, as it is the nature of the mind. On the basis of the example of the flame, we can understand that all the elements, like fire, have a nirmanakaya nature.

Some people wonder when they will finally recognize the nature of the mind, or they think they will never recognize it. But you should think of the Buddha: the Buddha actually spent three countless, limitless eons accumulating merit. In some scriptures it says that we will not be able to realize the nature of mind unless we, too, accumulate merit for three eons. This is what some of the scriptures say. Of course, it is true that we have to accumulate merit, but we can also understand the nature of the mind, as it is actually here right now. It is here right now. It is the ordinary consciousness — the mind we have right now, that is always present. Milarepa said that in an ordinary sense, it is the rational consciousness. When we know the nature of that consciousness, it is the nature of the mind.

That consciousness is what creates all of samsara and nirvana; when you recognize its nature, you realize the nature of the mind. Otherwise, the rational consciousness is just the ordinary mind that projects outwards and perceives all the various objects on the outer level and knows things. It is our consciousness; and when you recognize its nature and become free of all grasping, then you understand the indivisible nature of others and yourself. But it is just an ordinary mind. For example, before Gampopa met Milarepa, he was a great scholar, and it was actually said that he possessed the qualities of a tenth-bhumi bodhisattva. But it was only later, when Milarepa introduced him to Mahamudra and the nature of the mind, that he was able to clear away all doubts about the nature of the mind. He said, “Now through the kindness of my guru, who is the Buddha in human form, I have recognized that the nature of my mind is just my ordinary consciousness.” He resolved that the nature of mind itself is the buddha. Through the blessings of Milarepa and his own devotion, he was able to clear away all doubts. Even before, though, the ordinary consciousness was always there. It is just that we don’t normally recognize that consciousness.

Sometimes when we meditate, we become free of thoughts and the mind becomes very clear; and then thoughts arise again, doubts arise, and we lose this clarity; it is like the wind has blown the candle out. It is said that shamatha, abiding in stillness, is like a candle flame in a place with no wind. That is how we must train the mind to abide. When we practice shamatha, we habituate to it gradually; we contemplate the Thoughts that Turn the Mind over the course of a very long time in order to cultivate bodhicitta. We cannot expect to meditate just one day and have an immediate result. It is really because we have not practiced enough and habituated it that we always encounter difficulties. It is not easy; it requires long-term practice. We cannot expect that we can meditate today and understand the nature of the mind right away. It is not that easy; but at the same time, we should not get discouraged, because we have to start. We should think, "Today I will begin to practice." You begin by recognizing each and every thought that arises, and then it is actually the awareness that sees those thoughts that you need to recognize and sustain. So, that is the only thing to be sustained: the awareness that recognizes the thoughts. You do that in your meditation, and then throughout all your activities. When you can sustain this awareness in all your activities, then you will be unmistakable in your conduct in terms of what to do and what not to do. You should resolve that the nature of the mind is the ordinary consciousness that is present right now; it is your present mind.

When we practice shamatha, we habituate to it gradually; we contemplate the Thoughts that Turn the Mind over the course of a very long time in order to cultivate bodhicitta. We cannot expect to meditate just one day and have an immediate result.

The Need to Follow a Curriculum on the Stages of Meditation Path

We have a path of meditation that progresses by stages of the meditation path, given in a curriculum that lays out the stages of the path. Many disciples go to several different places and receive many different teachings, but from all those different teachings, it is difficult for them to sort out what the actual steps on the path are. Also, their teachers are often far away, and they cannot always ask questions about the practice. So, they don't really know how to practice and in what order to do things. It is important to understand what order to do the steps in; it is just like you need to know the steps to make seeds grow into a crop, for example. To do it, you first plow

the field, then plant the seed, irrigate, and care for the seeds until they grow into a crop. The path to enlightenment is just like that.

Step by step, we practice, beginning from the Four Thoughts up until attaining enlightenment. There are many steps on the path to enlightenment. We don't have the opportunity to read all of the scriptures; although they explain everything, it is all very extensive and doesn't provide a practical perspective. Most of us don't really know how to apply that path or which steps to follow. Also, we have many activities and much work to do, so it is difficult to reconcile it all. Therefore, I requested Khenpo Samdup to create a curriculum that includes the stages of the path and lays out all the steps on the path. It is online, so there is a forum for asking questions and receiving an answer even if you are far away. That is very convenient for practicing by yourself, so you can stay and practice wherever you are.

The curriculum has been created on the basis of a vast understanding of the scriptures — which I actually do not really have. It is laid out in a way that is convenient for engaging in practice; it is very useful for actual practice. Wherever you are, even if you are at home and can't go anywhere — if it is difficult for you to travel to other places — you can still follow the path like that without having to go anywhere. For example, if you have a week or a month, or however much time you have, you can take that time and do some practices, following the stages of the path according to the curriculum. It is a complete path. Therefore, because it is important, Khenpo has created it. Since it is online, you can also ask questions, so you can clear away any difficulties or doubts. That is really our job as lamas. I travel all over the place, and my responsibility is to do more than only eat other people's food. I also have to care for them. Wherever I go, and whoever I meet, I must also help them to clear way their difficulties and really fulfill their wishes.

We generally clear away suffering through relying on two systems: the worldly system and the Dharma system. To clear away the suffering of beings is really our responsibility. Khenpo worked really hard to create this "Stages of the Path" curriculum, and also his book, *Stages of Meditation*. They have been translated into English, and they would be very good for you to use as a basis for future practice. It is just like science; actually, it is very scientific, and very convenient to practice. I think that is probably how it is, because I don't know science all that well. (I don't even know how to make a phone call myself!) But I think it would be very good for you to use as a basis

for practice, and also on that basis, you can ask any spiritual teacher questions. That is important, because often we want to practice the Dharma, but we don't really feel very inspired, and don't really get the flavor of the Dharma. Then we can easily fall into doubts and wrong views and so on. This is why it is important to have the curriculum, a path that is laid out to us like a map that shows the stages of Dharma practice. Therefore, I would like you, my friends, to bear this in mind.

We have some time to ask questions. It is important to clear away our questions and doubts and really understand the meaning of the teachings. If we don't understand the meaning at first, or if we ask a question and don't understand the answer the first time, then we should keep asking about it until we do finally understand the meaning. By getting answers to the questions, the meaning becomes clear. I do like to receive questions, but we don't always have enough time to answer all the questions.

For example, once in Arizona, there was a sick person who came for an audience. The person said that he had been waiting for that audience for eight years, and finally he had that opportunity. He actually booked a plane ticket from far away just to come for that audience. I asked what his question or difficulty was. He said, "I've been ill for many years; I had several surgeries and spent a lot of money on various medical treatments. So, all my money went for the medical bills, and I'm still not better or cured. What should I do?" So, first of all, I said that he should reconsider the thought, "I have lost all my money to medical bills." Where does the money actually go when you pay for your medical bills? It goes to the hospital, and so the hospital benefits from the money. If it benefits from your money, then it can help more sentient beings. It can do more surgeries and medical treatments on others. Your payment is like an act of generosity or offering; if you see like that, you actually accumulate merit from having made an offering. Then it has not been wasted. So, if you understand that meaning, it will not be wasted; but if you do not understand, it will seem to you as if the money has been wasted. Instead of thinking that the money is just gone, think that the payments are merit that will last throughout all future lifetimes. Then in the future, you will obtain the result of having practiced generosity and made offerings.

Now, regarding the illness, you should understand that the illness is due to karma; it is a karmic illness. For example, some people commit suicide in the belief that there is so much suffering in their life that if they destroy their body, they will bring an end to their suffering. That is a completely

wrong belief. We can see how wrong it is just by looking at our dreams. All our karma and imprints are within the idea of the “self.” Due to the presence of karmic imprints, in our dreams we have the same kinds of experiences as during the day, happiness and suffering, and so on. When we take our own life, instead of bringing an end to our suffering, we increase it; it becomes even more intense. That is not the way to separate from suffering; that way we only separate from our precious human body. Understanding all that through Dharma can really save someone from committing suicide. That is why it is so beneficial. Through answering several questions like that, I have been able to save the lives of several people.

It’s not because I have many great qualities or much learning; it is the quality of the Dharma, the quality of my teachers. If someone without a lot of qualities like myself can bring that benefit, then we should think about all the other teachers in all the different religions in the world. On the basis of the two systems, the worldly and Dharma systems, we can clear away the suffering of sentient beings. Now we will return to answering the remaining questions. If we finish with time still left, I can continue with the teachings.

Questions and Answers

Q1. When the mind sees itself and all grasping stops for the first time, can it be that the body experiences deep exhaustion and tiredness, a feeling of extreme physical tiredness?

RINPOCHE: When you rest in the nature of the mind as you described, you actually do not feel tired or exhausted. You feel very happy or joyful. What is happening in your case is that when you meditate with too much tightness and you are tense, it exhausts you. Therefore, it is better to relax your body a bit more. Sit with a straight back, but just relax the mind and body. There should not actually be a feeling of tiredness or exhaustion. When you feel tired, the reason has to do with your physical disposition, for example, an issue with the winds, or some kind of illness. Due to some imbalance in your body, you feel tired. Also, when we have a lot to do, many activities in the Dharma or the world, we can feel exhausted and not want to do them. When you feel like that, it is better to relax your body a bit, rejuvenate your body, take some medicine, and so on; but this kind of feeling does not come from meditation. It has to do with your channels and winds, your physical disposition.

Q2. After meditation, I usually feel very fresh. It feels like waking up from a long, deep sleep. Is it normal to feel like that, or am I being too relaxed during meditation?

RINPOCHE: There is no fault in that; that's actually a very good sign of meditation practice. When the mind really abides calmly, then it becomes very clear, and that clears away all sleepiness. You feel refreshed and not sleepy; you feel very clear. The fault that we often fall into is sleepiness. If you feel refreshed, it is a sign that you know how to meditate. However, it is important to be able to relax your body, so this does not mean that you shouldn't sleep at all. If you didn't sleep at all, it wouldn't be good for your body. If you can't sleep, then you should try various things to be able to sleep. You definitely should sleep. But, in general, that feeling of being

If you are able to remember the meditation the very moment you wake up from sleeping, then it is just as though you had meditated while you were sleeping.

clear and so on is a sign that you have seen the nature of the mind and have practiced meditation, and as a result, there is an experience of very clear awareness. In the best case, if we have habituated meditation, we come to a point where we have no more need to sleep but we don't feel tired; but in our case, this is not what we should do. You have to work, so you have to sleep. If you are able to remember the

meditation the very moment you wake up from sleeping, then it is just as though you had meditated while you were sleeping.

Q3. During the first few minutes of meditation, I usually visualize the Hum on my forehead between my eyebrows. At that time, in front of my eyes and in my mind, I see and feel in various very warm, bright colors. The warm colors only appear for a few minutes. After that, I don't see any color in my mind or in front of my eyes. All I feel is my mind or body floating in an empty space. There is nothing around me, even if I am sitting in a room with people or furniture around me. My mind is blank at that time. Is this normal? Is my practice in the right direction?

RINPOCHE: There is no problem with that; but no matter what appears, you should not investigate it. Don't think about it. Whether you see colors or not, there should be no thought about what it is and so on. Ultimately, the mind must become free of all kinds of grasping, seeing

or not seeing anything. Then that mind is like space and all-pervasive. So you should see whatever appears as like a reflection appearing in a mirror. It is an appearance, but it is empty. Whatever appears, see it just like that. It is just an appearance which is empty. A form might appear, but its essence is empty. This is also how we should practice the deity. When a deity appears in your mind, it appears, but it is also empty. It is not truly, substantially there. That is actually the best way to practice the generation stage.

Q4. Many times when I meditate, I get so energized that I can't sleep. Should I not meditate before bed? As I do Vajrasattva practice at the end of the day and 21 Taras before sleep, it energizes me. Sometimes I go for days, months, years without too much sleep. I seem to be able to function, but my husband is concerned that I don't sleep enough. Is it okay not to sleep very much? Maybe three to four hours a night.

RINPOCHE: At the very least, you should definitely sleep four to five hours a night. If you can't sleep, for example, if the mind is very clear, then you can practice your Oh Ah Hum recitations, and that should help you sleep. Also, in the evening, you can drink some sheep yogurt, which will help you sleep. You definitely have to sleep. Later, if you are in an actual retreat, then it is okay to sleep a bit less; in retreat you don't feel tired, and finally, there is no more difference between sleeping and not sleeping. So then, for example, your body is actually sleeping, but you still know and have complete awareness at the time. That is the final, best sort of practice.

Q5. When doing calm abiding meditation, is it better to visualize or not visualize? If it is the former, do you recommend visualizing Hum at the navel? Should the color of the Hum syllable be red?

RINPOCHE: Whether or not you need to visualize in your meditation depends on whether or not your mind is able to abide in stillness. If the mind is not able to abide in stillness and has many thoughts, then you need to rely on a visualization, a focal object. If the mind is able to abide in stillness, then you do not need a visualization. When the mind is still, you recognize whatever arises in the mind. You see how the mind is when it abides in stillness, and how it is when thoughts move through it like waves on the water. They come and go again. Then it is enough just to recognize the absence or presence of thoughts. Finally, by habituating that, you recognize that the mind that is without thoughts, the mind that is thinking, and the awareness that recognizes

those states are all the same mind. If you do not get involved in or follow whatever arises—if you just let the thoughts be — then they will not affect you. In that case, you don't need any visualization. You can just remain in a very natural state that recognizes when a thought arises. That is the natural, unaltered, original state of the mind, the ordinary normal consciousness. You just abide within that state naturally and recognize when thoughts arise, and when they do, you don't follow them.

In general, we say that there are three types of mental states. There are positive thoughts, negative thoughts, and neutral thoughts. Neutral thoughts are more a state of unmindfulness, of lack of clarity. It is not a desirable state, because we need to develop clarity; clarity is used to recognize whatever thoughts arise and just let them be. Then, just rest within the mind itself and see how it pervades like space. Space pervades everywhere — there is no outer and no inner. The mind is nowhere outside, nor inside, nor in-between. For example, here in this building, that space-like nature pervades all the people and beings in this building; it pervades everything. Then, you don't investigate it; you don't think about it; you just abide naturally. Then you don't need a visualization.

Neutral thoughts are more a state of unmindfulness, of lack of clarity. It is not a desirable state, because we need to develop clarity; clarity is used to recognize whatever thoughts arise and just let them be.

Regarding the Hum, the color doesn't really matter, but if you feel very cold, for example, you can visualize it as red. When you feel hot, you can visualize it as white. During everything you do, keep your focus at the navel. To support that, visualize a Hum at the navel. It is just a method to keep the mind from wandering, to keep it still. During shamatha practice, what is most important is to develop the quality of calm abiding. You don't need any special visualization if the mind will already abide in a very still state.

Q6. What were we before we were born? How was it we were born? Why were we born?

RINPOCHE: What is important is what you did to take this birth. Now, you have a fortunate birth, you are a precious human being. This is the result of having done things with a mind of love and compassion, although there was still a mind of attachment and desire. Due to those imprints, you

entered the womb of your mother and took birth here. Because you had developed some love and compassion in your mind, but also still had an attachment to the pleasures of this samsaric existence, you have taken birth as a precious human being.

Q7. With the thought of benefitting all sentient beings, we meditate. How can we benefit all sentient beings prior to dedicating the merit to all sentient beings? How does one person's actions through meditation benefit all sentient beings?

RINPOCHE: For this, you first need to understand that the minds of all sentient beings and your own mind have a single basis. We are connected to the minds of all sentient beings, and this is

Love is the power that is all-pervasive. The stronger your compassion is, the greater your capacity is to pervade sentient beings. How powerful our ability to benefit them is depends on our ability to cultivate compassion and how strong it is.

how we pervade them. Sentient beings, however, grasp at a "self." Although the minds of all beings have a single basis like a vast ocean, the minds of beings are like blocks of ice in that water. That is the ice of self-grasping. Their ice can melt somewhat if you give rise love and compassion, because our minds are one. It is said that love is the power that is all-pervasive. However strong your compassion is, you are able to benefit sentient beings to that extent. The stronger your

compassion is, the greater your capacity is to pervade sentient beings and make offerings to the buddhas in the pure lands. This is because the mind of compassion is like warmth, and when it reaches beings through its all-pervasive nature, the warmth can melt the ice-block of self-grasping. The karma and imprints of sentient beings also melt, along with the self-grasping. How powerful our ability to benefit them is depends on our ability to cultivate compassion and how strong it is.

In the beginning, we cultivate a samadhi of love. For that, we must first contemplate and really understand. Think that all sentient beings without exception have been your parents. When that is clear in your mind and you really see all beings as your mother, at that moment, love pervades all beings. When you see that those beings all suffer, then naturally you will want to free them from suffering, and that is compassion. That is how you benefit beings. A sign that you can actually affect beings in this way is, for example, when you have compassion for your cat or dog, then

they want to stay with you, because you love them. If you do not love them, then they will go elsewhere.

If somebody who really understands the Four Immeasurables just recites the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra, then through the power of their compassion, their mind makes offerings to all the pure lands and pervades all sentient beings of the six realms when they recite that one mantra.

Q8. If there is no “self,” who is the one who will become the buddha?

RINPOCHE: When there is no more “self,” that is enlightenment. When this perception of a “self” has disappeared, then we have attained enlightenment. For example, the enlightened mind of the buddhas is like an ocean, and sentient beings are like many ice-blocks floating in the ocean. When one of those ice-blocks melts, it merges and becomes one with the ocean. It doesn’t disappear, it’s still there, but it is indistinguishable from the ocean. That is non-dual wisdom. The ocean is still there, it is just that there is no division in its waters. There’s only one water. Or, for example, space: the sky is there, but there is no division in space. There’s only one space.

The term for enlightenment in Tibetan is *sang gye*. *Sang* means to clear away dualistic grasping, and *gye* means expansive, extensive; that is, the mind then pervades and becomes extensive and vast like space. It is said that when you realize that there is no difference between the mind and space, you have actualized the dharmakaya. Within the dharmakaya, there is no self. For example, the wisdom deities are all the same, although there are a million different forms. Therefore, the mind of a million deities and the mind of a single deity is a single one.

Q9. I have experienced fear of higher energies when practicing meditation. This fear keeps me from doing much good meditation. How do I overcome this fear of higher energies and change my habit of thinking “I can’t do this”?

RINPOCHE: For that, you should meditate on the yidam deity and understand that those beings are formless. The higher energy is like a formless being that grasps at a “self,” and because they grasp at a “self,” they have fear and also suffer. That is what we often call an “evil spirit.” Fear of it is self-grasping. When there is self-grasping, then naturally we are afraid. Therefore, you must make a greater effort to develop love and compassion. The stronger your compassion, the less fear you will feel. Fear and self-grasping are actually equivalent. You should visualize the yidam

deity again and again. Visualize the deity that you love and are devoted to until you never forget about it. When you reach that point, then all the demons and evil spirits transform. Then you will recognize that the evil spirit is only created by your own mind, by the fearful self-grasping in your own mind.

For example, if you are afraid of the dark, it is because you grasp at the “self” that you are afraid and think something is going to come. Then you have nightmares and bad dreams. All of that is actually created by your own self-grasping. All fear comes from self-grasping. Therefore, when you practice the deity and cultivate love and compassion, then all those demons and evil

An evil spirit is only created by the fearful self-grasping of one's own mind.

spirits transform into the deity. They all become friends. Everything becomes a pure land. When there is self-grasping, everything appears as the demon or evil spirit. An evil spirit is a mind that is competitive — but it is a corrupt form of competitiveness, because there is also a good form of competitiveness. The corrupt form of competitiveness is when self-grasping is very strong, and with a mind of anger and jealousy, it undermines the good, beneficial work of others. For example, some people want to benefit their country, but then others work against it and set off bombs and so on. Someone who dies with a corrupt intention will go down into a miserable existence, going further and further down for many years and lifetimes.

Until the self-grasping and the afflictions of anger, jealousy and so on come to an end, one will experience suffering. But then, gradually and slowly, those beings can also become liberated. We need to understand that the nature of those beings is just a corrupt form of attachment.

All deities are the manifestations of bodhicitta, and they are like heat, or warmth. Due to self-grasping, an evil spirit is like a block of ice. Therefore, thinking of the deity has the power to melt that ice-block of self-grasping. Ultimately, in reality, there is no real evil spirit, no demon. It is all a creation of one's own mind.

Q10. When I practice Oh Ah Hum, every time I let my mind focus on the Hum at the navel, then very spontaneously I also have a visualization of the subtle energy entering my subtle central channel. The central channel appears clearly in my mind. So, at that

moment, how should I proceed? Do I continue to let the subtle energy enter the central channel and let the image of the central channel remain, or what should I do?

RINPOCHE: When the subtle energies or the winds enter into the central channel, all you need to do is meditate. You don't have to wonder about it, or follow any thought of what to do and so on. When the wind enters the central channel, your body is naturally pervaded by warmth, and

The visualization is only a method to get the mind to abide in stillness; what is most important is for the mind to abide in meditation, in the state that is clear and empty.

then you should only continue to meditate, resting in shamatha and vipassana without thinking about that state or getting mentally involved in it. The main point of all these visualizations and different stages of meditation is actually to meditate in order to abide calmly. The visualization is only a method to get the mind to abide in stillness; what is most important is for the mind to abide in meditation. When a mind abides

in the state that is clear and empty, then that is most important. The visualizations are secondary, and what is most important is the calm abiding state of meditation.

GENERATION STAGE MEDITATION

My Dharma friends, today we will talk more about the generation stage of the Secret Mantra, the Vajrayana; within the fivefold path of Mahamudra, it is the section on the yidam deity. First of all, how do we get to the generation stage? We get to the generation stage step by step, and we have just discussed the steps that lead up to the generation stage. First, we cultivate a state of shamatha, calm abiding. Then, as we have mentioned, we recognize the mind that is without any thought; we let go of all thoughts. Within that thought-free state, we then gain insight into the nature of the mind — that is vipassana. At that time, the mind is still, and with that stillness, we also need to cultivate clarity, a clear awareness that recognizes the nature of the mind.



Within the emptiness, we find clarity. The “clarity” here means that the conscious mind knows itself as empty; it is the knowing capacity which we also call “vipassana,” special insight. Then we train and gain stability in that clarity, that special insight, and when we gain that stability in clarity, we naturally understand that the mind itself has created all of samsara and nirvana.

What we call “samsara” begins with the perception of a “self,” and from that perception, “others” appear. This dualistic perception and grasping sees self and other as separate. From that, the afflictions arise, and, clinging to our own afflictions and thoughts as valid and true, we engage in action. This is how our mind temporarily becomes like water frozen into ice. And so, we perceive a reality where actually there is no such reality. It doesn’t really exist in the way it appears to us; it appears to be truly existing. When you understand this through your vipassana practice, then you will also naturally recognize each and every affliction as it arises — simple anger, jealousy, and so on. You will know the consequences of all those afflictions, and you will also know that, ultimately, they’re the fault of self-grasping. The antidote to that is the altruistic mind.

If you have an altruistic mind, then there is no “self.” Through special insight, you realize that the “self” is only a thought in your own mind, and anything you think becomes true to you. If you think there is a “self,” there is a “self.” If you think there is no “self,” then there is no “self.” Then you see that you actually have a choice here. You can choose whether or not you want to

If you have an altruistic mind, then there is no “self.” Through special insight, you realize that the self is only a thought in your own mind.

believe in a self, and that choice creates its appearance or lack of appearance. Ultimately, we also transcend that; insight finally realizes that the “self” neither exists nor does not exist. The nature of the mind is something that transcends all limitations of conceptual designations. It is simply not an object of intellectual investigation. The actual meaning of vipassana is explained on page 74 of *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup. In the second paragraph it says, “When we talk about emptiness imbued with all perfect qualities...” This “emptiness imbued with all perfect qualities” is the actual meaning of the view of vipassana.

When you see the emptiness imbued with perfect qualities, it is like meeting the Buddha, like directly seeing the enlightened mind of the Buddha. But where is that emptiness imbued with all perfect qualities? Where can we find it? It is actually your own mind. It is the actual nature of the mind that is clear, empty, and free of all concepts and grasping. That is the nature of the Buddha, and when you see it, it is the same mind as the Buddha’s. It is called the “supreme mind” because it is above everything else. Normally, when we say something is good, it implies that there is also something worse; that is why we can say the one thing is good. For example, in terms of the wisdom mind, when we say something is the “excellent” or “exalted” wisdom, it implies there is also an inferior sort of wisdom.

The Two Types of Wisdom

There are two types of wisdom. There is worldly wisdom, and there is transcendental wisdom, the wisdom that transcends the world. The wisdom that transcends the world is the supreme wisdom of the Buddha, and worldly wisdom is the wisdom that we use to understand various worldly things, for example, science, but actually they are both still the same mind. They are just different ways of using that mind. These types of wisdom are not two separate minds; they are both one’s nature of the mind, but used in different ways. If it is used in a worldly, samsaric context, wisdom

perceives a duality — a separation between self and others that, to this consciousness, appears to be a reality. It thinks it is true, and due to that grasping at a concrete reality, it gives rise to many thoughts of attachment and aversion. From this awareness — this worldly sort of wisdom or intelligence — all the outer universe and all sentient beings, all of samsara, is created. This worldly wisdom is used for all our worldly activities — for example, understanding the world and various natural sciences, and so on. It investigates the world, holding all appearances to be concrete and separately existing entities. Based on that knowledge, it utilizes its intelligence. Ultimately, however, everything that is created in this world is a compound, and therefore, impermanent. This is what the Buddha realized.

Therefore, the Buddha's wisdom is the supreme wisdom; it is always good. It always was in the past, and it will be good in the future. Also, it is ever-unchanging. That is actually the quality of buddha nature; the nature of the mind is always good, always supreme. It is supreme because it never arises, and it never ceases to be; it is never born and it never dies. It never declines but always remains just as it is. It is the wisdom of the Buddha with perfect qualities. It is given different names; it is called the "wisdom that transcends the mundane," or the "wisdom of the Tathagatas," or the "supreme primordial wisdom," and so on. It is given many different names, but it is still the same mind. Here, we are calling it "vipassana," special insight.

In the context of vipassana, we look inward, and we look at our mind. By seeing the mind, you

If you think there is a "self," then to you, there is a "self." But also, if you think there is no "self" and don't grasp at any "self," then there is no "self."

will understand that, if you think there is a "self," then to you, there is a "self." But also, if you think there is no "self" and don't grasp at any "self," then there is no "self." If you understand that, you know that it is only your own perception, and if you just let go of that thought of a self, then what is there? What is left when you let go of that thought? You realize that there is nothing there. The mind is just like space. Your mind and space become like one.

Although you will understand that, other people won't all understand it. Other people will still see you in a dualistic way, as separate from them. The other person sees you as a separate entity from himself, sees "This is me and that is him." But you will know that that is just their perception that there is no actual separation; that is just how that other person sees it. There are different

perceptions; although one person might see that way, someone else might realize that we are not actually distinct, there is no separation. For example, we often see the lama, but what we really see is the body, and then we grasp at the body. Then we think that when the lama's body is physically present, we receive his blessings, and when his body is not there, it seems like there are no blessings. That is the fault of not knowing the non-dual nature of mind. It is the fault of still holding onto worldly perceptions, worldly wisdom.

We should look at our own body as an example when we investigate the two types of wisdom. As we have said, there is the wisdom that transcends the mundane, and there is the worldly or mundane wisdom. When you look at your body, your awareness perceives your body and holds it to be your truly existing "self." You hold onto it. You believe it is a true, material thing. You think it is truly real. On the basis of this perception, this identifying with your body, you engage in actions. Out of this perception of your body, you engage in various actions. Those actions are performed by mundane wisdom. Mundane wisdom isn't something that has to be learned, it just naturally follows a certain course of action based on grasping at the body.

Now, what is it like when transcendental wisdom looks at the body? When you perceive your body with transcendental wisdom, what actually is this body then? This wisdom understands that the body is not who you really are. In the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*, it says "this ship of leisure and fortune of the precious human body." The human body is like a ship that can carry you to the state of liberation if you use it well. With this wisdom, you understand that it can carry you to liberation, but if you do not use the body to attain liberation — if you continue to grasp at it and perceive it as the "I" — you will not attain liberation. Due to identifying with your body, one day when you die and separate from it, you will still have the imprint of identifying with a body, and therefore you will seek another body, again and again. In this way you will circle in samsara, from body to body. Jigten Sumgon said that the one who actually wanders around in this ocean of samara is the body. We go from body to body due to our clinging to our body as our identity. And then, each new body we create is based on whichever of the afflictions are predominant, so our bodies are

Jigten Sumgon said that the one who actually wanders around in this ocean of samara is the body.

the manifestations of our afflictions. Depending on our virtuous and non-virtuous actions, we experience happiness and suffering.

The wisdom that transcends the mundane understands that there is no real “self” within the body. Only if you think there is a “self” is there one. If you do not think there is a “self,” there is no “self,” and therefore, you should not hold onto a “self.” Let go of a “self” and stay in a state without grasping at anything at all. This is to remain in a state of vipassana, special insight.

The Two Types of Illusory Body

There are two types of illusory body, a pure and an impure illusory body. The impure illusory body is a mundane body — a samsaric body. The impure illusory body of a worldly god, for example, is not a material body, but the god still has a mental perception of a body, so there is a mental body and experiences of samsaric suffering. That is a worldly god; His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises us not to practice those worldly gods because there will be no ultimate benefit, since they themselves are also samsaric beings who suffer. They also experience fear, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, poverty, and so on. Even though they do not have a physical body, they still have a perception of a body, so they have a mental body; they are formless, but they have a mental body that is an impure illusory body.

There is also a pure illusory body, which is the deity that arises from the generation stage — the deity that we visualize. As beginners, we can start by visualizing a peaceful form or we can visualize the Buddha Shakyamuni’s form. We are familiar with that, so the Buddha's form will

If you have habituated to shamatha and vipassana, within that clear mind, anything the mind can conceive of will appear there. This seeing is not seeing with your eyes, it is seeing in your mind.

appear easily to all of our minds. That it is a good way to begin — to visualize the form of the Buddha. In the beginning, there is still a dualistic perception of "That is the Buddha, and this is me visualizing the Buddha." At this time, you can visualize the Buddha in space before you, for example, a small Buddha just in front of you. Look at a Buddha image and then close your eyes and see it in your mind. If you have already habituated shamatha and vipassana and your mind is without thoughts, then the Buddha will appear to your

mind, which is like a clear mirror. The Buddha will appear like a reflection within your clear, still mind.

Actually, within that clear mind, anything the mind can conceive of will appear there. Whatever you think of appears in your mind; you see whatever you think of. This seeing is not seeing with your eyes, it is seeing in your mind. If you are looking for something you see with your eyes — a visual perception — then you will not see it. This kind of seeing is seeing with the mind. The object appears in the mind; it is not a visual perception of the eyes.

The Buddha appears with all the qualities of the enlightened Buddha. The Buddha represents various qualities, such as the ten powers and the four types of fearlessness, and so on. In the beginning, the Buddha cultivated the mind of enlightenment — bodhicitta — and then he practiced the six paramitas until he attained perfect and complete enlightenment. When he attained enlightenment, he accomplished the pure illusory body. This is the form you bring to mind. When you think of the Buddha's form, it appears; and when you do not think of it, it disappears. It is not there. That is because it, too, lacks any inherent existence. Its lack of inherent existence is the

Due to the qualities of clarity and emptiness, the generation and completion stages are actually a union. They are actually practiced at the same time, because they represent the qualities of sambhogakaya and dharmakaya.

completion stage. Actually, due to the qualities of clarity and emptiness, the generation and completion stages are actually a union. They are actually practiced at the same time, because they represent the qualities of sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the space-like nature of the mind, and the sambhogakaya is the rainbow that appears very clearly in the sky. It appears with very clear, distinct, vivid

colors, but the essence of its appearance is emptiness. The essence is empty, and the nature is clarity. This is the nature of the pure illusory body — and it is actually the nature of your own mind. The essence of the mind is empty, and its nature is clarity. When you practice the deity again and again, and visualize the deity again and again, you come to understand that the deity is not actually separate from your mind; it is actually established within your own mind.

In the beginning, we don't understand this, so there is still a dualistic perception. At that time, you can visualize a Buddha so big it fills all of space, or just very small, the size of a mustard seed. You can visualize Buddha's form in any size, and you should remember his qualities. Gradually, you begin to understand how the appearance is actually in your mind. The dharmakaya of the Buddha pervades everywhere, and therefore, it is naturally, inherently connected to your own mind, your buddha nature. So then, gradually you understand that the appearance of the Buddha and your own mind are not separate from each other. The Buddha that appears is actually your mind; or that appearance of the deity is actually your own mind. This is how we practice and gradually accomplish the generation stage. In the beginning, it is good to start by visualizing the form of Buddha Shakyamuni. Once you have habituated and stabilized shamatha and this view of vipassana — especially vipassana, special insight — then you just rest within the clarity without thinking anything at all — without any perception or idea that the deity exists or does not exist, that something is there or not there. There is no intellectual investigation, no concept; you just stay within that state of clarity.

Beginning practitioners still have many doubts, and many people do not fully trust the Dharma. For example, some people think that visualizing the deity is pretending that something is there that is not actually there — like we are fabricating that deity — and those external things that are really there, we say that they are not there. To them, it seems that the deity is just a way to deceive our mind; we are misleading our own mind by pretending that the deity is there when it is not really there. There are many doubts like that, and if you have doubts like that, you should look at your own mind. First of all, look to see whether or not there is a “self.” You will believe there is a “self” if you have those kinds of doubts, so you should look at your own mind and try to really identify that “self.” Where is it? What is it like? Does it have any shape or color? When you investigate, you will not find anything there. You will not be able to determine what that “self” really is — what it looks like, how it exists. That “self” is nothing you can identify or see, but still, it is what creates all of samara. It is what creates all suffering. Although we cannot identify it, we cannot see it clearly, we do experience how it torments us and how it creates suffering. On that basis, we can understand that there is something that cannot be identified. We can't see it; it's not there, but still, it performs a function. It affects us although we cannot see it.

In this very same way, we can understand the nature of the deity. The deity exists in just that way, and it, too, is not an object for intellectual investigation. It is said that the ultimate truth cannot be understood by means of the intellect; the ultimate nature is inexpressible. The nature of the deity really cannot be expressed by words; it cannot be conceived by the intellect. There is nothing, no concept, that can describe it, but when you see it, you are free of doubt. If you still have doubts about the deity, you don't understand the deity. So, first you have to look at your mind and try to find your "self." When you look for it, there's no way you can actually find it. There is no truly existing self anywhere to be found. Then, as you slowly habituate shamatha and vipassana, when you come to the deity meditation, you will cultivate trust in the deity. Then, just like the "self," the deity lacks inherent existence but also possesses qualities. The deity possesses the qualities of omniscience and loving compassion, and also the power to grant protection. Where do these qualities come from? From the perspective of enlightenment, the deity arises from the three kayas, so ultimately, the deity comes from the buddha nature.

Actually, the appearance of the Buddha and your own mind are not separate from each other. The Buddha that appears is actually your mind, or that form of the deity is actually your own mind.

Therefore, in Secret Mantra Vajrayana, we must first receive empowerment, because the empowerment is actually what introduces us to the nature of the deity and the nature of the practitioner, and what their relationship is — how the deity and the practitioner are connected. This is what we are introduced to during the empowerment. To begin with, we are connected on the basis of buddha nature. Buddha nature is like the single trunk of a tree, or one stem with many flowers. When we develop vipassana, we understand the indivisibility of the lamas, the buddhas, and ourselves. We realize non-dual wisdom, the non-duality of "self" and "others," and that mind that is free of all grasping is actually the mind of the deity. It is like the development of a flower; in the beginning, the practitioner's mind is like an unopened flower bud, and the Vajra Master who introduces us through empowerment is like a fully opened blossom. The Vajra Master has experience, knows how to tame beings through the four enlightened activities, and can show them the path, so the Master is like an open, full blossom. Then, the deities are like the seeds produced by that flower. The dharmakaya nature of the deity is empty, like the sky, the sambhogakaya is

like a rainbow in the sky, and the nirmanakaya is like the rain drops that fall from the sky; or in the other example, it is like a growing flower.

This precious human body is like the unopened flower bud. The precious human body consists of six elements, and is thus endowed with the qualities necessary to attain liberation in this lifetime. We have attained this precious body as the result of a great deal of merit accumulated in the past, and also through the power of bodhicitta. Of all the types of bodies in the six realms of samsara, we have attained this precious human body. And, when you really understand this, you will know you have to make good use of this precious existence, because you will know that in this life, you have the potential to attain enlightenment in this single body, in this single lifetime. The method for accomplishing it is introduced through the basis, the path, and the result.

In terms of the basis, the path, and the result: all of them are the mind. First, it is explained that the mind is the basis. Then, in the context of the path, the mind becomes the practice. On the path, the practice is to let go of self-grasping and develop an altruistic mind — so that is also the mind. The one who practices and cultivates altruism is also the mind. The basis — the ultimate nature of the mind — is the mind; and the one who practices on the path is the same, the mind. And then, in the end, when all obscurations have been removed, the result is also the mind. Through our long cultivation of compassion, self-grasping gradually diminishes, and when there is no more self-grasping, when only great compassion is left in the mind, that is the final result. The nature of the mind is the buddha, so the result is also the mind. As Milarepa explained, there is no buddha to be found anywhere outside of your mind. To see the Buddha, look at the quality of your own mind. Also, the Buddha himself said that your own mind is actually the buddha. Your own mental continuum and the Buddha's mental continuum are actually one single mental continuum. It is just like space; because the nature of the mind is like space, there cannot be a distinction, a separation, between our minds. Therefore, the minds of all sentient beings and the Buddha's mind are the same, and that is also the mind of the deity. When you practice the deity but you do not yet understand that — that is, if you have not yet developed vipassana, special insight — then when you visualize the deity in the generation stage, you will still perceive the deity in a dualistic way.

For example, today, when we visualize the deity, you can just visualize a Buddha form in front of you. We have here a statue of the Buddha; you can look at it and use it as the support for your visualization. Look at it, close your eyes, and then make it appear in your mind. Try not to follow any thoughts. Try to not let that vision of the Buddha be interrupted by any other thoughts while you have your eyes closed. In the generation stage of the deity, the visualized form must appear clearly in the mind. Then, recognize that what is appearing to you is actually in your own mind. Therefore, the deity is actually not separate from your own mind; it is your own mind. But, for the time being, we have dualistic perception, so for now, you can also visualize the Buddha in space outside of you, sometimes large enough to fill all of space, sometimes very small. There are different ways in which we can train in the generation stage.

Questions and Answers

Q1. When practicing love and kindness, I find it easier to bestow on others than myself. How can I cultivate this without sacrificing myself?

RINPOCHE: That thought of "Maybe I shouldn't sacrifice myself completely" is due to self-grasping. You should completely sacrifice the "self" — let it all go, and even if you let it all go, you can never lose your buddha nature. Even if you wanted to, there is actually no way to lose your

You should completely sacrifice the "self" — let it all go, and even if you let it all go, you can never lose your buddha nature.

buddha nature. But what you should lose, what you should completely sacrifice, is the "self," your grasping at the "self." If you really only think about benefiting or helping others, and you never think about yourself, then that's the greatest benefit. That is actually the best. That is like the warmth that melts the ice block. Normally, when we perceive "self" and "others," we perceive ourselves to be very important. But when you only think about others, you don't worry so much about

yourself. That is actually the best way to practice, because that is what we should do; we should completely give up that "self." By doing that, you are actually benefiting yourself the most, because self-grasping is like ice, and until it is fully melted, you must work on melting it. The more we melt the ice, the better it is.

Q2. When you say “your mind,” do you mean inside the head or in the field of cognition?

RINPOCHE: We mentioned that when we try to look for the mind, we cannot find it. We cannot say, “This is where it is,” for example, in the brain or in the head; it is actually all-pervasive. There is nothing that is not pervaded. Your entire body is pervaded by the mind. Not only that, wherever your “self” goes, the mind also goes there. For example, when you own a house, if there is some damage to the house, then you get angry, right? That means your mind pervades the house too. Wherever there is the feeling of “I” or “mine,” whatever you own, whatever you identify with, the mind pervades. It goes anywhere. We mentioned yesterday in the discussion of shamatha practice and analytical mediation that we cannot determine the location of the mind. We cannot say where it is, or where it abides. The Samantabhadra Prayer says that it is not on the outside, but it is not inside either. It is beyond affirmation and denial, beyond existence and non-existence. It is everywhere. There is actually no outer, no inner, and nothing in between. The mind pervades everywhere space pervades. So, from the perspective of self-grasping, the mind pervades all those objects and everything we take ownership of.

The mind pervades everywhere space pervades. The mind pervades all those objects and everything we take ownership of.

Q3. Can you please explain Tilopa's statement: "This is self-aware wisdom. Know for yourself your own supreme self-awareness."

RINPOCHE: The supreme knowing is to see yourself — to see your own mind — and ignorance means unawareness, not seeing your true nature. Not seeing your true nature, you perceive dualistically. It is also said that vipassana is the supreme seeing, the supreme knowing of your own nature. This is what we call “self-knowing primordial wisdom,” and it is the supreme awareness; and that awareness is the mind of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Buddha. When you know yourself — when awareness knows itself — that is called “primordial wisdom.” When awareness does not know itself, it is called the “rational consciousness.” That consciousness projects outward, and it dualistically perceives all the various objects — “self” and “others,” and so on. But when it projects inward and looks at itself, then it becomes free of all designations, and you cannot describe it in terms of existence or non-existence and so on. It becomes just like space, and it is primordial wisdom. “Primordial” because it has always been there since

beginningless time, and “wisdom” because it has an all-knowing quality, an all-knowing capacity.

“Primordial” because it has always been there since beginningless time, and “wisdom” because it has an all-knowing quality, an all-knowing capacity.

So, it has always been there in the past; in the future, it will never cease to be; and now, it is just the same as it always was and will be. It is called “self-existing primordial wisdom;” and it is your own mind. It is “self-existing” because it is not composed of different parts, so therefore, it is uncompounded. If it was composed or compounded of different parts, then it would be impermanent, because anything that is compounded is impermanent. Its nature is

uncompounded.

When you meditate and rest in vipassana, special insight, and you really see the actual nature of your mind, then what you recognize is just that. You recognize a mind that perceives a duality of “self” and “others”; that is the rational consciousness, or intellect. But then if you look more closely at the mind, there really is no such distinction between “self” and “others.” There is a distinction only in their different forms, but not within the mind. When you see this, you see primordial wisdom.

Q4. Is it okay to visualize not just the image of the Buddha, but a vision of the Buddha in a state of samadhi?

RINPOCHE: The reason we have mentioned visualization and visualizing the Buddha’s form is because today we are talking about the beginning of the generation stage. The reason we talked about it like this is that for those beginning generation stage practice, there still is a grasping at a true, substantial existence of the objects that appear outwardly. That ordinary perception must be purified, and in order to purify it, we train in the generation stage. We first purify our thoughts through the generation stage. We empty our minds of thoughts through the generation stage, and also through the completion stage; we gradually diminish our grasping at various thoughts. But if there are no thoughts in your mind to begin with, or if you don’t grasp at them at all, then of course, you don’t have to visualize in this specific way. You don’t have to meditate on a deity.

In the generation stage, the visualization is an antidote to ordinary thinking, because when the mind is visualizing the pure deity, the mind can remain there in stillness; it can stay there without

wandering. This is how the mind becomes purified. When you are thinking about worldly concerns, the mind becomes defiled. Meditating on the deity is just like purifying water. When water is very pure, it is useful; everybody drinks it. But nobody would drink the water you flush down the toilet, even though it is still just water. Purifying the mind is just like cleaning it with soap, and the “soap” that we use to clean the mind is the deity visualization of the generation stage, the visualization of the pure illusory body.

When we practice the generation stage again and again, we habituate it. We will eventually reach the point where we even forget about our body sometimes — where it almost seems we have no more feeling or awareness of the body, it seems to disappear. At that point, we can say the habitual imprints of the body are being purified. It is when we grasp and identify with the body and the form that a lot of harm is caused.

Q5. If someone could practice seeing the ultimate nature of mind directly in the presence of ordinary activity, what would be the benefit of practicing the generation and completion stages of the deity?

RINPOCHE: It is still good to have a yidam deity; have one yidam deity — only one — that always remains in your mind, so you never forget about the yidam. That is actually important. Or, if you cannot always keep the yidam in mind, you can instead think of the seed syllable, such as Hum, for example; but there should be something in your mind during all of your activities. To clarify the idea of someone who already always abides in the ultimate nature in all activities: It is quite difficult to abide in that nature all the time during all of your everyday activities. Since it is very unlikely, it is good to still think about a yidam deity, or think of your guru, and so on, since it is so difficult to sustain that ongoing state of remaining in the ultimate nature. It is difficult for the mind to keep that clarity all the time.

The reason for remembering the yidam is that when we die, there are different ways of being liberated — in the first or second bardo, and so on. In the ideal case, we are liberated in the first bardo. That can be accomplished if, while you are still alive, you practice as you fall asleep, so that you never actually fall into unconscious sleep, but rather, you recognize the luminosity of the deep-sleep state. That is, the mind always remains with complete clarity throughout the deep-sleep state. If you can accomplish that, you will become liberated in the first bardo of death. But

that is actually very difficult to accomplish. It is very difficult to sustain clarity throughout a deep-sleep state, while you are actually sleeping. If you do not become liberated in the first bardo, you will next come to the second bardo, and concepts will begin to arise again. At this time, you must be able to remember the yidam deity, because if you are able to remember the yidam deity, you can attain enlightenment as a sambhogkaya. Ideally, of course, you would attain enlightenment in the dharmakaya right away in the first bardo, but that is very difficult. Therefore, in case we aren't able to accomplish that, it is good to have also prepared for the second bardo, and we do that with the practice of the yidam deity.

Of course, if you are actually able to recognize the first bardo, you don't need a yidam deity. That is true. But in case you do not recognize it, then it is good to have a yidam deity to remember when you come to the second bardo. In order to remember at that time, it is important to practice now and in all your day-to-day activities. Always remember the yidam deity in whatever you do. For example, when you are eating food or you are enjoying any of the other five sense pleasures — whatever you do — always think of the deity. By “thinking of the deity” I mean you should just have an awareness of the deity; you do not have to visualize all the implements and ornaments and colors and so on as they are described in the visualization. You don't have to visualize every detail all the time, but you should always have the deity in mind, so you never forget about the deity, like a mother would never forget about her only child. If you just keep that kind of awareness, it is sufficient.

Whatever you do, always think of the deity. By “thinking of the deity”, I mean you should just have an awareness of the deity.

Q6. You talked about mirror-like wisdom in relation to ultimate primordial wisdom. Could you say a few words about the other of the five wisdoms and/or suggest a text that may be available in English? Thank you, Rinpoche.

RINPOCHE: There are various books that you can read about that. You have to see what is available in your language. Regarding those five wisdoms, they are qualities that are inherent within one mind; there are five qualities of one single mind. Mirror-like wisdom is like a mirror because anything can be reflected in it, and everything appears without any bias on the part of the mirror. Therefore, it is “mirror-like” wisdom. Whatever is reflected in that “mirror,” good or bad or so on, the mind has no bias. It doesn't become involved in those appearances, so it does not

grasp at whatever good or bad thoughts arise; they are all the same. Perceiving them all as the same is the wisdom of equanimity. Then, although they all are the same, there is also a very clear knowledge of the subtle workings of karma. Although it knows they are the same by nature, the mind also knows that virtue and non-virtue lead to different results — that emptiness, which is known by dharmadhatu wisdom, actually has the natural radiance of karma, cause and effect; they are actually a union. That clear knowledge of karmic cause and effect is called the “individually discriminating wisdom.” And then, the mind also knows that bodhicitta naturally creates the pure lands, and self-grasping and the afflictions naturally create the six realms of samsara. “Naturally” means no one intentionally makes them; it is just their nature. They are created naturally. This natural creation of certain results from certain causes is called the “all-accomplishing wisdom.” These are five qualities of one mind.

Q7. Why do we visualize some deities as self-generations and other deities in front of us?

RINPOCHE: At first, in the beginning, we should practice the front visualization — the deity in the sky or space in front of us. Then, as you keep practicing, you gradually begin to realize that what appears in front of you is still in your own mind. It is still a perception or appearance within your own mind. Gradually, you understand that it's yourself. Then you arrive at self-generation visualization. We practice in stages; for example, we follow the four branches of approach, close approach, accomplishment and great accomplishment; or the four classes of tantra. In brief, those four steps are: First, we are introduced to the deity. We get acquainted with the deity. Second, we become friends with the deity. Third, we become family to the deity. And fourth, we become non-dual; we become the deity. This is how we gradually ripen.

Q8. If I can see in my mind the root guru as a Buddha, can I visualize a deity in my root guru's form?

RINPOCHE: When you see your root guru as the actual Buddha, then you see that the guru's form is the Sangha, his speech is the Dharma, and his mind is the Buddha. We normally see the root guru as a person, as a substantially existing, material being. We hold that the guru's form truly exists; we grasp at it. Of course, in the best case, you do understand that the guru is actually a buddha, and if you really understand that, then it is fine to visualize the yidam in the form of the guru. Actually, the form is not so important, because the real yidam is not the form, it is the mind.

And likewise, the real guru is not the guru's form but the mind. When the guru's body dies, then the guru actually does become the yidam, and at that time, the guru's form becomes the rainbow-like sambhogakaya form of the yidam. It is just right now that the guru has his particular human body that is a nirmanakaya form. But that is not his only form.

Later, when the guru has discarded his physical, material form and become sambhogakaya, then he actually becomes the sambhogakaya form of the yidam deity, which pervades countless pure lands in many different forms. And ultimately, the actual mind of the guru is the dharmakaya. That dharmakaya nature is the empty nature of the mind, which is actually indivisible from the empty nature of your own mind; they are one single continuum. If you understand this crucial point, then there is really no need to realize the yidam, whether in the form of the guru or in some other form, because the most important thing to understand is the connection of the mind.

The crucial point to realize when visualizing the guru as the Buddha is to understand that the Buddha's mind, which is the guru's mind, is actually indivisible from your own mind. It is truly your own mind. And if you understand this, it is possible for anything to appear on the outer level. Various forms of the guru can appear, and you can also visualize the form of the guru. For example, when you practice Vajradhara or Vajrasattva, it's good to actually see the forms of Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, or any other peaceful or wrathful deity you visualize, but it is also fine to just see the form of the guru.

Q9. When I am faced with obstacles and meditate, I feel a very strong connection to Green Tara. Does this mean she is my yidam deity, and what does this say about my path?

RINPOCHE: That feeling that you have is a very good feeling. You're connected to that deity, so you should practice that deity. This is the first feeling that should arise — a strong feeling of being connected to the deity. At first, it is like recognizing an acquaintance. Then later, as you practice the deity more, the deity becomes like a friend, so a more intense feeling arises. You should just practice that one deity and always remember that yidam. In everything you do, remember the yidam deity; it is sufficient to practice just that one deity. We go through four steps of feeling closer to the deity. First, there is a feeling that arises when we recognize the deity; and then second, the deity becomes like a friend. We establish a connection of love, like connecting with a friend. And

then third, we become even closer to the deity, like a family member. And then fourth, according to the Anuttarayoga Tantra, or the unsurpassed yoga tantra, in the end, we become non-dual with the deity. When we no longer grasp at duality, we become the deity; and along with that, we attain all the powers of the deity.

Q10. When you do your daily walking meditation, can we also follow behind you and walk with you?

RINPOCHE: You don't have to walk together with me, because that's not actually very important. Rather, you should "walk with my mind" — understand my mind. It is a mind of love and compassion; keep company with my mind, and not with my body. Actually, the reason I go for walks is mainly for my health, because I'm getting old. If you always sit and never move, you lose your mobility and feel heavy. For those health reasons, I need to walk; there's no need for you to follow me on my walks. However, walking can also become a meditation. It is said that you should practice the instruction of "making all walking a circumambulation." When I'm walking around, I recite a mantra, and whatever I see, I see it as the deity.

Milarepa said, "Walking becomes circumambulation. Eating becomes a feast offering. When your mind is purified, everything becomes a practice."

For example, I see the trees, the environment, and then the celestial palace of the deity. If you meditate in this way as you walk around, it becomes just like doing prostration or circumambulating. You can also think like this when you're driving your car. Everywhere you pass, and everyone you meet, you can see them as a celestial palace and a deity, and

think, "I'm really doing circumambulation." But, that is for you to do in your own practice; there is no need to follow me when I'm walking. The students of the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh also do walking meditation with their teachers, and it is very meaningful and beneficial. Milarepa said, "Walking becomes circumambulation. Eating becomes a feast offering. When your mind is purified, everything becomes a practice."

Q11. What is the Tibetan version of Kundalini yoga?

RINPOCHE: The Tibetan tradition of tummo and the Indian tradition were probably not very different, at least originally, because the Tibetan tradition of tummo originated in India. Actually,

according to the tradition we follow, it was taught by Naropa. In the Tibetan tradition of tummo, there is a refuge prayer that says, “I take refuge in my own channels, winds, and drops.” This refers to the ultimate nature of our subtle body; the subtle channels are the seed of the nirmanakaya, the subtle winds are the seeds of sambhogakaya, and

The subtle channels are the seeds of the nirmanakaya, the subtle winds are the seeds of sambhogakaya, and the subtle drops — the vital essences — are the seeds of the dharmakaya.

the subtle drops — the vital essences — are the seeds of the dharmakaya. When the mind is impure and we are ordinary beings, then those drops or bindus are the causes of samsara.

But when our mind becomes purified through the basis of bodhicitta, then the experience of bliss makes ordinary thoughts stop and we experience the four stages of the four types of joy. We progress along the stages of the path and we purify our mind. Then the drops will become pure — and the method for doing this is tummo practice. Through the tummo visualization, first, warmth arises in the navel area. Then that warmth becomes a blissful feeling, and through the blissful feeling, ordinary thoughts stop and the visualization of the deity becomes very clear. So, this is actually connected to shamatha practice. Ordinary people are attached to the feeling of sexual bliss, so one person becomes attached to another person, and that becomes the cause of samsara; their union becomes a cause of samsara.

But someone who understands the nature of the mind knows that, ultimately, within the mind, “self” and “others” do not exist. They also know that when they visualize a deity with a consort, such as Chakrasamvara yab-yum, there seems to be a duality of male and female, but when this

Tummo is a method for realizing this non-dual nature of the mind.

practice is actualized, the yab and the yum — the male and female — are a single union; they are not separate. In the mind, there is no distinction; there is no duality of male and female. Ultimately, the empty aspect is the female, the yum, and the bliss or clarity aspect is the male, the yab. That is the ultimate nature of our own mind — non-dual primordial

wisdom. Tummo is a method for realizing this non-dual nature of the mind.

When you practice tummo and have the experience of the energy rising and entering your crown chakra, if it makes you feel an uncomfortable pressure, it has to do with the disposition of your elements and channels. In that case, it is good to visualize the crown of your head like an open, blooming lotus flower; your crown opens up. It is important that you not follow in your mind to wherever you feel a sensation; don't go there. You should not be involved with any feelings that arise. Only focus on the opening lotus flower at your crown.

As the winds rise in tummo practice, we progress through four levels of increasing joy. First there is "joy," then "supreme joy," then "co-emergent joy"; and the last one is "devoid of joy." When we reach the highest point of joy, we realize vipassana, the nature of the mind. So, vipassana, shamatha, and those four joys in the tummo practice are all the same, as they are all methods for realizing the nature of mind. At that time, we are also practicing the generation stage. All of these practices are interrelated and serve the same purpose. For example, in this practice we visualize the deity in the yab-yum aspect because everything appears in that dualistic way to our dualistic perception of this world. We think that there is male and there is female; there are "self" and "others." Since everything appears in this separate, dualistic way, we first visualize it like that. But we must ultimately come to the point where all this dualistic grasping is given up.

Ultimately, the yab and the yum, and all distinctions must dissolve into non-dual primordial wisdom. But in the beginning, we must give rise to some bliss through the union of the yab and the yum. And then, on the basis of that bliss, we can recognize the nature of the mind — the realization of vipassana, special insight. The point of all these practices is to realize the single, non-dual basis of the mind. If we engage in these practices with attachment — with samsaric desire — then it becomes a cause of samara, and useless as a Dharma practice.

Q12. Could Master please tell us about dream yoga?

RINPOCHE: The most important instruction about understanding our dreams is to first understand the difference between our daytime perceptions and our dream perceptions. Normally, we think that the daytime perceptions are reality, our real life, and then at night, what we dream is all unreal, a fiction. But in reality, there is no difference at all; they are exactly the same. Now we are experiencing this life as a reality, as long as we have the karma to be here.

But, when that karma comes to an end, this life will actually become just like last night's fading dream.

In our dreams, we experience various states of happiness and suffering, just as we do during the day. Sometimes we can recognize it as a dream state; but, even though we know it's a dream state, we still experience various nightmares, for example. That is because there is self-grasping. We have to find a way to become free of self-grasping, because even if the dream appears as an illusory play to you, as long as there is self-grasping, there will always be fear. Only when self-grasping comes to an end, will the afflictions come to an end and fear not arise. Then, no frightening appearances or nightmares will be able to appear. But until self-grasping has come to an end, there will always be suffering and fear, because frightening appearances are the appearance of self-grasping. What appears does not actually inherently exist, it is actually empty; even if we recognize this, as long as we still have self-grasping, we will still have those perceptions. Habitual karmic tendencies are what have actually created this body. Now our mind is temporarily like a block of ice or a water bubble; eventually, our solid form will come to an end, will die. But then, even when we die, our habitual imprints will continue on. We can understand this by looking at our dreams. If we do not purify the habitual imprints and self-grasping now, then later, after we have died, they will continue to create appearances — but then they will become even more intense. Therefore, we must focus on purifying our self-grasping and habitual imprints now.

Some people train in dream yoga — that is, they train to recognize the dream state. For example, some find it easy to recognize the dream state when they experience fear in their dream, but there is still fear. Even though they know that it is a dream, they also know that they cannot stop it until they wake up. Only when they wake up do all those frightening experiences come to an end. Therefore, only recognizing it as a dream will not have the power to clear away our suffering. So, how can we clear away our experiences of suffering? In order to clear them away, we must clear away their causes — the afflictions, especially hatred and jealousy, and so on. Just being able to recognize the dream state will not be useful in clearing away our suffering. Even though we are practitioners, if we are not able to liberate our thoughts, we will not be able to liberate ourselves from suffering. In order to become liberated from suffering, we must separate from the causes of

suffering, and in order to do that, we must cultivate bodhicitta. Because we must separate from self-grasping, bodhicitta is the basis of all Dharma practices.

Jigten Sumgon said that the preliminary practices are more profound than the main-part practices. The preliminary practices are the cultivation of bodhicitta. Anything you practice on the basis of bodhicitta and altruistic mind will reduce self-grasping, and when it is gone, you will not have any more frightening dreams at all. Your dreams will be pleasant. Everyone will appear as a friend, because when there is love in your heart, everyone who appears is a friend. But on the other hand, even if you are a practitioner of the generation stage — you practice the deity and so on —if you still cling to your afflictions and self-grasping, then those who appear in dreams, and even the generation stage deity, can seem to be demons or an evil threat, because they are connected to your self-grasping and afflictions. What really appears to you is the force of self-grasping. In order to clear that away, we must apply a discriminating wisdom that recognizes the actual causes of our frightening perceptions. In brief, if you understand karma, then you will be diligent in practice. If you do not understand karma, then even if you practice the generation-stage visualizations, you will still not be able to remove your suffering. That is the fault of not really understanding karma.

In order to become liberated from suffering, we must separate from the causes of suffering, and in order to do that, we must cultivate bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the basis of all Dharma practices.

Q13. Does mercy killing create bad karma?

RINPOCHE: Mercy killing will not make very grave negative karma, but, there is still some fault in it. It will still create a karmic debt, a karmic creditor who will come back to harm you in a future life. When you kill somebody out of compassion, then there is some merit from the compassion, but there is also, of course, a fault from the killing. However, the fault is much smaller than that from ordinary killing. It is said that if killing is done with an afflicted motivation from self-grasping, then that one act of killing will lead to five hundred karmic creditors who will harm your life; the one act will multiply into five hundred. But to kill someone out of compassion, without any self-grasping, only creates one karmic debt instead of five hundred. With compassion, you accumulate great merit; that is a virtue. But then, there is still also the fault from killing. Some very high

practitioners are able to apply the deity visualization and mantra recitation of wrathful deities, and thus purify the negative karma, afflictions, and self-grasping of those beings that they kill, so they are actually liberated. Also, people often kill little insects or little creatures who cause a lot of harm to other beings. If we kill them with a good dedication or aspiration prayer for them, the fault is smaller.

Very often people ask questions about this, about how their houses are infested by insects or ants, and how to deal with it. Some other teachers would probably advise you not to kill them, but we have to consider the individual circumstances carefully. In general, if we kill them with an intention of love and compassion to prevent them from causing more harm, then the fault is much smaller. It's not ordinary killing. For example, if a bodhisattva eats meat compassionately, then the fault is smaller. In this case, the bodhisattva — and here I mean somebody with real courage — would think, "Even if I accumulate negative karma and I suffer from this, it doesn't matter. I don't care about myself, as long as I can free this being." If someone has such strong determination, strong compassion, then there is less fault in eating meat, for example. But what should people who have a lot of doubts do? First of all, we should think that the pests have their inferior bodies because in previous lives they only engaged in actions out of a mind of jealousy and anger. Therefore, they have now been born as these insects or scorpions or poisonous snakes, for example. They are manifestations of hatred, jealousy, and so on, and just seeing them makes us feel afraid and want to kill them. Also, when they are poisonous and might harm the human body, there is often no choice but to kill those creatures.

When it does come to that point where we really have no choice, there is a better way of doing it. First of all, we should regard them with compassion, think of their negative karma and the harm they are causing in those inferior bodies, and pray that in future lifetimes they not be born into such an inferior existence again. Then you can recite some Mani mantras for them. Even if you only recite one, it will benefit them. We have to consider the repercussions that come from those beings. For example, they infest one place and cause a lot of difficulty for someone, and then they increase, so more people experience hardship. In the end, they could infest an entire country; they could go on to cause a lot of harm. They are actually creating that harm, but through the force of karma, they don't know it. Therefore, with compassion, we should have the aspiration to

bring an end to their karmic existence, their negative existence that causes so much harm. In that particular case, it is actually better to kill them with compassion.

Q14. I have many thoughts during the first few minutes of meditation, but those thoughts go away quickly and my mind is empty. Does this mean I am doing the meditation the right way? Is the empty mind the result of good awareness?

RINPOCHE: When you meditate, thoughts will still arise. Just recognize those thoughts and leave them alone. If you just let them be as they are, they cannot really affect you, and they will dissipate just like waves on the ocean. Milarepa said you should meditate on your mind like an ocean. What do we do when waves arise? When waves arise, we see them as the natural, magical display of the ocean itself. The wave is not separate from the ocean, and the thought is not separate from the mind. It just arises — from no ground of arising, really. It does not abide anywhere, and it just dissolves back into the mind. You should just let it be as it is naturally, without doing anything to it, and the thought will naturally go away. Then, when the thoughts are pacified and there are no thoughts in your mind, the mind becomes very clear. That is the actual pure nature of the mind, which is like space, like a cloud-free sky. The thoughts are like clouds. Sometimes there are no clouds in the sky, and then you can see the sky and the sunlight very clearly. And when there are no thoughts in your mind, it becomes very clear, like sunlight. When you abide in this state, the clarity increases, and it is that clear awareness that you should sustain all the time as you meditate. If you're unable to sustain it, you can think of your guru, as the essence of the guru is actually your own mindfulness. In Mahamudra, it is explained that your own mindfulness and the guru are indivisible.

If you have strong devotion to your guru, then just thinking of your guru is like practicing mindfulness. For example, when a strong affliction arises, remember the guru and think, "What did my guru tell me? He taught me the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*." At that time, you should remember the words of the guru, and then, just by remembering his words, you will sustain mindfulness, and that becomes an antidote to the afflictions. The guru is your own mindfulness, and therefore, the practice of mindfulness is related to the practice of devotion. You can also think of the guru when you practice the generation stage. If you have such a guru when you practice Mahamudra, you can just think of that guru, who has the nature of your own mindfulness.

Our Mind and the Guru's Mind



The mind of the guru, the mind of the Buddha, and your own mind are one. When you understand this, you know that your mind is never actually separate from the guru's mind. We begin to understand this by identifying the nature of love and compassion; the actual guru is love and compassion, and whoever has love has the same mind. Love is always the same. The love of the guru and your own love — and everyone's love — have the same quality. It is the love that, for example, a mother has for her child. First you identify that feeling of love when it arises. That is the same kind of love for everyone, for any being, with or without a body; it is always the same love. The quality is the same, but there are differences in the strength and limits of love. When love arises in your

mind, you should recognize it as the same as the guru's love, except the guru's love is much greater than your love. The sangha and all the spiritual masters have love that is much greater than yours. The Buddha is also said to be one who loves all sentient beings. It is the same love; the only difference is in its strength and limits. The teacher's love is a boundless love, while our love usually has some limits. We love some, but we do not love others; it is a limited love. You recognize that you have the same kind of love, but you also recognize that yours is limited, and think, "I must increase this love." So first, recognize that feeling of love and that your love is the same as your guru's love. When you recognize that, you recognize relative bodhicitta.

The actual guru is love and compassion... The love of the guru and your own love — and everyone's love — have the same quality.

We must maintain sustain mindfulness in our meditation. When we meditate, we should first recognize all the thoughts — all the emotions, the afflictions, everything that arises in the mind. Especially when powerful afflictions, great suffering, and great problems arise, we must be able to recognize them. In order to know how high your realization of the view is, you should look at

your reaction when you encounter a negative circumstance. When you encounter a great difficulty or you feel a strong affliction — for example, when strong anger arises — at that time, you should remember to be mindful of the view. If you are able to sustain the view, then you will be able to stop thinking about the affliction. You have to remember the view of vipassana at that time. Look at the affliction as it arises, recognize it, and do not follow it. Then through practice, the affliction will eventually just go away. All those negative feelings and afflictions will disappear, and the mind will become very clear after they have gone. That clear mind that remains is the same as the guru's mind; there is no difference at all. It is the mindfulness which is the actual guru; that mindfulness is actually the ultimate guru, the ultimate lama.

In the beginning, the moment of clarity and recognition will not last very long. We will recognize some thoughts and the mind will be clear, but then more thoughts will arise again. The time we will be able to sustain mindfulness will be very short, but through practice, we have to extend that time longer and longer. We do that by countering every thought and every affliction that arises as they arise, again and again. An affliction arises; you apply an antidote, you're mindful, and it goes away. And then another one arises; and another one arises; and it goes on like that. We must habituate the antidote to each of those afflictions until they have all fallen apart, one by one. Eventually they will all settle naturally, and then the mind can just abide in its natural state. That is the mind of the guru, ultimate bodhicitta.

First, we gain an understanding of how our mindfulness and the guru's mindfulness are the same, and then we must practice continuously. At this point, there is still a difference between our mind and the guru's mind. The difference is not our thoughts and the afflictions, because afflictions also arise in the guru's mind. What arises is the same, but the difference is in how they are liberated, or how we deal with what arises. This is what makes the difference between an ordinary person and a lama. The afflictions arise in the same way, but how we deal with them differs. A spiritual teacher is able to release those afflictions. They do arise, but the teacher does not grasp at them but just lets them be, so they just dissolve again.

An ordinary person has the same affliction arise, but then they grasp at it. They think about it, over and over again, until they act out on it. The difference between a superior practitioner and an inferior, ordinary being is that ordinary beings hold onto their thoughts. They hold those

thoughts to be true and valid, and grasp at them again and again. The afflictions almost become like their friends; they support their afflictions. For example, they feel justified to fight back, to respond in some way, and to retaliate. They think they must hold on to that; they think that is a good thing to do. But a superior being will just let go of it. The fault really comes from holding on to the thoughts and afflictions that arise. But it is difficult to just let go, because we have habituated to that grasping since beginningless time up to now.

It is important to recognize that holding on to those afflictions will only lead to difficulty in all future

Ultimately, when all thoughts are liberated, your mind will actually be the mind of the guru — that is the realization of ultimate bodhicitta.

lifetimes. If you grasp at them, it can only lead to difficulties and faults, so it is better to just let it go and let them be. If you are actually able to let it go and liberate your own thought, your enemies and adversaries will slowly also become free of grasping. If you practice patience no matter what, then it is possible that your “enemy” will eventually become your friend. That is a temporary benefit that can come from liberating your thoughts. Ultimately, when all thoughts are liberated, your

mind will actually be the mind of the guru — that is the realization of ultimate bodhicitta. As we train in meditation, we should gradually realize that our own mind and the mind of the guru are indivisible.

If you have a guru that you trust very much, one that you’re very devoted to, then when you think of that guru in a moment of very strong devotion, your strong devotion actually has the power to stop all ordinary thinking. When strong devotion arises, all ordinary thoughts just stop, and at that moment, your mind and the guru’s mind are exactly the same, so your minds actually merge. Sometimes when people experience difficulties or when they are on the verge of dying, they are able to think of the guru and the guru appears to them. What appears to them is the guru’s form that they are familiar with. They have developed a habitual imprint of the guru in that form, so the guru appears in that form. What seems to appear is the guru’s form, however, what actually appears is the guru’s mind. It is really the mind of the guru that is perceived then.

People might think that what appears to them is not really the guru, but in fact, it is actually the mind of the guru. Even if you do not see the guru’s form, your mind still merges with the guru’s.

That is the quality of devotion to the guru; even without a form, the guru can still appear to you through the power of your devotion. Also, when you practice the generation stage of the deity, and you visualize the deity, there will be a flash of a moment where the deity appears for just an instant and then disappears again; but even for that short instant, what appears is the real deity. Likewise, when you think of the guru and the guru appears, that is the actual guru. And that guru in the nature of the mind, that mental form of the guru, is the mind.

The Three Kayas

That mind is beyond birth and death; that is the actual nature of the guru. The actual guru is not the guru's physical form; his physical form is the same as our own body. It will die one day; it is a compound, so it is impermanent. When the guru dies, his mind becomes sambhogakaya forms. Actually, the guru's form is the nirmanakaya and the guru's speech is the sambhogakaya. The guru's speech is the sambhogakaya because the guru uses his speech to explain Dharma to us, for example, how to practice the generation and completion stages. Then, if we practice what he has explained, our mind will become one with the guru's mind. When the disciple's mind merges with the guru's mind, it is like the mind seeing the mind. What we realize is not the guru's material, physical form, but his sambhogakaya form. Ultimately, on that basis, we realize the dharmakaya, the non-dual nature of mind. When we practice the generation stage, we will gradually be able to realize the Buddha's three kayas through our practice. First, the deity that we meditate on and visualize appears from the dharmakaya. The countless peaceful and wrathful sambhogakaya deities and so on appear from the dharmakaya.

The actual guru is not the guru's physical form. It is beyond birth and death, it is the actual nature of the guru.

We practitioners are nirmanakaya. The basis of our mind is buddha nature, and it is only due to some temporary karma of virtue and non-virtue that we appear in different shapes and forms in the six realms of samsara. But the basis of our mind is always the same. Our buddha nature never declines; it never becomes defiled or spoiled, but always remains exactly as it is. It is only temporary that we appear in this form, which is like an ice-block floating in water. The Buddha himself said that within every sentient being is a buddha that is only obscured by temporary stains. Those temporary stains are stains of self-grasping.

Deity Yoga

First, we perceive a “self,” and then, due to that, we give rise to afflictions, we engage in actions, and we accumulate habitual imprints. Those habitual karmic imprints then create various shapes, forms, and bodies. Once the body has been created, the speech is created, and then a certain

We purify the body through the generation-stage visualization, the speech through mantra recitation, and the mind through abiding in single-pointed samadhi.

mental state is created. In order to purify those obscurations of body, speech, and mind, we practice deity yoga. When we visualize the form of the deity in the generation stage, we purify the obscurations of the ordinary body and arise in the rainbow-like form of the deity. Then we recite the deity’s mantra to purify the defilements of our speech. Normally, we grasp at the various things that we hear, and by reciting the mantra, we stop our grasping at ordinary sound. Therefore,

when we visualize the deity and recite the mantra, we are purifying all our grasping at ordinary forms and sounds. As the mind becomes free of all grasping at forms and sounds, its clarity increases more and more. We purify the body through the generation-stage visualization, the speech through mantra recitation, and the mind through abiding in single-pointed samadhi.

All phenomena encompassed by samsara and nirvana have never truly existed from their own side. All are merely the spontaneous reflections of mind and primordial knowing awareness. The primordial knowing awareness is nothing other than the nature of mind. Right at this very moment, for each and every one of us, the true nature of our mind is this: equanimity, wisdom, primordial knowing, unceasing present awareness, and emptiness, beyond any conceptual constructs. This can be explained by way of the three avenues of liberation. The first avenue of liberation is emptiness. It is not something newly created, but rather it is innately present, and thus its nature is unconditioned. The essence of emptiness is free from all labels, and it cannot be described or fit into our conceptual mind as an object of understanding. That it is beyond any characteristics to pinpoint it is the second avenue of liberation. In this dharma of equanimity beyond anything to be

Three avenues of liberation: emptiness, being beyond characteristics, and not aspiring to a result.

attained and any act of attaining something, there is nothing to which one can aspire. Thus, the third avenue of liberation is not aspiring to a result.

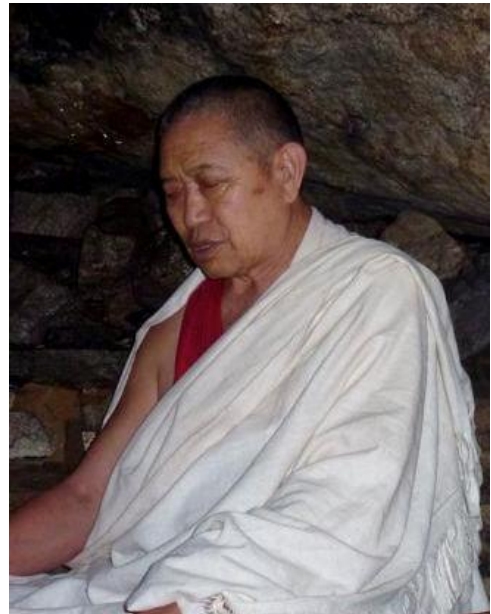
When you generate the mandala and deities during deity practice, first you visualize the immeasurable palace of the deity, and then you generate the deities inside it. There are two stages in generating the immeasurable palace. The first is known as “purification of the environment,” and the second is the actual development of the immeasurable palace.

In the first stage, what is being purified is the formation of the world where sentient beings are born. First, we start with the element of space and with the mind, which is the principal cause of the formation of the world. The specific karma of sentient beings, collective and similar in nature, forms specific world systems that appear to beings who share similar karma and whose habitual imprints influence their mind and perceptions. Their collective karma ripens as a collective environment shared by those sentient beings. This refers to the mandala of the four continents and Mount Meru. They are purified into a buddha field, where buddhas awaken the innately pure space-phenomenon, dharmadhatu. The agents of purification are the six syllables, *E Yam Ram Bam Lam and Sum*, which purify the five elements and conceptual grasping at the five elements. Here, you should have the yogi’s confidence in the unity of the basic ground and result, remembering that in their innately pure state, the five elements are the five female buddhas of the five families.

Next, we generate the deity’s immeasurable palace to purify the abodes of sentient beings, where they live and stay, such as houses and so forth. Conceptual grasping at ordinary abodes is purified into the primordial wisdom of the original basic space of dharmadhatu wisdom — free of all elaborations; according to the teachings, this is the abode of all buddhas. The deity’s innate, immeasurable palace is thus the mansion of the natural state of the mind, the manifestation of innately pure appearances. The essence of pure appearances, the agent of purification is taken onto the path as the palace of the innately pure appearances of the buddha fields.

Front-generation

At this point in the generation stage, there is a duality: someone who purifies and something that is to be purified. As we have said, the outer universe is the creation of the collective karma or imprints of the sentient beings living there. Exactly how is it created? For example, when you dream at night, the various appearances in your dreams are actually only the appearances of your own mind. From that one mind, everything else appears; your mind creates an entire dream universe of all sentient beings, and all kinds of things happen in your dreams. Everything is created by the mind; all appearances originate only from that mind. There appears to be a duality, but really, it is only the natural projection of your own mind, like a



miraculous play of the mind. We must understand the quality of purifying the mind and the fault of not doing so. If we do not purify the mind, we cling to this world, to this life, as having reality, as being real. Later, when we die, we carry this clinging attachment with us, continue to wander in samsara, and continue to experience greater suffering. We will never become free of suffering as long as we carry that grasping at the ordinary world with us.

The Universe and the Immeasurable Palace

As we have said, we see everything as the deity's immeasurable palace. So, what is the benefit of seeing everything in this way? Beyond just picturing it as a mandala, we first have to understand how this universe comes into being. What is its true nature? Its nature has been pure from the very beginning. It is said that all phenomena of samsara and nirvana have the nature of three kayas, and nothing transcends that nature. Therefore, we samsaric sentient beings are actually nirmanakayas. Nirmanakayas appear in pure and impure forms. Ultimately, everything is pure on the basis, which means that everything is empty by nature. Nothing that appears exists inherently. This is why they call it "nirmanakaya," which means an emanation, everything is just an emanation. In order to purify our belief in the substantial existence of the reality that we perceive, we must first understand how we are all "emanation bodies," or nirmanakayas. To

understand this, we must first understand the nature of the five elements. We think that the outer universe is so vast and limitless, but it actually just consists of the same matter as our own body. Our body is like a microcosm of the entire universe; they are made of the same substances. No matter how vast the universe is, it just consists of the five elements, and nothing in the universe transcends those five elements. Since that is also the nature of your own body, it, too, is an emanation, an illusory plane.

For example, consider the elements. Fire has the quality of burning something, but once it is extinguished, where does it go? We cannot actually locate the fire, and we cannot see where it comes from and where it goes. It has just a natural existence — it just appears naturally. And the same is true for the other five elements. They are natural appearances; they are emanations or illusory planes that appear but lack inherent existence. Therefore, the five elements are said to be the five female buddhas. And then, within the minds of sentient beings, there are the five afflictions, but when we give rise to bodhicitta, they become the five wisdoms. Our mind is just like a seed that can grow into the flower of enlightenment. But if we do not cultivate that seed, it will go to waste and we will continue to wander in samsara. This is how we need to understand it.

We grasp at this outer world as a substantially existing universe, and that grasping is purified by seeing it as an immeasurable palace, the mandala of the deity. And then our grasping at the true existence of sentient beings is purified by visualizing the deity. Khenpo Samdup's book [*Stages of Meditation*] says, "We purify the support and the supported." The support mentioned here is the universe, which is the immeasurable palace; and the supported are its inhabitants, which we see as the deity.

Depending on our mental capacity and disposition, we can practice any deity's generation stage. We practice a deity with the understanding that the universe and all sentient beings are actually included within the body and mind of every sentient being. Every being is like a microcosm of the outer universe and all sentient beings. It is said in Anuttarayoga tantra that everything that appears and exists is contained within one's own body and mind. Although the five elements, for example, appear in so many different ways, they all are included within one single element, just as many

different rainbow lights which appear to be separate all emerge as the natural projection of a single crystal. Even though we now understand this, there is still grasping in our mind.

The Four Different Types of Generation Stage

In order to purify that grasping at our ordinary body, we practice generation stage visualization. There are four different types of generation stage, which correspond to the four different ways in

In general, the generation stage purifies birth.

which we can take birth. For each way of taking birth, there is one type of generation that corresponds to it. In general, the generation stage purifies birth. It helps us when we take birth again. For example, the generation called the “five actualizations” corresponds to the way of taking birth from a womb. It is a more elaborate generation stage, with a visualization of five steps. For taking birth from an egg, there is a four-step generation called the “four vajras.” There is a three-step generation related to birth from heat and moisture, and an instant generation which corresponds to miraculous, instantaneous birth. These are the four different types of generation stages, which we practice according to our own dispositions and mental capacities. Understanding them is very beneficial for when we actually take birth again.

By training in the generation stage, when we are in the bardo and about to take birth again, we might be able to see our parents as the deity — for example, as Chakrasamvara in yab-yum aspect. Then, seeing our own consciousness as a Hum syllable, we enter the womb. That will be of benefit in the bardo. The benefit right now in this life is that it helps eliminate our grasping at the substantial reality of our perceptions. We create a pure illusory body by visualizing the deity. Ultimately, when we attain enlightenment and really become the deity, the countless pure lands of the deities are actually the projection of bodhicitta. Therefore, when we attain enlightenment, we will not just disappear, but countless pure lands will manifest as the natural projections of our bodhicitta. Those countless pure lands are actually there, and they have what are called the “five certainties of the sambhogakaya pure land.” They do appear, but there is no dualistic perception of them; when you attain enlightenment, you will recognize that the pure lands are manifestations of your own mind, while at the same time, you can also enjoy them.

For example, you can enjoy the pure land of Dewachen, but without any deliberate action of word or thought, because you understand that Dewachen is the manifestation of your own mind. But without thoughts or effort, you can still partake in the pleasure of that pure land which is your own mind. Right now, we can practice this. We can see forms; we can see people; we can see everything as it is. We can also talk to people normally, but at the same time in the mind, there is no thought at all. There is no thought of “This is how it is, this is not how it is;” or “It exists, it doesn’t exist;” there is no thinking at all. There is no dualistic grasping. And so, if you can accomplish that, you will actually be very close to accomplishing the pure lands, because in the pure lands, there is no dualistic grasping; at that time, it has all been purified. There is nothing to be purified; there is no active purifying. When that happens, you gain control over the pure lands of the dharmakaya and the sambhogakaya, and you will also be able to enjoy them. This is why the translation of the term *sambhogakaya* is “enjoyment body.” It is because the sambhogakaya appearance is recognized as one’s own mind — one’s own projection — but at the same time, one can enjoy that self-projection. The self-projections of the pure lands and the countless buddha forms and so on are beyond birth and death, beyond arising and decline; they are unchanging.

Self-projection

We have said that when we attain the pure lands, we will enjoy or partake in our own self-projections. This is actually what all beings do; the difference is that they don’t know that they’re doing it. But everything that appears is like the projection of a rainbow from a crystal. All that appears is the union of clarity and emptiness. From an impure perspective, we don’t know it, but we are actually partaking in our own self-projections. So, no matter whether we are enlightened or ordinary, we are always partaking in the projections of our own mind.

For example, in this world, places where fighting and wars are ongoing are the manifestations of karma accumulated with hatred and anger. There are people who spend their entire lives fighting with each other, creating more and more suffering. That is the self-projection of hatred. Their mind of hatred is projected, and they partake in it. They don’t like partaking in it, because nobody likes to fight and be in a war, but they can’t help but partake in their own self-projections, because all of it is the manifestation of their own mind. The only difference is they don’t know it and think it is separate from them. But really, what they’re doing is just the same thing as the pure beings in pure lands: experiencing their own self-projections. When there is dualistic grasping, beings

accumulate karma with an afflicted mind. We perceive a duality of “self” and “others,” and as long as we see things in this way, we keep accumulating more and more afflictions, and karma upon karma. We believe, for example, “He’s hurting me,” and so, “We will hurt them in return.” And this all comes back to us in future lifetimes, so we are born in a hell realm or as a frightening animal such as a poisonous snake. All of this is the projection of our own mind, of our own anger, for example.

Everything is actually the projection of our own mind, and we always partake in the projection. It’s just that we don’t realize that that’s what we’re doing. But now that we know it, we can make a choice: Which kind of self-projection would we like to enjoy, to experience and partake in? If you wish to partake in an experience of unity free of self-grasping, then you need to purify the mind; ultimately, when the mind is purified, there is only mind. Ultimately, there is no one who purifies, nothing to be purified, and no purification. What is to be purified is the mind, and the purification is also the mind of bodhicitta, so everything is complete within the mind. The dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, the nirmanakaya—all are complete within the mind. This is a point you should understand. Then you will understand how the pure lands are the manifestations of your own mind. You do not just disappear, you just experience the projections of your own mind. When you understand this, you will not want to get angry anymore.

***When the mind is purified,
there is only mind.
Ultimately, there is no one
who purifies, nothing to be
purified, and no purification.***

You will get tired of getting angry. Actually, this is in two lines in the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*: “All suffering without exception comes from wishing for one’s own happiness. The

***All beings always experience
the projections of their own
mind, but the difference is
just knowing or not knowing
that this is so.***

perfect Buddhas arise from the altruistic mind.” Wherever we are born in the six realms, even in the higher realms, there’s only suffering. In the higher realms, there is the suffering of change and so on, and in the lower realms, there is suffering upon suffering — endless suffering. When you see all those self-projections of various states of mind, you will finally

become exhausted by all that suffering, and really want to become liberated from samsara. Actually, all beings always experience the projections of their own mind, but the difference is just knowing or not knowing that this is so.

So, my Dharma friends, today I will give an introduction to Mahamudra. Because there were so many questions yesterday, there is still something left to say about the generation stage and the visualizations of the immeasurable palace and the deity. There is a lot of material in the different scriptures on these topics. As we have mentioned, there are pure and impure appearances of the illusory forms. On the outer level, the universe is compounded, and so to us, it appears as impure illusory forms. When the impurity is purified — that is, when self-grasping and grasping at a substantial reality have been purified — then the subtle essences of those impure forms become apparent. From an impure perspective, we perceive them as the five elements. For example, we perceive a tree and flowers and so on, all the various things made of the five elements. But from a pure perspective, we perceive them as five-colored rainbow lights. The subtle essences of the five elements — earth, water, fire, wind, and space — appear as five-color rainbow lights, and that is the pure illusory body.

So therefore, from a pure perspective, everything is naturally established as the immeasurable palace of the deity; this is also what is meant by the “celestial palace.” Regarding the form of the deity, from an impure perspective, we have the compounded body of aggregates, which is undeveloped, like a flower bud. But, if it is developed through cultivating bodhicitta, it opens up into a flower in full bloom. The body develops through the method of ripening, and then, as a result, turns into a full-blooming flower. It is like the progression from seed to flower bud, to flower, and then again, the seed coming from the flower.

When we do the generation stage visualization, we should just have an awareness that everything is the immeasurable palace, the deity — that everything in the generation stage is here. It is sufficient to simply have an awareness of all that being here, but what we should mainly focus on is the mantra recitation and the mantra garland that surrounds the seed syllable of the deity. So, I shall give a brief explanation on that.

Self-generation



There are three aspects to practicing the deity. They are the clear visualization, the recollection of purity, and the cultivation of divine pride, or the confidence of being the deity. In the ideal case, high practitioners can practice exactly as it is taught in the tantra; they can visualize very clearly and also recollect the purity, and so on. It is very powerful to practice in this way. But for a beginning practitioner who is not able to do all that, what is most important is the divine pride or confidence. To resolve “Am I really the deity or not?” What is important for the beginning practitioner is to gain confidence in actually being the deity. First and foremost, we are actually connected to the deity on the basis of buddha nature. Our buddha nature is the

same as the deity.

For example, if you have a hundred different light bulbs, then they appear as a hundred different lights, but ultimately, there is only one light. In just the same way, the nature of the mind is exactly the same in buddhas and sentient beings. When you practice vipassana and see that your mind is very clear and vast like space, through seeing that, you can understand and develop trust that the empty continuum of mind is a single basis within which you are one with the deity. Ideally, you understand the non-dual nature of the mind, non-dual awareness. And, if you understand that, you can understand how your mind is really non-dual with the deity. Or we can first think our closest friends are the same as us; for example, you can think, “We two have the same mind.” Since we have the same mind, what is the difference between our mind and the deity's? The difference is that the deity also has great compassion. Therefore, if you cultivate love and compassion, whenever great compassion arises in your mind, you can be confident that your mind is actually the mind of the deity. When you understand this, you will make an effort to cultivate compassion.

The Essence of the Deity's Mind

The essence of the deity's mind is the union of emptiness and compassion. We have to be connected to the deity in these two ways in order to actualize the deity; it is just like needing two electrical cords to connect in order to produce light — they have to come together. The first cord we already have: we have the same empty basis of mind. And the second cord, the electricity cord, is love and compassion; when we cultivate that, we produce light —we become the deity. All the qualities of the deity come from that union of emptiness and compassion. When compassion arises, we can be confident that that really is the mind of the deity — “Now I am no different from the deity.” The essence of the deity's compassion is represented by the seed syllable, for example, the Hrih or the Hum, and so on. We visualize the seed syllable and then the mantra garland — the mantra that is to be recited — around it. There are different lengths of mantras and mantra garlands; there are longer ones, medium ones, and shorter ones. The shortest one is called the “heart essence,” or the “quintessence” mantra. The mantra garlands stand upright around the seed syllable.

The essence of the deity's mind is the union of emptiness and compassion.

If our practice is explained according to the four branches of approach and accomplishment, as in the old tantric system (the Nyingma), then in the first branch, the approach, when we recite the mantra, we first recognize the deity. When our practice is explained according to the new tantric transmission (the sarma), those four branches of tantra are all arranged into four separate classes of tantric practices. In the Nyingma system, within one single practice, all four branches are complete — the approach, close approach, accomplishment, and great accomplishment. Therefore, they are a bit easier to understand, since they're all arranged in one practice. The section of Khenpo's book [*Stages of Meditation*] about the generation stage explains clarity, purity, and divine pride, so you can read it and discuss it with each other later. I have only given a brief introduction to it.

The Mantra Garland and Mantra Recitation

Today we will talk about the completion stage, Mahamudra. But first, a few more words about the mantra garland and the mantra recitation: When we recite the mantra, we are often given a specific number of mantras to accumulate, a few hundred thousand or so. When we hear this, we

tend to focus only on the numbers, but that is not what it is really about. As we go through the four branches of approach and accomplishment, there is a process of habituation in the mind. In the beginning, during the approach, we first visualize each syllable in the mantra. We visualize the seat of sun and moon, and then on top of that, we visualize each mantra syllable standing next to each other. We place each of those mantra syllables around the seed syllable. They are standing still at that point. In the approach, the first branch, we just visualize those mantra syllables until we can see them clearly.

This branch is like becoming familiar with the deity; we visualize this over and over again. Also, while we visualize those mantra syllables, we should recognize that the mantra syllables themselves are the deity. This is one of the many benefits of the mantra garland. First, we visualize those syllables until that becomes very clear. Then in the next branch, the close approach, the mantra garland begins to rotate. The mantra garland, which we can see clearly, slowly begins to spin like a prayer wheel. There is already great benefit in a physical prayer wheel, but when you can visualize it in your mind, there are even greater benefits. The close approach is like becoming friends with the deity. In this branch, the mantra garland begins to circle. At first it begins to circle slowly, and then it gradually accelerates to spin faster and faster, until it is spinning so fast you cannot see it anymore. It is like the engine of a jet plane; you can see a large wheel when it isn't moving, but when it begins to spin and accelerate, it reaches a point where it is spinning so fast you cannot see it at all anymore. The only thing we perceive is the sound it makes. Just like that, the mantra garland spins very fast and produces the natural sound of the mantra.

The plane's engine is a good example. It seems like it is not there because it is too fast for our eyes, but if we stuck our hands into it, they would get chopped up. It is powerful and it produces its sound. This is just like the mantra garland. The mantra produces a natural sound, and you can listen to it at home and recite while you listen and visualize it in this way. You train the mind to spin the mantra garland until you are able to spin it very fast. When that is accomplished, you arrive at the third branch, the accomplishment. By this point, self-grasping has already become much weaker, and bodhicitta, love, and compassion have increased. A natural compassion for all sentient beings will be present in the mind. Now the mantra garland is spinning so fast that light rays radiate and gather back. In Khenpo's book [*Stages of Meditation*], it says we visualize those

light rays radiating and gathering back, but the “light rays” are actually rays of compassion. The stronger your compassion, the more pervasive it will be. Just to give a small example: when two friends love each other, because their minds are the same, they feel happy next to each other. Or if you love your cat or your dog, they will want to stay next to you. If you do not love them, they will not want to be near you. That is the power of love. Although we cannot see it directly with our eyes, there really is love radiating out. That love pervades all beings. When you feel compassion for all beings in the three realms of samsara, then that love, that compassion, will pervade them all, wherever space pervades. In our practice, the light rays radiate and gather. Here, “radiate” means they go out, and they purify the obscurations of sentient beings. They are like warmth

The real meaning behind the light-rays visualization is that when we cultivate compassion for sentient beings, that compassion truly is all-pervasive and can destroy the self-grasping of sentient beings because our minds are connected.

melting blocks of ice, and then all sentient beings “melt” into the deity. They also radiate to all the pure lands, where they emanate countless gods and goddesses who make offerings to the buddhas of the pure lands. This is how we should visualize, according to the text. But actually, the real meaning behind this visualization is that when we cultivate compassion for sentient beings, that compassion truly is all-pervasive and

can destroy the self-grasping of sentient beings because our minds are connected. So, it does actually accomplish the benefit of sentient beings.

And, regarding the pure lands: the pure lands are also created by bodhicitta. Within the pure lands, all the offering substances are naturally present; it is actually bodhicitta that naturally produces all of those offerings. The offerings of the “light rays” are mental offerings, and between material and mental offerings, it is said that the mentally created offerings are of even greater benefit. Because your mind pervades space, all of space becomes pervaded by offerings made to all those buddhas in those countless pure lands. In the Prayer for Excellent Conduct, it says “the power of all-pervasive love.” There is nothing which is not pervaded by love and compassion. If you give rise to anger, for example, that instantly makes suffering pervade. But the power of love is hundreds of times more powerful than that, so it has the power to pervade everything. That is what radiates out when the light rays radiate; it is love that radiates out. That is the third branch, the accomplishment.

The fourth branch is the great accomplishment. Great Accomplishment is also the meaning of “Dzogchen.” When we come to the Dzogchen, or the branch of great accomplishment, we are already able to radiate those light rays of love and compassion. When we arrive at this point, as we radiate rays of love, we realize that self and others are actually non-dual, that we do not exist separately. We then realize that the minds of buddhas and sentient beings are not separate.

During the great accomplishment, you realize that your own mind and the deity’s mind are actually indivisible. You are one. This is how we must gradually practice when we recite the mantra. It is not just about accumulating a certain number of mantras that makes us accomplish it; we have to look at our own personal experience to see how far we have progressed on the branches. Some people move through the different branches faster, and others take longer to accomplish each of the branches. We cannot judge our accomplishment only by looking at the number of mantras we accumulate.

COMPLETION STAGE MEDITATION



Through the generation stage, we train in the way in which we take birth, so there are four different types of generation stage to correspond to the four ways of taking birth. After the generation stage comes the completion stage — the dissolution — and by practicing that, we train in the process of death. It is certain that we will die, and the completion stage explains the process that is that illusion of death. In the completion

stage, all outer surroundings, the entire universe — everything — dissolves into emptiness. It illustrates that all existence is compounded, and therefore impermanent, and will dissolve into emptiness. We look at our body, and that body will become emptiness. That body will die. That body actually has the same nature as the outer universe and the immeasurable palace; everything dissolves. The elements dissolve into each other. When we die, first the earth element dissolves into water, then water into fire, fire into wind, and wind into consciousness, and then consciousness dissolves into an unconscious state. At that point, the consciousness separates from the warmth of the body. Consciousness separating from that life-warmth is what we call “dying.” That is when the consciousness leaves the body and the body dies. Actually, every night when we go to sleep, we experience a more subtle version of dying. As long as we still have some time left in our life span, we will again wake up from sleeping. We can also observe that dissolution by looking at the dissolution of our dream state. The practice of dissolution is the completion stage.

By practicing the completion stage — the dissolution — we train in the process of death.

First, we visualized everything in the generation stage, and then all of that dissolves. For example, the retinue deities dissolve into the principal deities, then the yum dissolve into the yab, and the yab then dissolves into the Hum at the heart. And then the Hum also slowly dissolves. We do a

mental visualization of this dissolution. In stages, everything finally gathers into the mind and we rest within a state of Mahamudra. After the yab has dissolved into the Hum, the Hum dissolves, starting from its bottom part — called the “shapkyu,” it looks like a hook. First that part dissolves, and then slowly the rest dissolves upwards to the crescent moon — the half circle — and then into the drop, and then that dissolves into the subtle string. Only a very subtle nada string remains, floating in empty space. And then that, too, becomes non-referential and dissolves into space. That is the completion stage, and we rest our mind within its natural state—the view without grasping at anything at all. The completion stage and Mahamudra are, therefore, really related to each other. You can read about it in Khenpo’s book [*Stages of Meditation*] on page 120. There is a very excellent introduction to it in the book. You can read this at home and practice the completion stage like that again and again, until you obtain stability and you can visualize how everything dissolves.

The Hum has dissolved, and then the nada string has become more and more subtle and dissolved, and then everything has dissolved into space. Then you should just rest for a little while — for however long you can, even for just a minute or two — within the inner state that is without

When you wake up from sleeping, to remember the deity the moment you wake up is actually the instruction for attaining enlightenment as sambhogakaya.

grasping at anything at all, the natural state of the mind. After that, in an instant, you appear as the deity. You visualize the deity. Dissolution is important, but arising again is also very important. For example, when you wake up from sleeping, to remember the deity the moment you wake up is actually the instruction for attaining enlightenment as sambhogakaya: to awaken from sleep in the nature of the deity, without any other

thought before that. Once you begin to have ordinary thoughts again, you become confused. When you die, it will be just like a vase filled with water is breaking, so then the water must be caught by another vessel. If the “vessel” that appears in that instant is the deity, then the “water” will be poured into the “vessel” of the deity and you will become the deity. But, if you don’t think of the deity and instead think of your “self,” then the “water” will fall to the ground and become defiled, and you will become confused. It will be very important to instantly, without any other thought in between, arise as the deity, which is just like remembering the deity upon awakening in the morning.

So now in your practice, you should not focus too much on the outer immeasurable palace and the visualizations of the outer mandala. For now, just focus on the form of the deity, and train your mind, over and over again, in the whole process of visualization. You visualize the deity, and then the deity dissolves; it dissolves into the Hum, and then it arises again, and then you dissolve it again. You train in this, over and over again. When everything has dissolved, you rest for a little while in the view, in the nature of the mind. And then again, in an instant, you arise as whichever deity you are practicing, without allowing any other thoughts to intervene. In this way, you train many times, over and over again: generation, completion, resting in the view, arising, and repeat. Also train in awakening from sleep and instantly remembering the deity. If you are able to remember the deity the very moment you wake from sleep, then you really gain an understanding of the completion stage. The essence of the completion stage after the dissolution is actually related to Mahamudra. From the time where everything has dissolved, everything has become empty, until you arise again as the deity, we should recognize that that is Mahamudra.

In the completion stage, we train in the dissolution and the arising. The deity that arises is what remains in all your day-to-day activities. In your activities, whenever you think of the deity, that is actually mindfulness. The deity becomes your mindfulness, and with that mindfulness, in all your activities, you recognize whichever faults arise in your mind. The method for sustaining mindfulness on an ongoing basis is summarized in verse number 36 of the *Thirty-seven Bodhisattva Practices*.

Now we come back to page 120 of *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup. There is a section which comes from *Chakya Chenpo, the Co-emergent Mahamudra*, which is an authentic way of explaining Mahamudra's nature. First, I will read it in English and you should meditate on its meaning. Many of you have heard many explanations of Mahamudra before, so now we will just read this section.

How to Meditate on the Completion Stage of Wisdom

In addition, in the completion stage, when resting the mind and completely relaxing the mind in its natural state, there is this vivid, open, clear awareness. Look directly at the essence of this mind. What is it like? Really look into the nature of your own mind and see for yourself. Once you have become conversant in this practice and you have

conviction, there is the sense of mind as being this vivid presence, but without anything to pinpoint or identify. There is just this clear, vivid, open awareness that is present and aware, yet, there is no possible way to articulate, conceptualize, or define it as being like this or like that. It is just knowing, clear, and unceasing, vivid, present, nakedly aware. It is like you are seeing something you never saw before. You are experiencing something you never experienced before. You know it; you believe it. You are sure, but you cannot put it into words. This is what is known as completion stage. The awareness, this present knowing, this clear, open, unborn, un-static, unceasing, vivid presence is also what is known as Mahamudra, or Dharmakaya. This is also the ultimate, true Three Jewels of refuge, the true meaning or essence of the mantra, mandala, and so forth. Right there in that moment of knowing, the three kayas are encompassed. The basic nature that cannot be pinpointed or fixed anywhere at all is Dharmakaya. The natural radiance that is never ceasing is Sambhogakaya. These two kayas non-dual, non-fixed are Nirmanakaya.

The awareness, this present knowing, this clear, open, unborn, un-static, unceasing, vivid presence is also what is known as Mahamudra, or Dharmakaya.

This very mind of yours, this continuum, this original primordial knowing, innately aware, vividly clear and present, is emptiness and compassion inseparable, the inseparability of the two truths, the inseparability of skillful means and wisdom, the inseparability of the development and completion stages. It is only a matter of relaxing the mind in its natural state and not deviating from that nature of emptiness-clarity, emptiness-awareness. There is nothing else to meditate on, no meditation outside of and apart from this. During the four daily activities, maintain your awareness without wavering. Within that state, whatever thoughts and emotions arise, simply recognize them.

By doing so, you will naturally be cleared, like snowflakes falling into a lake. By sustaining this over a long period of time, eventually you will experience being naturally in this state without having to place your mind there. Then, even in the four daily activities, you will be in a state of ever increasing naked awareness of clarity and emptiness non-dual.

To introduce thoughts as Dharmakaya, when the mind is let go, relaxing in its natural state, look directly into the essence of mind itself, this open, vivid, present awareness, clear and without thoughts. As you are resting in this nature, whatever thoughts surface, look directly into the essence of the thoughts. Meditate as before and gain conviction. These very thoughts that are unceasing are nakedly present, clarity-emptiness. Consider, for example, the waves that rise and fall on the surface of the ocean — they are the ocean. There are no ocean waves apart from the ocean. There is no ocean outside of or apart from the waves. It is just like that. From the space of clarity and emptiness, thoughts arise, but these thoughts are indivisible with the clarity-emptiness. When you look into the essence of a thought, there is nothing to apprehend. Where is the thought located? The thought itself is non-conceptual. This makes your heart fill with joy and wonder.

A negative thought does not need to be rejected or rid from your mind. You need not try to find some wisdom to counteract the negative thought. Whatever is holding you down, if you realize this extraordinary path, in which simply recognizing whatever arises enables it to naturally release on its own, then you will become a buddha in one lifetime.

Whatever thoughts or emotions arise, look directly into their essence and rest there. When you do this, the thoughts or emotions naturally self-release for they have no intrinsic realness.

If strong desire emotion arises, do not follow after it or get lost in it. Instead, look directly into the essence of that desire and rest your mind there without wavering. When desire arises, it is rootless and groundless. This is known as not rejecting desire, but rather as desire purified into its own nature, desire

liberated in its own ground. That itself is discriminating wisdom. That itself is Buddha Amitabha. In the same way, at the arising of the five emotional poisons, do not follow after or indulge in them, but look into their essence and rest there. By doing so, the emotions and thoughts are pure in their own ground, are naturally free in their own nature. They arise, but they are rootless. These are the five wisdoms. These are the five Buddhas. Whatever thoughts or emotions arise, look directly into their essence and rest there. When you do this, the thoughts or emotions naturally self-release for they have no

intrinsic realness. This practice is from the oral instructions for taking the five poisons onto the path. This practice should be understood and sustained.

Questions and Answers

Q1. If primordial wisdom is originally pure and empty, how and why did obscurations, and consequently samsara, begin or appear? How did duality arise out of indivisible clarity?

RINPOCHE: You look at your mind and a thought arises, and then you grasp at that thought and you accumulate karma. And so, that is how it always begins. Other than that, there is no other beginning point. However, whenever you recognize a thought, then you are liberated. That is where it always begins.

Later, when we die and lose the body, in the subtle dissolution there are appearances of redness, whiteness, and then blackness, and then we fall unconscious; and then we awaken again from that unconscious state, and the first thing that arises is a perception of “I,” and “I am,” and “I have died,” and so on. This is where samsara begins. This is where the samsara of the next life begins. But if you understand the view of Mahamudra, then the thoughts of “I” and “I am” do not arise at that point. There is no self-grasping. You awaken in the view, and that is liberation from samsara. You can only see for yourself in your own mind where samsara begins; you cannot find the beginning anywhere outside of yourself.

Q2. Because I am half-paralyzed, it is very difficult for me to sit straight, and I cannot sit for a long time. When I meditate lying down, however, I become sleepy very easily; therefore, what should I do?

RINPOCHE: First of all, you don't have to sit up straight; as you said, you can meditate lying down. When you're lying down and not feeling sleepy yet, you should look into a cloud-free sky and think of nothing at all and merge your mind with the outer sky. That will also be good for curing your illness. When you're not sleepy, you should meditate in that way, and if you fall asleep, you sleep. But the moment you wake up again, you should try to immediately go back into the state of meditation. You can practice like this.

Q3. When I watch my mind, sometimes a thought arises. When I intentionally watch that thought, it subsides. At that time, confusion arises, because I am not sure whether the one who recognized it and the one who is being recognized are one and the same, or they are different? Suddenly I lose my mindfulness at that very moment. Please guide me as to what I should do at that moment.

RINPOCHE: You shouldn't think about what that thought is. You shouldn't analyze the thought. A thought arises and it disappears; you shouldn't think about what that thought is, shouldn't investigate or analyze that thought. Just let it be. Milarepa said that when you meditate, you just sustain a completely empty space and habituate to it. For this, you need to practice on an ongoing basis. To "stay within the state" means that thoughts will arise, but as you sustain the empty state, the thoughts disappear again on their own. When a thought dissolves into the dharmakaya, then isn't that the actual habituation of meditation? The point of meditation is that the thought must dissolve. If you don't meditate continuously, the thoughts do not subside. If the thoughts do not subside, you are not actually meditating. When you meditate, whatever thought arises, if you just let it be and you don't think about it, it will just dissolve. The point of meditation is that the thoughts must continue to dissolve one by one.

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One might think that this means we cannot move at all, we cannot act at all, we can't do anything. But this is not the case. For example, if you eat some food and you know it tastes nice and you like the flavor, you can recognize that you like that flavor, but at the same time, you do not become attached to it. You can still partake of that food, following the thought that it is nice, but you eat without getting attached to it. And the same applies if you think that it does not taste good; you do not follow the thought of aversion. That not liking, that subtle aversion, is a thought of anger. Hope, fear, and subtle aversion are all subtle versions of the coarse forms of attachment and aggression. In the example of food, you would just eat whatever is good for your body, even if it doesn't taste so good. This also includes the food that you find nice, so you can eat all of that together.

The point is, you can still engage in activities; you can still do things. It's not like there's nothing you can do because you can't follow your thoughts. You can recognize the thoughts and be mindful of not becoming attached or cultivating a form of aversion and so on. For this, you really need to look at your mind and use your discriminating wisdom to see the state of your mind. The subtle versions of attachment and aggression are hope and fear. For example, we hope to accomplish something — that hope is subtle attachment. And then, we wonder: what if we encounter obstacles to it and that fear is a subtle aversion, or aggression. In this case, how should we think when it comes to our activities? If it is our karma to accomplish that activity, then we will accomplish it. And, if it is not our karma, we will not accomplish it. There's really no point in having hopes and fears. Without hopes and fears, you can still engage in your activities. And then, if things do not work out, if there is an obstacle, then you should just think "This is my karma," and pray to the deity. You should not give way to those thoughts of hopes and fears.

When you have many things to do, when you get very busy, you should think in this way. Normally, when we get very busy, get caught up in all kinds of activities, we easily become very unmindful. Because we are flustered, we lose things and make mistakes in our actions of body and speech. So, when you're very busy, you should think, "I have to be careful now. Right now, I'm very busy and becoming flustered. I must be very careful." It is better to approach your activities in a relaxed way, so you will not make mistakes, not lose or waste things, or for example, when you drive your car and so on, you will not encounter obstacles. When you're very busy in your activities, you should slow down more; and also, when you get angry, you should relax your mind. Especially at those times, it is very important to meditate.

When you meditate at those times, your mind can become free of those thoughts. When you engage in activities — whether they are worldly or Dharma activities — with a relaxed mind, all those activities will turn out well and you will not make mistakes. But if your mind is tense and flustered, you will make a lot of mistakes.

Q4. How do we know if we have realized emptiness or not?

RINPOCHE: It is when you can recognize whenever an affliction or thought arises, and then you can naturally let it go, and it becomes emptiness. For example, anger arises and then it naturally goes away and dissolves into emptiness without any need to do anything to it — without thinking

about it. When any kind of feeling arises, such as strong happiness or sadness, you know that you are happy or sad; but then the feeling will dissolve on its own, without your needing to think about it. It just dissolves naturally. If all those thoughts dissolve naturally, it is a sign of having realized emptiness.

Q5. During the meditation, I see the limitless base where all the thoughts arise. Is this limitless base the same as emptiness?

RINPOCHE: Milarepa said that when you realize that mind and space are indivisible, you have actualized the dharmakaya. So that space-like nature is the empty nature of the mind, but you should not think about it. You should not analyze its nature. Just recognize it and then abide within its nature. Do not lose your clarity or fall asleep and so on. Recognize clearly the empty, space-like nature. It is like space; it is empty, but you should also clearly know that empty nature. You just abide within a state of indivisible clarity and emptiness.

When you realize that mind and space are indivisible, you have actualized the dharmakaya. You should not analyze this nature. Just recognize it and then abide within its nature.

Q6. Rinpoche said that the generation and completion stages are equivalent to shamatha and vipassana. Can one realize Mahamudra with shamatha and vipassana alone? Is meditation on the generation and the completion stages necessary?

RINPOCHE: We practice shamatha because the mind cannot abide in stillness. When the mind cannot abide calmly, we practice the generation stage to make our thoughts settle down and stay still. But if your mind naturally stays calm and still, then you go directly from the generation to the completion stage, or vipassana. If you cannot abide in stillness, you practice the generation stage some more, for example. The practices are related to each other, but they are also different in their methods. It does not have to be only that particular method; there are various methods.

Q7. Rinpoche, modern materialism agrees somewhat with Buddhism, but only up to a point. Materialists argue consciousness itself is an illusion — a trick of the chemical processes in the brain. What logic do the Dharma scholars use to refute this belief?

RINPOCHE: One can actually say that consciousness also pervades those particles. In a way, the particles are also like living forms. That means, for example, if someone gives rise to bodhicitta, then all those particles become the deity. And, if we are afflicted, then those particles become like demons. Actually, we talk about different particles and bacteria as being either afflicted or of bodhicitta. And then, for example, if we give rise to bodhicitta, those bodhicitta particles increase and cause well-being. If we are very afflicted, then those particles cause illness. For example, the afflictions of attachment, aversion, and ignorance create illnesses of the winds, bile, and phlegm.

Some scientists would say there is no mind, that there is nothing when we die, because they cannot see the mind, the consciousness. Those materialists will hold the view that there is no mind after we die, but, that is just their own view. How do we refute it? Anyone can have their own view. Everyone has a choice in what view they want to hold. But if you actually look into it, that view is not tenable; in the end, they will lose that view. We can see that there is a mind by looking at our dreams. When you dream at night, the mind is doing all kinds of things — that's not just chemicals doing things. The mind is doing things in your dream. It is just that we cannot see the mind, so we call it "chemicals" and "particles" and so on.

Q8. I have had too many empowerments. I have tried to practice the Immeasurables, the union of emptiness and compassion with worldly activities, and now I know I should practice with a yidam. How do I choose? By affection? By capacity? By the unique activities of the yidam? Or by the simplest? Because I am old and slow to come to this harder understanding. Thank you for turning the wheel for the sake of all sentient beings.

RINPOCHE: It depends. There are some people who have a natural feeling, like a tendency, and just feel that they like a certain yidam deity, and they naturally practice that one. They feel close to a certain mantra or a certain deity. If you have a particular liking for a certain deity or mantra, then you can practice that. Some other people practice whichever deity they have practiced for a long time. Whichever you are most used to, you can practice that one. But in general, in the Kagyu lineage, the principal deities are Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi. If you have already habituated to the practice, you can practice either one; it makes no difference. A beginning practitioner who is female, for example, can visualize herself as the female Vajravarahi. A male can visualize himself as Chakrasamvara. And then each has the corresponding consort, the yab or the yum.

This is until you gain some habituation or familiarity with the practice; when you have some habituation of the practice, it really makes no difference to you whether you visualize the female or male, because within the mind, there is no distinction between male and female. The principal deity in this lineage is Chakrasamvara, but you can actually practice any deity; do whatever is easiest or most convenient for you.

In brief, we practice a yidam deity because the mind needs some support. Therefore, we visualize our body as the yidam, our speech becomes the mantra, and our mind becomes bodhicitta. We need a reference point as a support for body, speech and mind. It is good to have a single yidam deity because, later in the bardo, there will be all kinds of different appearances, and if you practice a single deity, you will be able to recognize your own yidam deity amongst all those appearances. Otherwise, when you are in the bardo, there are too many appearances, and that leads to many thoughts if you have not habituated to one particular yidam. If you have habituated to one yidam deity, it will be like recognizing a friend among many other beings.

The problem with having too many yidam deities is that when you encounter very crucial situations or difficulties, you won't know which yidam deity to call upon; you will become confused and uncertain. In reality, there is no difference in the mind of any of those wisdom beings, but you have to choose one, even though they all are one and the same in essence. If you have too many, you won't be able to bring one of them to mind instantly when there is a crucial circumstance. If you have no doubts in general, then it really makes no difference; but it is good to have one that you really care for. It is like when you go to an airport to receive somebody, and you can recognize which person to greet. In general, all the deities are the same because they have the same mind that is a union of emptiness and compassion. Only their bodies and shapes appear separately. If you actually think all the deities are separate from each other, then actually they become just worldly gods.

Q9. What are the benefits of eating or drinking from the leftovers of lamas and rinpoches, or His Holiness, compared to eating the leftovers from a regular person?

RINPOCHE: There is a big difference between those types of food. The food of those greater beings, the food of the sangha and so on, is actually blessed by their love. This is because, when they eat that food, they know its nature; they know that it is pure by nature, like a buddha

emanation. Also, they eat with an awareness of being the deity, and with love. It depends on your way of viewing it; If you visualize the deity and think “I am Chenrezig” and you eat, it is like eating the blessings of Chenrezig. Then it is very good to eat, like a blessing. If you think of the deity, it is just like making an offering to the deity; this is the instruction on making food become a feast offering. If you have awareness of the yidam deity, then when you eat food or enjoy any of the five sense pleasures, as long as you never forget about the deity, there is no harm caused by enjoying those sense pleasures. In fact, you’re actually accumulating great merit; you’re making an offering to the deity. On the other hand, if you eat with a self-grasping mind, you are creating a karmic creditor. If you visualize the deity, then you’re actually accumulating merit and there’s no harm in it. When you eat the leftovers of someone with great love, you can think you’re receiving the love of whoever has blessed it. What really imbues it with blessings is the love of that being. That is why we say that when you touch or see somebody with great love, you receive their blessings.

Even after somebody with great love has died, their body becomes medicinal. Or, when we are touched by the wind that has also blown on them, we receive their blessings of love. Everything of the body, speech, and mind of someone with great love becomes medicinal. In general, there is really no difference, but what is important is that the person has great love. The Buddha said that, even if they have died, the body of anyone with great love is of great benefit to sentient beings. That can also apply to anything — their food, clothing, and so on. When you come into contact with these things, you should think of that guru, and particularly that guru’s words. The guru said you should practice love, compassion, and patience: so then, you bring that to mind and develop love and compassion in your own mind. In this sense, it is beneficial.

This question is related to meditation practice. Especially when we eat food, we should not waste it. Even if we can actually afford it, we should not waste food, but consider all those beings who suffer from hunger and thirst. In the best case, you give leftovers to some animals or other beings. But we can’t always do that for hygienic reasons; when we really have to throw it in the garbage, we should dedicate these leftovers as we throw it away. If we dedicate them, then those beings can receive that offering. If we do not dedicate the leftovers that we throw away, then those worldly beings without bodies they cannot receive it. This is because they have a dualistic perception of “self” and “others.” Therefore, if we do not dedicate it to them, it is like we are not giving them

anything. And if we do dedicate it to them, it is like granting it to them. This is the only way for them to receive it. Therefore, we should make a prayer of dedication whenever we throw away leftover food, “May all those beings without a body receive this leftover food.” Then they will receive it and the food will not be wasted.

Actually, the Vinaya teachings say that leftover food should not be thrown away but given to animals and other beings so they can eat it. Then there will be no negative karmic ripening. Otherwise, there will be karmic ripening. That isn’t always possible, because we must act in accordance with the customs of the country. In some places, people have a lot of thoughts about spoiled food spreading illness and so on. Illness really comes from the karma one has accumulated, but we still have to act in accord with those scientific customs. In situations when we really cannot give it to others and we really have to throw it in the trash, then we should dedicate it to those formless beings.

Q10. If a person has a malignant brain tumor, what can they do purify and cause the growth to slow down?

RINPOCHE: In terms of an antidote or practice, it is the same for all illness. Whether it is a tumor or another illness, for all of these various illnesses, we should habituate the meditation of the yidam deity and the yidam deity’s form. Especially at the times when the pain is very strong, you should try to send the mind and consciousness out into space and visualize the yidam deity there. In order to be able to practice this, you must first train in the various steps of deity practice. We have mentioned the approach, close approach, and accomplishment; when you get to the branch of accomplishment, you will have familiarized the practice enough for it to actually be effective. Illnesses and all kinds of sickness can only be completely eradicated through realizing the yidam deity. You can visualize the yidam deity’s form inside wherever your illness is located. Even karmic illnesses have often been cured or purified by this. It is the bodhicitta of the deity that cures the illness. Therefore, we can also purify an illness through the practice of Tonglen — receiving the suffering of others and sending them our happiness — because all negative karma is within self-grasping. If you practice Tonglen, bodhicitta, then you let go of self-grasping. Therefore, you can also be cured of a karmic illness, because self-grasping diminishes.

If it is difficult to cultivate such great bodhicitta, it is still beneficial to visualize the yidam deity's form. In brief, it is important that you not think too much about the sickness, but rather think of the deity — almost forget about the sickness. When you keep thinking about the sickness, it will get worse and worse. Even if you don't actually have a sickness, if you always think that you do, then for sure you are creating a sickness with your mind, with your thoughts, because ultimately, all sickness comes from afflictions. For example, illnesses related to heat are related to anger and aggression, sicknesses related to cold are related to attachment, and phlegm is related to ignorance.

For a variety of illnesses, you can visualize a small form of the yidam deity where the illness is located. You can visualize that small form like a sphere of light, like a bindu of light that is very bright and brilliant. For example, it is like a fire-making crystal; when you put a fire-making crystal in the sun, you concentrate the sunlight so that a small but very powerful spot of light is produced from the crystal, and that spot becomes very hot. So, a fire-making crystal produces fire. For example, within two minutes, you can produce such an intense little white spot that it will burn anything away. So, you should visualize a small form of the yidam deity just like that, producing a small, hot drop at the place of illness, and think that it is burning away your illness. Another visualization comes from tummo practice; you can visualize your entire body becoming a mass of fire and think that, again and again, your entire body is burned away by that fire. That is also very beneficial. There are different methods in the Six Yogas about what to do in order not to have to eat any food, or not to have to wear any clothing.

Q11. I find that by focusing on chanting Amitabha I can meditate on an empty mind. However, I have also had miraculous experiences with White Tara. I am blessed to have come to learn this meditation method with Garchen Rinpoche in the last few days. Would it be better for me to focus on Buddha Amitabha or on White Tara as my deity for Mahamudra?

RINPOCHE: It doesn't make any difference, actually. The real nature of the deity is the state of Mahamudra. Through practicing the deity, we come to realize Mahamudra.

Q12. As a soldier, I was called upon to defend my country, and I have killed soldiers with no joy whatsoever, with prayers for deliverance, and hoping for their highest good. Later, while working with government agencies, I was involved in taking down international drug dealers, child molesters, and murderers. Yet, I still feel bad about all this. What else can I practice to purify my regrets, karma, and guilt due to killing?

RINPOCHE: You shouldn't feel so much regret, because your intention was actually to protect the country. You did it for the purpose of others and not for your own purpose. If you do these things for the purpose of others, it becomes a bodhisattva activity, because you are forsaking your own life for your country. When they asked me if I would go to war for this country, I also said I would go. And so, in that case, there is no negativity. There is no negative karma accumulated. This is a good activity and you should rejoice in it, and you should think, "I will still benefit and still serve this country even more." On the other hand, if you hurt somebody out of a selfish intention, or even if you just get angry at someone out of a selfish intention, then of course it is different. There is a negative karma there. But you were doing that for your country. And moreover, you have a karmic connection to those beings. The one who kills and the one who is killed can only meet in that circumstance because of a karmic connection. Without a karmic connection, they would not meet in that circumstance. When you have to kill them, you should pray that in the future they be reborn in the pure land of Dewachen. You should rejoice and think that you will still continue to serve your country.

Q13. I'd like to express my gratitude for when my brother passed.

RINPOCHE: When we recite the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra for all sentient beings, it is beneficial. When someone dies, we should dedicate the Om Mani mantra for all sentient beings. In general, when somebody such as a relative, for example, passes away, you should not think that just that person, but all sentient beings, are just like that. They have all been your relative; all the time and uninterruptedly, countless beings are always dying. We should always pray for them so, ideally, they are reborn in the pure land, or else born as a precious human being, and so on.

About merging with the mind of the guru: that is uncertain. It is very different in each circumstance. In general, to really merge the mind with the guru's, we must actually attain enlightenment or realize the view of Mahamudra. It is uncertain what each being is capable of. We say that we "liberate those who are not liberated," which means beings are liberated gradually. So, from the

In general, to really merge the mind with the guru's, we must actually attain enlightenment or realize the view of Mahamudra.

three lower realms, they are liberated slowly, in stages. Somebody who has realized Mahamudra can merge with the guru's mind, someone who has cultivated bodhicitta can be born in the pure land of Dewachen, and someone who has given rise to faith or devotion can be reborn as a precious

human being. The next stage towards liberation depends on the person's current development.

Q14. Why do I cry when I am doing the Phowa practice?

RINPOCHE: That is very good, actually; this is a sign of true unobjectified compassion. This is actually the best kind of compassion, as it has no object. For example, when we dedicate with this compassion for sentient beings, we can melt self-grasping. You cry because your own self-grasping is melting; it is a sign that your self-grasping is melting and strong compassion is arising in your mind. That is very good. You should also recite some Mani mantras, and then it will become very powerful for those who have passed away. Actually, it is said that if you want to benefit those who have passed away, it is more powerful to recite a single Mani mantra with a mind of love than a hundred Mani mantras without any love. That is the quality of love.

Q15. Rinpoche, you mentioned that Mahamudra and Dzogchen are, in essence, one. In realizing one, you realize the other.

RINPOCHE: "Mahamudra", "Dzogchen," and also the "Middle Way" all refer to the pure state of mind. That pure state of mind is given those three different names in the three different philosophical systems, but there's really only one pure state of mind. Within that state of mind, there is no duality. Therefore, there is no real distinction between Mahamudra and Dzogchen. We need to understand what "non-dual primordial wisdom" means. If there is no duality, it is primordial wisdom; if there is a duality, then it is the rational consciousness.

Q16. I'm only a beginner at practicing meditation, visualizing Hum, and visualizing the Green Tara image. Which one should I visualize first? Should I visualize both of them at the same time? And how do I know if I am ready, or my mind is ready, to visualize the Om Mani Padme Hum mantra, even though I am a beginner at meditation?

RINPOCHE: You can visualize the Hum syllable at the navel. If you are a beginning practitioner, you should actually first train in contemplating the Four Thoughts. Each and every day, you should contemplate how rare it is to find a precious human body; and you should contemplate death, impermanence, and karma — cause and effect. Also, you should develop love and compassion for all sentient beings. Habituate that for a while, and when compassion arises, that compassion becomes the syllable Hum. The essence of the Hum is that compassion. And if you know the Mani mantra, you can also practice that. The six syllables of the Mani mantra are the essences of the six paramitas, and they are also antidotes to the six afflictions.

Each and every day, you should contemplate how rare it is to find a precious human body; and you should contemplate death, impermanence, and karma — cause and effect. Also, you should develop love and compassion for all sentient beings.

Q17. When I visualize the Green Tara image, the image does not appear in front of my eyes. However, the image is very clear in my mind and thoughts. Am I visualizing the Green Tara image properly?

RINPOCHE: When the deity appears within your mind, at that time, you should not think about it at all in terms of “I” and “other” and so on. It just appears in your mind, and the way it appears to you is fine. Sometimes when your eyes are closed, it will appear, and sometimes when your eyes are open, it will appear. Whichever way it appears, you should not think about it or label it in terms of “self” and “other.” When it just appears like that, ordinary thoughts stop and you can see Mahamudra. The essence of Mahamudra is the appearance of the deity.

Q18. Sometimes I reflect and analyze the causes and effects of my previous actions, or I think of the Buddha's life, or teachings, and analyze it. My mind is clear and I understand clearly what actions I did that have resulted in happiness and suffering. And at the same time, I notice a sensation on the top of my head or the sides of my head; the left side of my head especially has a minty, refreshing feeling like when you first chew a piece of gum with minty flavor. That minty, refreshing feeling is very strong at a point on top of my head or at the sides of my head. It feels just a little bit hot. As the sensations spread

outward from where I feel hot, the sensation is comfortable and refreshing. Sometimes I have to use my hand to rub the part that feels minty and refreshing, because sometimes the feeling lasts for more than a couple of minutes, like 10 to 30 minutes. Is this normal, and what causes this feeling?

RINPOCHE: Sometimes when the mind abides in stillness, we experience all sorts of sensations due to the movements of our winds and channels and so on. But then, no matter what sensation you experience, no matter what, you should not think about it. Do not focus on or follow that sensation. Instead, you should think of the Hum, or think of the Buddha's form appearing in an instant. Do not think about that feeling. Do not go there with your mind. The body is just like a car or an engine, and all kinds of sensations can always arise. But to investigate and analyze each of those sensations and experiences is the basis of delusion. Feelings arise, but they are all the same in nature. Ultimately, they all have to become equal. You should practice patience and tolerate those feelings, and then they will naturally subside. But if it's too intense and you cannot tolerate them, you can also rub and massage yourself a little bit. Most important is that you should not get involved with your mind or think about it. You can know there is a feeling, but do not become controlled by that feeling. It is said that during meditation, you must empty all sensations and feelings. This means you must not grasp at any feelings or sensations that arise, so then they will naturally subside.

There are six sense consciousnesses or sensations that can arise. It is said that we should let them be in the natural state, just relax in the natural state, without clinging to them. This means that we should not cling to positive sensations and we should not have an aversion against negative sensations, but, we should equalize them. They must all become equal. So, all those sensations - forms, touch, smell, and so on - all of them must subside.

Q19. If a relative in the family is diagnosed with mental illness and he or she isn't able to recite mantras because he/she also experiences memory loss, what should his/her family members do to help him/her?

RINPOCHE: If the sick person is a male, then visualize Chenrezig; and if it is a female, then visualize Tara. You should not think of them as just an ordinary person, but see them as a deity, and also see yourself as the deity. That actually benefits others and yourself. There are all kinds

of visualizations in relation to that, but they are not really necessary if you just think of the deity, see the sick person as the deity, and recite mantras. Also, you can think that by experiencing this illness, the person is actually purifying karmic obscurations, so that is a good thing. To think in this way is also very beneficial for yourself. When you're ill, for example, you should think in this way. In that way, you will perceive the illness as support; you will take the path as support. Also, for example, you can visualize the medicine you take as the Medicine Buddha, and think that when you take the medicine, it is actually the deity. All medicine really is an emanation of the buddha, so you should take the medicine with faith and pure perception.

The nature of our thoughts is the dharmakaya. The thoughts or afflictions become wisdom, so in that sense, they are also the dharmakaya. This means that when you meditate and thoughts arise, you should not grasp at those thoughts. You don't follow them. And then, they will just naturally subside like a wave on the water.

Q20. A practitioner on the Vajrayana path should never separate from the vows and meditation wisdom. Therefore, if we want to attain meditative self-absorption, do we have to maintain our vows?

RINPOCHE: If you can keep your vows, the more vows you can keep the better it is. But the most important thing in the Vajrayana is to cultivate pure perception — to purify your way of seeing things. There are pure and impure perceptions. From an impure perspective, the universe consists of the five elements. The five afflictions are like their subtle essences, and they can be transformed into the five wisdoms. We should understand the relation between these. It is said that you should see all that appears and exists as the form of the deity. Therefore, in reality, the

In Vajrayana, the crucial practice to observe is pure perception...The Four Immeasurables – love and compassion — are also most important practices.

five elements are really the deity, like buddha-emanation forms. Also, a person's body, for example, consists of those five elements, and then, within the person's mind are the five afflictions. Within one person, the entire universe and all beings are actually complete. If you understand this, then you know that the impure way of perceiving things only arises due to grasping at a "self."

In the Vajrayana, the crucial practice to observe is pure perception — that is, to understand that on their basis, all sentient beings are really buddhas. They are only impure temporarily. In order to melt the ice of their self-grasping, we must cultivate love and compassion, and therefore, the Four Immeasurables — love and compassion — are also most important practices. Without the Four Immeasurables, it is difficult to actualize Vajrayana; you might know that ice is ice, but just knowing that doesn't melt the ice.

Now, to come back to understanding thoughts to be the dharmakaya: In brief, this is when thoughts arise while you practice, you don't grasp at them; you just let them be. Then you will gain the experience that if you just let them be, the thoughts don't affect you in any way. They don't actually do anything. To begin with, they have no arising. They come from nowhere. They do not abide anywhere. Therefore, we don't analyze where they really come from and where they abide. They are free from arising. For example, like a wave on water, all of a sudden, there's a thought; but if you just let it be and don't pay attention to it, it will go away on its own. Then again, another thought arises, and when it arises, it, too, is nowhere abiding. If you just let it be, then you will gain the experience that the thought is not actually affecting you. This is how thoughts become the dharmakaya. Then we finally realize that that is the basic nature of the mind. It is the dharmakaya.

Mahamudra



Before, we said that in Jigten Sumgon's instruction on Mahamudra, he introduced our thoughts as dharmakaya. What is the benefit of realizing Mahamudra? We will understand all mental arisings as Mahamudra. Normally we grasp at our thoughts as having substantial and true existence,

and so we are bound and fettered by those thoughts. When we are fettered by those thoughts,

feelings arise, and we are bound by our feelings. If we do not grasp at those thoughts, but let them be, then there is no feeling in the mind, and even if thoughts arise, they will not affect us in any way. That is the quality of meditation — one is free of all bondage. Whether one experiences happiness or suffering, one is not bound by those thoughts. That is the emptiness of the feelings, or clarity and emptiness. It is the unchanging great bliss of the dharmakaya. That is the nature of the mind itself: blissful. That is what we call it when ordinary thinking stops; that is what we call “great bliss.” Then we can attain the actual nature of the mind. For example, when we sleep deeply, we also arrive at the nature of the mind. We experience it as something very pleasant.

Whether one experiences happiness or suffering, one is not bound by these thoughts. That is the emptying of the feelings, or clarity and emptiness. It is the unchanging great bliss of the dharmakaya.

First, we are introduced to the mental thoughts, whatever arises, as dharmakaya. As we practice, we continue to release the appearances and perceptions into dharmakaya. This is how we take those various appearances as the path. This is what we will discuss this afternoon, on page 128 of *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup. Let us read the section about that.

To introduce appearances as Dharmakaya, just let your mind rest in its natural state without fixation. Let devotion for your lama well up inside you. Abide in the non-conceptual state without letting your mind wander off. When you meditate this way over a long period of time, abiding in the original, ongoing nature of mind, whatever appears is not like an external thing outside of mind, nor is it like an appearance in someone else’s mind. Appearances arise ever clearly as inseparable with mind. The natural radiance of mind’s nature appears in unceasing display. When we do not recognize the true nature of these appearances, we grasp at appearances to be real, as if they exist inherently from their own side. This way of thinking makes appearances arise to us through deluded perception. Like that,

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appearances appear naturally as inseparability of appearances and mind. It is not like appearances and mind were once separate and later merge together. It is in fact the case that appearances and mind have always been inseparable. Apart from the self-appearing radiance that has always been co-emergent, there is not an atom's worth of true existence to anything in the external world. When all sorts of different appearances arise to your perceptions, know that they are the original ongoing display of self-appearance, primordially inseparable with mind, primordially beyond the limits of arising, ceasing, and remaining.

Through analytical meditation we have resolved the nature of the outer-appearing object and the inner mind grasping at it. We talked about the two types of self, of person and of phenomena. We have resolved that all of these are empty; they lack inherent existence and they are impermanent. We looked at the mind, and now we're looking at the various appearances. All those appearances of the external universe lack any inherent existence. They appear to us temporarily — like an ice block, for example. First, we have to gain this understanding, but when it comes to actual practice, we must first cultivate a mind of love and compassion, because just understanding this point is not sufficient.

Once we understand appearances to be dharmakaya, how do we practice? For example, there are many disciples together here in this room. When we meditate, then in one single instant, we let go of all grasping. You don't think about anything at all. You don't think there are many people here; you don't think there is no one; you don't think of anything at all. You just gaze into the room as a totality. You do not focus on any object, but you see everything at once, without any thought of something being there or not being there. Someone who has gained an experience of this is able to just pervade the entire room without thinking anything at all. Although they see everyone, they do not focus on any one person; they see everything at the same time. Someone who has not realized that will grasp. They perceive "This is me" and "That is him." They will label "This person may like me" or "That person may not like me." They will label "I like this person" or "I do not like that person," and that generates all sorts of feelings in the mind. Because there are so many people here, we may feel embarrassed, and we may see other people looking at us, and so on. All of this is bondage. This is the grasping that binds the mind. When we meditate, we do not grasp at any of those thoughts.

Just as we said before: we resolve the thoughts as dharmakaya, we do not grasp at thoughts, and in the same way, we do not grasp at the outer appearances around us. We just settle within the natural state of the mind without thinking of anything around us. We do not think that things are there, nor do we think that nothing is there. There are no thoughts whatsoever. That is the union of appearance and emptiness. It is the actual nature of the deity. If you realize it, then you do not have to realize a deity, because it is the natural quality of the deity. This is how we perceive appearances as dharmakaya.

For example, when you gain an experience through the practice that we do together here in the temple, then afterwards you take that wherever you go, when you go outside or to some other place. Then, when you meditate in some open space where there are sky and clouds, or

You gaze into the totality. You see the entire horizon without focusing on anything. Do not think at all about whether something is there or not there. In that way, the mind merges; it unites with the appearances. Once that happens, you are free of grasping.

mountains and rivers, then you can look at everything at once, without focusing on any one thing. So, you gaze into the totality. You see the entire horizon without focusing on anything. Then you see various things, pure or impure, and so on, but do not think at all about whether something is there or not there. In that way, the mind merges; it unites with the appearances. The inner mind and the outer appearances merge. Once that happens, you are free of grasping, and the mind becomes

very happy, and you feel very good. If you have not yet gained that experience, you must first make an effort to cultivate love and compassion. When we gain stability in merging the mind with outer appearances, that is actually how various miracles are performed, because of the realization that all appearances lack inherent existence. When there is no bondage of thinking about them in terms of “existence” or “nonexistence,” there is no grasping. There is complete merging.

To meditate on that and cultivate it, we first make an effort to cultivate love and compassion. Then, we will meditate here together and try not to grasp at anything, and slowly, gradually, experience will arise. It is similar to how we understand appearances to be dharmakaya: do not grasp at any appearance in terms of “existence” or “nonexistence.” Do not think at all about whatever appears. Then, if there is no grasping, those appearances will not affect you in any way. But if you grasp

at them, many problems will come from that. Using your discriminating wisdom, you should bring to mind the qualities of not grasping and the faults of grasping. Think that if you grasp at those appearances, then you will encounter various difficulties and your mind will be in bondage. If you do not grasp at them, then your mind will be at ease and relaxed. When we are introduced to Mahamudra, we talk about the difference between bondage and liberation, and if you understand that point, you can become liberated from the suffering of samsara. So, we need to understand the difference between bondage and liberation.



It is explained in the term “Mahamudra” (in Tibetan, *Chag Gya*) itself. *Chag* is the homage; it refers to empty space, primordial wisdom. There is no dualistic grasping in the mind to our “selves” or “others” or anything whatsoever. So, there is no thought of “it is” or “it is not;” there is no thought at all. Then, there is *Gya*, which is the seal, and nothing transcends transcendence. When there is no grasping within the mind, one is naturally

liberated. When there is dualistic perception, that is samsara. The dualistic perception of “self” and “others” is what creates samsara. As long as we do not let go of dualistic perception and grasping, we can’t become liberated from samsara. Ultimately, when we realize non-duality, then we realize that there is no duality between samsara and the one who wanders in samsara.

The difference is only in seeing and not seeing — in realizing and not realizing the nature of the mind. When we receive an empowerment, for example, we are introduced to the nature of mind through the symbol of the crystal ball. From the crystal ball, a rainbow of lights emerges. Someone who has realized the nature of the mind sees those rainbow lights as the projection of the crystal, not separate from the crystal. Someone who has not realized the nature of the mind sees the rainbow lights as separate from the crystal, not understanding that

All appearances are only the projections of the mind itself. The only difference is in realizing or not realizing this.

they are actually the projections of the crystal itself. In a similar way, all appearances are only the projections of the mind itself. The only difference is in realizing or not realizing this.

Since not every one of you has the *Stages of Meditation* by Khenpo Samdup, I will read the remaining part, page 130.

Sustain your experience in post-meditation: Let disillusionment for samsara be the leg of your meditation practice. Wear the badge of impermanence and awareness of death on your heart. Toss far away your attachment to this present life's agenda. Let devotion be at the forefront of your meditation practice. Give rise to devotion to your lama, see him or her as an actual buddha in person. Pray to your lama with longing. When meditating, rest in the open, vivid awareness of clarity and emptiness. As you are abiding in the state, whatever subtle or gross thoughts and emotions arise, recognize them. By recognizing them, they will disappear, since they have no inherent existence. When you do this, all sorts of meditative experiences or "phenomena" will arise, high and low. Sometimes you will you experience this clarity-emptiness, a sense of vivid clarity and total conviction. Other times you will experience a dull, spaced-out, dim feeling and you will wonder what went wrong with your meditation. Sometimes all sorts of emotions and thoughts will burst forth, and you will feel like you have this rage boiling inside you. These are all just the phenomena of meditative experience; do not get caught up in them. Do not try to engage in them or push them away. Just sustain your awareness and let whatever arises just arise as it will spontaneously without trying to edit it.

If mind is still, let it be still. You do not need to apply any effort to rouse your mind into another state. If there is stirring of thoughts, let them stir, and simply recognize whatever arises. You do not need to apply any effort to try and still your mind. If you find yourself sinking into dullness or lethargy, rouse your awareness and focus while supplicating the lama and continue meditating. Your lethargy then will naturally be released. If you find your mind getting too

Just sustain your awareness and let whatever arise just arise as it will spontaneously disappear without trying to edit it.

overactive and stimulated, do the same thing as before and continue meditating. The overstimulation will naturally self-release, and clarity-emptiness will become more and more apparent.

Like this, whatever appearances or phenomena arise, catalyzing the experiences of happiness and suffering, if you can apprehend them within the space of mindfulness-awareness, they will naturally be purified, naturally be released.

*Whatever phenomena arise to the six sense doors,
Self-arisen, they subside naturally, so leave them be.
When apprehended within the space of suchness itself,
The three or five poisons cannot harm you.
If they are not apprehended within the space of suchness,
Even if you engage in all aspects of the path,
You will achieve temporary states of higher rebirth,
But how will you ever attain the sublime state?
Emotions are liberated by knowing this.*

As expressed above, once certainty has dawned from within and you have brought your meditation practice to its consummation, you will actualize realization and awaken to buddhahood.

Illustrious Milarepa said:

*Because the two obscurations and two aspects of self-grasping are cleared away,
SANG.
Because the self-knowing, self-illuminating wisdom-awareness unfurls, GYE.
When people ask, this is how I define SANG-GYE (buddha).*

The Excellent Stream of the Elixir of Immortality: A Prayer for the Long Life of Glorious Garchen

OM SWASTI. Unchanging great bliss, Dharmakāya; unceasing manifold creativity, Sambhogakāya; dance of compassion without object, Nirmanakāya—protector, in nature the indivisible three kāyas, protect us!

White as the autumn moon replete with its sixteen parts, the protectress from the eight fears — mother of the three times' victors — sits in the center of a white lotus holding an utpala. Wish-granting Cakra, bestow immortal life!

The one known in the Holy Land as Āryadeva emanated into the Gar clan of Eastern Tibet as Chödingpa, the heart son of Jigten Sumgön. May the life of glorious Garchen remain steadfast for a hundred eons!

The full moon, ornament of the three jewels' teaching, is exalted above the crevasses of the eastern mountains; yet its cool rays nurture the white lilies of the lower slopes. May Garchen, the moon that benefits others, live long!

Casting to the wind all concern for food, clothing and fame, he is girded with the armor of wisdom, morality and a good heart. As firm in the three samadhis as the ocean is deep — may Garchen, lampflame of definitive meaning, live long!

In this age of strife when the Victor's teaching faces hardship, through his powerful, vajra-like conduct, he takes on himself the heavy responsibility of the unbiased teaching. May Garchen, the sun of the teaching, live long!

There is no chance for demonic obstacles to affect the three secrets of the lama who possesses blessings; yet, in accord with the principle of auspicious interdependence, this wish-granting supplication is wonderful!

Through the compassionate truth and power of the three jewels and three roots, and through the might of Mahākala and Chökyi Drölma, may these words of benediction made with pure heart be accordingly and spontaneously accomplished without hindrance!

At the request of the monks Karma Drodül and Drukseng of Lho Lungkar Monastery and others, this was composed on the 29th day of the 12th month of the water-monkey year in the 17th cycle in accord with all aspirations by Könchog Tenzin Künzang Trinle Lhündrub, the one blessed with the name of the Victorious Drigungpa. May it bring virtue. This prayer was translated from the Tibetan by Jakob Leschly in 1998.



Long Life Prayer for His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche *composed by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama*

*Crown of the Shakyas —
Kind unknown friend to all beings,
Seventeen Great Pandits, Tilopa, and
Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, Jigten
Sumgön, and their lineage heirs:
Please bestow good fortune and
auspiciousness.*

*Transcendent Lord Protector Amitayus
Who grants supreme life — everlasting,
stable, and unchanging —
And who diverts from untimely death
One who merely hears your name or thinks of you:
Please bestow good fortune and auspiciousness.*

*With discipline, living in the higher training of morality,
With great compassion that appears as the glory of those to be tamed,
And without ever parting, devoid of all grasping, from Mahamudra's natural state,
Ngedön Tenpé Nyima, Sun of the Teachings,
May your life remain firm!*



In accordance with the request of various communities of the Upper Kham Nangchen region, and in particular the following of the Drikung Kagyü lineage at [Gar] Monastery and its nearby communities, the Buddhist monk and expounder of the Dharma Tenzin Gyatso, Dalai Lama, composed these words of prayer for the long life of the 8th Garchen Rinpoche, Könchog Ngedön Tenpé Nyima, on the 6th day of the 9th month in the Fire Monkey Year in the Tibetan 17th Rabjung Cycle, or November 5, 2016.

This translation from Tibetan into English was completed by Ina Trinley Wangmo and edited by Kay Candler in December 2016.



གང་དག་བདག་ལ་དང་གུར་རམ། །
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དྲ་དག་སྡིག་ཟད་ཉེན་མེད་མེད་། །
མྱོད་པའི་རྒྱ་བོ་སྤང་བར་ཤོག །

Whoever puts their faith in me
or shows contempt and slanders me,
May their evil be exhausted,
May their afflictions be removed,
And may they renounce the
ocean of samsaric life.

任何於我信受者，
或是謾罵毀謗者，
彼等罪滅煩惱消，
惟願斷離輪迴海。

H.E. Garchen Triptrül Rinpoche
Garchen Buddhist Institute
November 21, 2017

