

# Meditation Retreat at Shambhala Mountain Center, June 14-21<sup>st</sup> 2019

B. Alan Wallace

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# 1 Introduction to the retreat

Note: Apologies, most of this session comes out of our backup recorder since we had some issues with the main microphone.

Lama Alan begins by welcoming everyone and explaining how he received the transmission for these teachings himself, primarily from Gyatrul Rinpoche but also most recently from Garchen Rinpoche. He also comments on how some teachers may set restrictions and prerequisites on these teachings, while others may teach them more openly.

Lama then goes over some of the logistics for the retreat, as well as the approach that he'll be following for sharing the teachings. He mentions that despite these being very high teachings, they should always be integrated into our daily lives. We'll be covering the entire path to enlightenment in this retreat so Lama warns us to fasten our seatbelts.

Afterwards Lama Alan comments on the intended audience for these teachings and the importance of bodhicitta and a sense of urgency to achieve enlightenment.

Lama mentions that we'll be covering all 4 Yogas (each one having 3 stages for a total of 12), as well as the 9 stages for achieving Shamatha. He gives a brief overview of the 4 Yogas and elaborates on the theme of sustainability within the context of our practice.

## Keywords

Gyatrul Rinpoche, Garchen Rinpoche, 4 Yogas, Bodhicitta, Shamatha, Sustainability

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## 2 Mahamudra in Sutrayana and Vajrayana

This morning Lama Alan introduces the practice of settling body, speech, and mind in their natural state.

After the meditation Lama Alan continues to comment on the practice and its benefits. This can be an excellent prelude to other practices and also help us with our everyday activities.

Lama also introduces the concept of seasoning the day and the importance of learning how to practice in the supine position. He also explains the differences between Mahamudra from the perspective of Sutrayana and Vajrayana.

Lama then comments on the 3 main elements to enter the path of Mahamudra: Shamatha, Vipashyana, and identifying pristine awareness. He further elaborates on the practice of Shamatha.

Finally he goes over the 4 revolutions in outlook (aka the 4 thoughts that turn the mind) as preliminaries to Mahamudra in the Sutrayana and viewing all sentient beings as family, seeing your Vajra siblings with pure vision, and viewing your Guru as a Buddha.

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling body, speech, and mind in their natural state  
Meditation starts at 8:38

## Keywords

Settling body, speech, and mind in their natural state, supine, Mahamudra, 4 revolutions in outlook, pure vision, guru devotion

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# 3 Cultivating relaxation without losing the clarity with which you began

We start with a preamble to the next meditation, with more comments from Lama Alan on the practice of mindfulness of breathing. We'll be covering 3 different interpretations of the Buddha's teachings on this practice.

After the meditation we start going over the "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra" text, beginning with the first yoga: The Yoga of Single-pointedness (Rangjung Dorje's Great Instructions). Lama comments on the union of shamatha and vipashyana, and how this is the essence of buddhist meditation.

We then move on to the "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra":

- Śamatha
  - Mindfulness of breathing
    - The Primary Tantra of Manjushri
    - The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Ten Thousand Stanzas
    - The Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha

## Meditation

Shamatha: Mindfulness of breathing based on Asanga's method

Meditation starts at 6:09

## Keywords

Relaxation, mindfulness of breathing, shamatha, Asanga, Yoga of Single-pointedness

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# 4 Enhancing stability without losing the underlying relaxation

Note: Sorry, we got some noise and feedback while recording this session, we tried to improve it but the quality may not be as good as other sessions.

Lama Alan starts by commenting on the importance of sleep, and how mindfulness of breathing can be very helpful to get a good night's sleep. For this session we will be practicing the Burmese method, where we focus on enhancing stability without losing the underlying sense of relaxation.

After the meditation we go back to "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra":

- Ānāpānasati Sutta
- Majjhima Nikāya III 82
- Saṃyutta Nikāya 54.9

And Lama continues to comment on the practice of mindfulness of breathing.

Then we move on to "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra":

- Yoga of Single-pointedness
  - Karma Chagme
    - Point a)
    - Point b)

## Meditation

Shamatha: Mindfulness of breathing based on the Burmese method

Meditation starts at 13:10

## Keywords

Burmese method, Karma Chagme, shamatha, mindfulness of breathing, stability

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## 5 Enhancing clarity without losing the underlying stability

Lama Alan starts with an overview of the practice for this session: mindfulness of breathing following the Theravada method. This time the balance is to enhance clarity without losing the underlying stability.

Just before the session Lama also introduces the concept of introspection and how it relates to mindfulness.

After the session Lama further elaborates on the topic of relaxation, stability and vividness, as well as some comments on the substrate consciousness.

Further on he offers one interpretation of the passage by the Buddha: "I shall breathe in, calming the composite of the body. I shall breathe out, calming the composite of the body." Lama Alan also talks about the frequency of the breath and some of its correlations.

We then continue with the "The Path of Shamatha" text:

- 1. Directed Attention
- Coarse excitation

## Meditation

Shamatha: Mindfulness of breathing following the Theravada method

Meditation starts at 17:37

## Keywords

Shamatha, mindfulness of breathing, clarity, introspection, Theravada method, directed attention, coarse excitation

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## 6 Q&A

Note: We're really sorry, we had issues with one of the microphones and the questions are not so easy to hear, so they have been transcribed below.

Lama Alan begins by commenting on the topic of silence before we move on to questions.

- Rob
  - I noticed during the last practice session of kind of touching into the clarity aspect, that it almost seemed like the clarity brought up more klesha activity with it. It's almost like that's a habit, that you're not used to that clarity without some sort of anger or sexuality or something that kind of goes with it. Is that something that you work with or how does that work?
- Mark
  - Regarding using the breath as the object of meditation, and how you just explained in the last session that that is the mainstay of the Hinayana practice, but here we are in a Vajrayana/Dzogchen practice, and this may be a misguided observation on my part but my experience has been that the object of meditation in the Vajrayana practice in order to accumulate the most, highest and greatest possible merit needs to be a holy object, so could you possibly clarify how that observation, is that correct and how would that work, as it relates to using the breath as an object?
- Yongyi
  - If Shamatha is more like a basic skill we need to polish everyday, even for experts, more like an irreversible accompaniment, like once you do this, you can do this and then you can move on to the next work or skill. The reason I'm asking this is because earlier you mentioned the example of some people who can do this, achieve samadhi in an instant, so do they still practice this everyday? What's the point of achieving this effortlessly?
- Alex
  - This morning you asked us which is the easiest, practicing shamatha, vipashyana or meditation on the nature of the mind? And then you said that the shamatha approach is the easiest, and I had the thought at the time that could you also say that it might depend, the state of mind changes and which approach might be applicable or easiest might not always be the same
- Lexie
  - I had a comment about the 20 days off the grid, letting go of thoughts, which creates a sense of self. Ok so go off for 20 days and let thoughts self-liberate.
  - My second question is about the guru-disciple relationship. I understand what would be beneficial for the disciple to see the guru as a buddha, but presumably wouldn't the guru also see the disciple as a buddha because he/she would have pure vision?
  - If the guru has self-realization then how would they see the other as the other who is unrealized?
  - Would the Buddha see himself as a buddha? Or would he see "Buddha"?
  - So if I were lucidly dreaming, I'm aware that I'm a dream figure within the dream, I'm aware that it's all taking place within a larger mind, but then what I know is streamed through a kind of narrower perspective. And in the same way every



other dream figure is part of that larger mind, and so my dream figure is no more real than any other dream figure. And so for a buddha in this reality, in this waking reality, wouldn't he know that to say "I am awake", I could say "I'm lucidly dreaming" to another dream figure, but I couldn't be more real, more than.

- I don't understand personal consciousness. Consciousness doesn't seem personal to me.
- I just don't agree with the identity. I don't know that there's separation, I feel that what's essential is not separate from anything else, it's not divided.

## Keywords

Clarity, kleshas, breath, holy object, samadhi, guru-disciple relationship, lucid dreaming, personal consciousness

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## 7 The sign of the mind

This morning Lama Alan starts by talking about the importance of motivation. He then shares the plan for this session's meditation, as well as commenting on the apparent hierarchy of practices. Everyone has different dispositions and that that's why the Buddha taught so many different practices and teachings. He quotes Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche on how for some people the Sravakayana is their Great Perfection, and so on for the rest of the 9 yantras.

After the meditation we go back to "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra":

- Yoga of Single-pointedness
  - Karma Chagme
    - Point c)

Then we move on to "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra":

- Saṃyutta Nikāya V 152
- Aṅguttara Nikāya A.I.8-10
- Milindapañha, pp. 299-300
- Eight-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Sūtra)

Finally we go to "The Path of Shamatha":

- 2. Continuous attention

## Meditation

Shamatha: A tour of mindfulness of breathing methods: Asanga, Burmese and Theravada

Meditation starts at 10:34

## Keywords

Motivation, 9 yantras, Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche, Karma Chagme, Continuous attention, mindfulness of breathing

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## 8 Walking through walls

Lama Alan begins by mentioning the next method we'll be practicing: a Dzogchen approach to mindfulness of breathing. He also comes back to the analogy of the lucid dream and how it relates to Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

After the meditation we go back to "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra":

- Yoga of Single-pointedness
  - Karma Chagme
    - Point d)
    - Point e)

Then we move on to "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra" and cover:

- The five dhyāna factors remove the five obscurations
- Water similes of the five obscurations that prevent one from seeing the reflection of one's face in a pool of water (Sangarava-sutta, AN, III 230)
- So long as these five obscurations are not abandoned one considers oneself as indebted, sick, in bonds, enslaved, and lost in a desert track. (Sāmaññaphala Sutta in Dīgha Nikāya I 74)

## Meditation

Shamatha: Dzogchen approach to mindfulness of breathing

Meditation starts at 12:04

## Keywords

Lucid dreaming, mindfulness of breathing, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, five dhyana factors, five obscurations

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## 9 What's preventing us from knowing who we are?

Lama Alan starts by answering the question "Why do we suffer?", from the perspective of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. He then raises the question: "What's preventing us from realizing Rigpa, which is the equivalent of knowing who we are?" and comments on our own everyday experience as sentient beings.

Lama then presents the practice for this session, and comments on the 6 "theaters" of our own mind.

After the meditation Lama Alan explores the concept of qualia and the different ways in which people try to explain them.

We then continue with "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra":

- Small stage of Yoga of Single-pointedness

## Meditation

Shamatha: The Buddha's pith instructions to Bahiya  
Meditation starts at 17:01

## Keywords

Suffering, rigpa, sentient beings, Bahiya, qualia, Yoga of Single-pointedness

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## 10 Introduction to observing the mind

In this session we'll start exploring the practice of observing the mind. Lama comments on the way we usually relate to all the mental events arising within the space of our mind, and how we can gradually become less and less a "mind haver".

After the meditation we go back to "The Path of Shamatha" and cover:

- 3. Resurgent attention
- 4. Close attention
- Coarse laxity
- Medium excitation

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling the mind in its natural state, starting with the physical senses and culminating in the mind.

Meditation starts at 17:50

## Keywords

Observing the mind, resurgent attention, close attention, coarse laxity, medium excitation

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## 11 Q&A

Note: Sorry we still had some issues with the microphones that day

- Kriss
  - This is in regard to the stages and what came to my attention with that fourth stage, coming into the retreat I was having the impression in regard to samadhi that some fear was surrounding it for me and I thought about it but when you read about the complacency and then the next one is resistance, if there's any relation there and how that might be able to work through or something I should know.
- Henri
  - Today we were talking about walking through walls, so I was wondering that similarly in a lucid dream one might get stuck in a wall when you're like, kind of thinking it's not there and then half way through think: "Oh it's there". I have a little experience, not getting stuck but a couple of my dear friends have.
  - This was the introduction. When we were talking about samadhi, manipulating the archetypal elements in the form realm and that's kind of like manipulating how this is appearing here. So can you get stuck in a wall similarly like in a lucid dream? Or is it through samadhi that it's not really, you're not stumbling upon those blocks? I was thinking about this...
- Dale
  - I got a little confused today when you were talking about the stages. The first thing is it never occurred to me that I need to sit for an hour straight. I would sit

for half an hour and move around a little bit and maybe a drink of water. I might do that for two and a half hours in half hour increments. But you know I noticed that during the course of the retreat in Pomaia, I'm sure I experienced subtle excitation a lot. I mean it would go on for a long time. But when I look at the list it doesn't really seem like, you know, in other words it seems like, ok well I'm a little bit like a 7, I'm a little bit like a 3, maybe a 4. It's not really that clear to me, and you kind of threw me off a little bit with the sitting for at least an hour, with the subtle excitation.

- Martha
  - I find that in meditation I'm kind of all over the place. I have a nice meditation, then I have one where I am distracted by coarse agitation, and then I have one where I don't feel tired coming in to it and then I find that I'm momentarily dropping off to sleep and waking back up again. And so just thinking that perhaps, so I have scoliosis and I like to do it supine, but I was wondering if maybe that would be a situation where walking meditation might be of value. Do you have any pointers there? Because it seems like it would be a lot more distracting to do walking meditation if you're walking in your neighborhood or right around a trail or something.
- Marilyn
  - I'm relatively new to meditation as you know and I'm really drawn to the wisdom studies but I got here late like as far in my life. So I was wondering if you could kind of give a guideline as far as how to balance wisdom studies with how many hours of meditation. I'm a lay person, I'm retired so...But I seem busier now so, this is my main focus.
- [Name missing]
  - I hope this is an appropriate question. You know you talk about meditating for seven hours. I would like to know or feel that experience, what that is like.
  - Are there any kind of thoughts, experiences, sensations, or content going on? Anything I can relate to?
- Victoria
  - There's two types of distinctions that keep coming up for me. One is between the Theravada and the Dzogchen/Mahamudra experience of identitylessness or impersonality. And then the second question a distinction has to do between the Four Yogas, and Mud and Feathers and Buddhahood without Meditation.

## Keywords

Fourth stage, complacency, resistance, lucid dreaming, samadhi, form realm, subtle excitation, walking meditation, identitylessness

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# 12 If you achieve shamatha, vipashyana is not that difficult

Note: We had to combine recordings since we lost the main microphone for brief periods, so you may hear some echo. Sorry about that.

Lama Alan reminds us that today we're commemorating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and parinirvana (i.e. Saga Dawa). He comments on the life of Gautama and everything he had to do to be forever free of suffering and achieve enlightenment. Besides everything he had to give up, the Buddha had to learn that it was pointless to try to get as far away as possible from the body and mind, but rather understand the body and mind by way of vipashyana, on the basis of shamatha.

Lama quotes Geshe Ngawang Dhargye on how if you achieve shamatha, vipashyana is not that difficult, it could even be a matter of days instead of years or decades.

He mentions an anecdote from a woman who is very gifted at lucid dreaming. In her dream she was able to disarm a man by thrusting his knife into her abdomen, all the while knowing that that was a dream knife and a dream body, so there was nothing to be harmed. In the same way, an arya bodhisattva can give away limbs like we can away vegetables.

In the practice we're doing right now we aim to be totally present with the mind and all its junk, and yet not suffer by way of it.

After the meditation, Lama Alan draws a parallel between this practice and the non-abiding nirvana of a buddha.

We then continue with "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra":

- Śamatha Focused on the Mind
  - Maitrīpa (The Essential Instructions of the Mahāsiddha Maitrīpa)

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling the mind in its natural state

Meditation starts at 28:28

## Keywords

Saga Dawa, Shamatha, Vipashyana, Geshe Ngawang Dhargye, lucid dreaming, non-abiding nirvana

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## 13 Drama, farce, tragedy, and a lot of infomercials

Lama Alan begins by using the analogy of going to the movies and watching images on a screen as it compares to observing the mind and whatever arises within it. He quotes Yangthang Rinpoche: "Do not look out, look in, because when you look out you reify"

We're observing our own cinema about 16 hours a day. It's 3D, it's free, and it includes drama, farce, tragedy, and a lot of infomercials.

Lama then explains that there are two ways of doing the practice of settling the mind in its natural state. One is what we've already practiced, which is explained by Karma Chagme using the analogy of the raven and the navigator. The other is the approach suggested by Yangthang Rinpoche, where we're less likely to be caught up in the contents of our mind, because we just recognize the mental events that arise but we're not interested in their content.

After the meditation we go back to the texts. Lama Alan translated these short descriptions of each of the stages within each yoga from teachings by Garchen Rinpoche. They're contained in the text "Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra". We start by covering the small stage of the Yoga of single-pointedness.

Then we go back to "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra":

- Yoga of Single-pointedness
  - Medium Stage
    - Karma Chagme's instructions

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling the mind in its natural state following Yangthang Rinpoche's approach  
Meditation starts at 14:34

## Keywords

Yangthang Rinpoche, Karma Chagme, the navigator and the raven, Garchen Rinpoche, Yoga of Single-pointedness

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## 14 Overcoming our worst nightmares

Lama Alan begins by explaining the concepts of the substrate (Skt. ālaya, Tib. kun gzhi) and substrate consciousness (Skt. ālayavijñāna, Tib. kun gzhi rnam par shes pa). He then relates

them to the practice of observing the mind and lists all the kinds of phenomena that arise within the space of the mind, both objective and subjective.

He also comments on emotions and their somatic correlates, and on the importance of being aware of emotions before expressing them (whether to express them, when to express them and how to express them). Otherwise we're just acting out of habit and don't have real choices.

After the meditation Lama talks about overcoming our worst nightmares by becoming lucid in the midst of them and jump right into what we most dread. In the same way this practice can help us become thoroughly lucid with respect to our minds in the waking state.

We then go back to "The Path of Shamatha".

First we review the last two bullet items on each stage (the quality of the experience and the quality of the flow of involuntary thoughts).

Then we move forward with the text and cover:

- 5. Subdued attention
- 6. Pacified attention
- Medium laxity
- Subtle excitation

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling the mind in its natural state, focusing on the subjective impulses.

Meditation starts at 28:29

## Keywords

Substrate, substrate consciousness, subdued attention, pacified attention, medium laxity, subtle excitation

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# 15 The 4 stages of settling the mind in its natural state

For this session we jump right into the meditation.

After the meditation we go back to "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra":

- The Lake-Born Vajra, Padmasambhava (The Enlightened View of Samantabhadra)



This presents the whole path of shamatha from the perspective of this practice, divided into 4 stages.

## Meditation

Shamatha: Settling the mind in its natural state, focusing on the space of the mind and its characteristics

Meditation starts at 1:02

## Keywords

Padmasambhava, settling the mind in its natural state, Enlightened View of Samantabhadra, 4 stages

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## 16 Q&A

- Anonymous
  - Regarding the 3 elements required to reach the small stage of the first yoga, what is the distinction between the 2 elements of some realization of emptiness and identifying rigpa?
  - Regarding the uncommon preliminaries, what is meant by pure view? What are its effects on whom? Why pure view for sangha brothers and sisters, why not for other beings as well? Does having a pure view regarding sangha brothers mean we will automatically be friends and want to hang out together over coffee and scones?
- Mary
  - When you were talking about the animals and sentient beings, my first thought was that the reason they don't have to liberate is because they don't have culture and parents, they haven't had all that conditioning put in to them.
  - I don't understand or I always wonder why did pristine awareness get itself in this pickle of being stuck in the human brain?
- Nancy
  - I've got a question regarding Maitripa, and regarding the term "without recognition". Taking the example of your grandmother, suppose you observe an image of your grandmother; it arises as you're following your thoughts and it's followed by or overlaid with language: grandmother. And then an emotion arises. Is this lairing of mental events that are all related to the original image, recognition?
  - If there's a physical response, say tears, like in the same example the grandmother image came up and then you're going down this kind of road and then you've got an emotion that arises and then you've got a physical

manifestation of tears. It seems to me that the emotion is a subjective mental impulse, be it sadness or loss perhaps or deep love, are the tears an indication of grasping or desire?

- Ken
  - For shamatha meditation, do you recommend the tongue on the top of the mouth posture?
  - I was just under the impression that it goes a little deeper than that, I think that Vairocana recommends that posture. And also if you've seen certain cats like feral cats and other animals, they do that to kind of sense certain energies.
- Ana
  - This is regarding the awareness of awareness meditation. I just had a question on the last meditation we did. You reminded me of merging the mind with space. Are they not the same?
  - Is awareness of the space of the mind, watching the events of the mind, not vipashyana already?
- Rick
  - You mentioned yesterday that in Tibetan language they don't have the possessive past, present, future verb to have, but that doesn't mean that there isn't an "is", "has", or "will be"?
  - Today you gave the instruction: do not look out, look in. My question had to do with looking out, reification happening is not good or not where we want to head. But in some practices, there's mantra practice with eyes closed, there's no visual input. And there are some practices where the instruction is to keep the eyes open. I'm just wondering if there's more you can say about eyes closed or open.
- Elis
  - From your book *The Attention Revolution*, you mention the steps for improving attention and also that you need a teacher, and when do you need that, and how often do you need to see your teacher? And also I was meditating and focusing my breath, but I would like to know if I could focus on my heartbeat?

## Keywords

Emptiness, rigpa, uncommon preliminaries, pure view, pristine awareness, Maitripa, mental impulses, Vairocana, awareness of awareness, reification, eyes open or closed, heartbeat

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## 17 The emblem of consciousness

Today we will be focusing on the practice of shamatha without a sign, which takes the least effort, but also takes a lot of training to give so little effort.

Lama Alan also comments further on the difference between realizing emptiness and identifying pristine awareness by way of the analogy of a lucid dream.

Lama then comes back to the greater path of Mahamudra and Dzogchen and explains how this practice fits in, including some references to Yangthang Rinpoche's teachings.

After the meditation we go back to the texts:

Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra

- Kasiṇa Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya 10.25
- Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos, revealed by Karma Lingpa, (1326–1386)

The Path of Shamatha

- 7. Fully pacified attention
- Subtle laxity
- Subtle excitation

The Four Yogas of Mahāmudrā

- Yoga of Single-pointedness
  - Medium stage
    - Rangjung Dorjé's Great Instructions

Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra

- Yoga of single-pointedness
  - Medium stage

## Meditation

Shamatha: Shamatha without a sign, resting in the sheer luminosity and cognizance of awareness

Meditation starts at 24:44

## Keywords

Shamatha without a sign, emptiness, pristine awareness, lucid dreams, Yangthang Rinpoche, fully pacified attention, subtle laxity, subtle excitation, Yoga of single-pointedness

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# 18 The great stage of the yoga of single-pointedness

We begin by reading the first part of

Core Meditations on the Path of Mahāmudrā

- Padmasambhava [Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos, revealed by Karma Lingpa, 1326–1386]

After the meditation we cover the second part of the same text.

Then we go to:

- "The Path of Shamatha"
  - 8. Single-pointed attention
- "The Four Yogas of Mahamudra"
  - Yoga of single-pointedness
    - Great stage
      - Karma Chagme
      - Rangjung Dorjé's Great Instructions
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of single-pointedness
    - Great stage

## Meditation

Shamatha: Shamatha without a sign, focusing on the experience of being the agent.

Meditation starts at 2:20

## Keywords

Padmasambhava, Natural Liberation, Single-pointed attention, Yoga of single-pointedness, shamatha without a sign

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# 19 The case for shamatha

Lama Alan begins with further comments on the practice of shamatha without a sign, including the role of intention and agency and how we impute a sense of self onto that.

He comes back to clarifying how this is not still not vipashyana because there's no explicit inquiry, we're just looking very closely, although it does start to soften up the reifying sense of "I am".

After the meditation Lama Alan comments on the importance of motivation (which in turn leads to intention) in order to achieve shamatha. In order to go all the way we need a really solid motivation that includes renunciation, and if we want to go all the way on the Mahamudra path, we also need bodhicitta. But we don't only need that, we also need a pristine sense of ethics.

We go back to "The Path of Shamatha":

- 9. Attentional balance
- Atīśa (982 - 1054 CE) (Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment)
  - (vs. 39)
- Prerequisites for achieving Shamatha
- The Achievement of Śamatha (Threshold to the First Dhyāna)
- Trait Effects of Having Achieved Śamatha
- The Importance of Achieving Śamatha

## Meditation

Shamatha: Shamatha without a sign, focusing on observing the observer.

Meditation starts at 11:22

## Keywords

Shamatha, agency, motivation, bodhicitta, attentional balance, Atisha, prerequisites of shamatha, achievement of shamatha, trait effects of shamatha, importance of shamatha

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## 20 Last chance to achieve shamatha

This will be our last practice on shamatha as we'll be moving on to vipashyana tomorrow. We go straight into meditation.

After the meditation we go to the text that describes this practice. "Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra" on top of page 4 (numbering is different because the document was later updated).

Lama Alan also talks about proofs in science are equivalent to the discoveries made by contemplatives, and how the center in Tuscany will bring those to the general public by way of the collaboration between scientists and contemplatives.

We also cover one more instruction on shamatha by Maitrīpa.

## Meditation

Shamatha: Directing awareness in all directions, finishing with releasing the mind into space.

Meditation starts at 1:02

## Keywords

Shamatha, science, Tuscany, scientists, contemplatives, Maitripa, releasing mind into space

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## 21 Q&A

Note: Our sincere apologies, this session was particularly challenging because the equipment was especially sensitive that day, and we may have gotten some interference from cell phones. The good news is that we later got some help to further tweak the recording equipment, so the rest of the sessions should sound much better.

- Brad
  - I'm not criticizing any teaching of the sutra or tantra teachings. It just occurs to me that we finished the first yoga and it's all shamatha. Ok then we haven't gotten to what we call the view in Dzogchen. I know we've alluded to primordial awareness and so forth.
  - Because what appears from the text as written is we get all the way through the first two halves of the bodhisattvayana just with shamatha.
  - You've been clear about that both in this retreat and many retreats before, but that's not what the text says. But he has this nigh on the path of seeing just at the end of the first yoga here.
  - I understand we're seeing things from a vajrayana perspective and not a sutrayana perspective but you just mentioned in the last talk we had a few minutes ago, you mentioned the spirit of definite emergence. He hasn't even paid any kind of lip service to that, he hasn't mentioned uncontrived bodhicitta, there's not even any kind of hint of that.
- Victoria
  - I got super excited when you mentioned, I think it was yesterday, mathematics and the form realm. That was absolutely fascinating, it took some calming down.
  - What is the source of these realms? Is it the substrate? Since we each have our own individual substrate if I understand it correctly, so every appearance appears to me as you said, so the desire realm in which I'm right now is my individual desire realm and has as its source the substrate, my own individual substrate.

- I'm a mathematician so bear with me. So I was pondering in my walk this morning, how is it that we are sharing the same seeming reality, and I was thinking that the only logical explanation, because there is some logic to all of this, is that we are connected karmically. I think all of us who are here, we have these invisible karmic connections, which connect our substrates in some way, and then we share this reality. Would that make sense?
- So every person that I see in this room, I have a karmic connection with, totally unaware of them since I hadn't met anyone. But that should be the reason why we're sharing the common experiences or the common appearances that we see. Would that make sense?
- Henri
  - I'd like to just clarify the points regarding the actual achievement of shamatha. You explained that you have the acquired sign, and then you what happens is that dissolves and then the counterpart sign comes. But when this happens you actually achieve shamatha?
  - Ok because, for example, it's like a major transition and lots of stuff happening like you hear in Asanga's explanation, like the extraordinary mental joy and all the heaviness and all this that's related. So just to clarify this, when you go, you see the counterpart sign, these thoughts happening now and then you fall back and they're still happening or you stay there and it's happening and then you fall back, like a little bit of the details of this? Because it seems a little bit like contradictory that you achieve it but then you fall back.
- Laura
  - First of all I would like to thank you for your generosity. It's a great gift, and it is very much like drinking from a fire hose, a fire hydrant.
  - In light of what you just shared, which is akin to what I had thought to share, let me try. I'm a creative so I hope you're patient.
  - The way these teachings are delivered, how they are conveyed is enormous to me, and specifically what we might call the use of analogy, it doesn't operate in the way of offering an explanation. It doesn't operate like a metaphor. It itself is the revelation, and particularly the analogies then involve natural references. The bird, for example, is a revelation. It is an occurrence and it arises from shall we say the substrate.
  - So then between sessions doing my practice I had a moment, an occurrence and it stopped my mind, it was simply the puddles, it was a drop in concentric circles, and before I had language, before anything arrived, it arrived in completion. So I thought to share that last night and I didn't, and then this morning when you were speaking about physicists who attempt to write or speak to this and are condemned and exiled. I was reminded of a very dear friend of mine who again, I believe you know, his name is Shimon Malin. He worked as a physicist at Colgate and he wrote a book called "Nature loves to hide" and that was precisely my experience. It reveals itself when [speechless]. And I see how you are in your precision, in openness these practices are real. I just defaulted to the habit there.

- Ken
  - The approach to shamatha seems very similar to the approach to inner fire yoga. Both seem to be active gateways to non-dualism. Can you comment on the differences? Is there a difference?

## Keywords

Dzogchen view, bodhisattvayana, uncontrived bodhicitta, mathematics, form realm, substrate, karma, acquired sign, Asanga, Shimon Malin, inner fire, non-dualism

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## 22 We may not be mere chemical scum

Lama Alan begins the session by commenting again on Brad's question and clarifying on the mapping between the text and the practices we've been doing.

Now that we've finished exploring different shamatha practices, we will now be focusing on vipashyana. Lama Alan again explains how vipashyana requires an element of inquiry or investigation, and bare attention is neither mindfulness nor vipashyana.

He quotes an explanation by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 3 turnings of the wheel of Dharma. He also offers a commentary on a passage from the Pali Canon on the 4 applications of mindfulness.

After the meditation we move on to the second yoga and cover:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations
    - Karma Chagme
- Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra
  - Vipashyana
    - Karma Chagmé (A Spacious Path to Freedom)
    - Nima Arkani-Hamed
    - Steven Weinberg
    - Richard Feynman
    - John Archibald Wheeler
    - Andre Linde
    - Thomas Hertog

## Meditation

Vipashyana: phenomenological investigation based on the first turning of the wheel of Dharma.  
Meditation starts at 36:38



## Keywords

Vipashyana, bare attention, mindfulness, 3 turnings of the wheel of Dharma, Pali Canon, 4 applications of mindfulness, Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations, phenomenological investigation

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## 23 Catching a thief in the act

For this session we will be moving on to vipashyana on the nature of the mind, following the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, and focusing on the nature of that which observes or knows. We will now be doing an ontological investigation, as opposed to the phenomenological investigation done earlier.

After the meditation Lama Alan reminds us that phenomena are not out there, independently, from their own side. They arise relative to our conceptual designations of them. If you can observe the act of reification, you can see it happening, then it's like catching a thief in the act.

## Meditation

Vipashyana: ontological investigation on the nature of the mind  
Meditation starts at 4:30

## Keywords

Vipashyana, nature of the mind, second turning of the wheel of Dharma, ontological investigation, reification

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## 24 Like recognizing water even when it appears as ice

Lama Alan begins by again clarifying that we need all 3 practices of Shamatha, Vipashyana and Mahamudra to reach even the first stage of the first yoga, and he also comments on the differences between the 5 paths within the context of the Mahayana and Mahamudra.

Lama then explains the practice of investigating the emptiness of the origin, location and destination of the mind. He also comes back to the importance of first achieving Shamatha. Once we do that then Vipashyana and even Mahamudra are not that far away. At the same time

it's very easy to get caught up in all kinds of other practices just for the sake of avoiding our own minds.

After the meditation we continue with the second yoga:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations
    - Rangjung Dorje (Great Instructions)
    - Dagpo Rinpoche
    - Saraha
    - Gyalwa Yang Gönpa
    - Small stage
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:
  - Yoga free of elaboration
    - Small stage

## Meditation

Vipashyana: Origin, location and destination of mental events

Meditation starts at 30:52

## Keywords

Shamatha, Vipashyana, Mahamudra, 5 paths, origin, location and destination of the mind, Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations

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## 25 Severing the root of dualistic grasping

Lama Alan starts by commenting on how in the small stage of the first yoga, mind wandering can still occur in between sessions. In the same way, in the second yoga the tendencies of reification can still occur in between sessions.

He also comments on the sensitivity one develops as one progresses on the path. The same mental affliction that can seem harmless for an ordinary being would be unbearable for an arya bodhisattva. We don't even have an English word for the term klesha, and most popular translations fail to properly represent the term.

After the meditation Lama comments on the implications of realizing the emptiness of this sense of "I am". If one severs the root of dualistic grasping, in between sessions mental afflictions become like a chicken with its head cut off, they have a very short longevity.

We then move on to the texts:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations
    - Medium stage
    - Great stage
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:
  - Yoga free of elaboration
    - Medium stage
    - Great stage

## Meditation

Vipashyana: Origin, location and destination of the mind that is observing.

Meditation starts at 10:45

## Keywords

Dualistic grasping, mind wandering, first yoga, second yoga, sensitivity, klesha, Yoga of Freedom from Conceptual Elaborations

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## 26 Q&A

- Victoria
  - Today in the inquiry on the nature of mind, two things arose that seemed not consistent with emptiness. One was in relation to the translation that you just gave, it felt like the mind felt intentional, because there's effort. And so that felt intentional, and therefore that feels like somewhat of an agent.
  - And then the second and final one was that it felt like the mind, rather than the mind feeling like it didn't exist, it felt like the mind would arise or come into being based on conditions, such as waking, being aware, contact with an object.
- Mark
  - I have a very basic, simple question. I wondered for a long time, and you referenced Shantideva in the teachings this week. You also referenced beings that were adept and academic, and the balance of the two. Shantideva is a bit of an enigma, to me anyway. How did he fit into this question? There isn't very much known about him I think, but I know you and your wife wrote a translation. My question is where does he fall in the equation of adepts and academics?
- Alex
  - I was wondering about something you spoke about earlier, the 12 links of dependent origination, and also in a more Mahayana context the idea of

dependent arising. And I've read that the cause or origin of suffering is understood differently in the context of the Theravada and in the Mahayana, and I'm wondering if you might speak about, is there some explanation there in these sort of philosophical or conceptual explanations, could you talk about that?

- Just very quickly I wanted to say that I've heard explanations that according to the explanation of the 12 links of dependent origination, the link or stage of vedana or feeling, of not being able to tolerate or sit with pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feelings, and then acting on that with craving, that that's where the suffering arises.
- Alberto
  - In Cittamatra if nothing exists out there independent of the observer, how can others influence me, or more specifically, are the teachings residing in my mind? I mean if everything is a product of my mind and arises out of my own consciousness...
- Holly
  - Today you talked about you how were practicing, the children were playing, and you turned right in upon, so you're going towards it, is one technique. But then was it yesterday or the day before? You said: "my dance card is full", going right back to the nostrils. So my question is, when to turn towards it and when to say "my dance card is full"?
- Lexie
  - I'd really like to know the question that you asked the Dalai Lama when you first met him.

## Keywords

Emptiness, agent, intention, Shantideva, adepts, academics, 12 links of dependent origination, dependent arising, Theravada, Mahayana, vedana, Cittamatra, consciousness, dance card, Dalai Lama

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## 27 Transcending the sacred tension

Lama Alan begins by again reminding us that the core reason for engaging in the practice of vipashyana is to cut the cord of dualistic grasping. He also comments on the view of Dzogchen, and how all appearances are our own appearances, or more explicitly, all appearances are appearances of us. Therefore samsara beings every instant that we see appearances as "other".

Lama also comments on how relaxation is key, and how there's no harm in being relaxed. As we relax more and more through sustained practice, this tends to loosen blockages in our prana, which will most likely shout as they leave in the form of nyam.

Lama Alan explains that the practice was based on Padmasambhava's pith instruction from the book Natural Liberation (in the section "searching for the mind") and he reads the text itself.

- Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra
  - Vipashyana
    - Padmasambhava (Natural Liberation)
      - First bullet point

We then move on to:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of One Taste
    - Karma Chagmé

## Meditation

Vipashyana: inverting awareness in upon the mind that is observing  
Meditation starts at 15:52

## Keywords

Sacred tension, vipashyana, Dzogchen view, relaxation, prana, Natural Liberation, Padmasambhava, Yoga of One Taste

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## 28 Is it like that or not? Observe your own mind!

Before going into the next meditation Lama Alan adds an addendum to the previous instructions by Padmasambhava.

- Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra
  - Vipashyana
    - Padmasambhava (Natural Liberation)
      - Second and third bullet points

After the meditation we go back to:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of One Taste
    - Rangjung Dorjé
    - Gyalwa Yang Gönpa
    - Small stage
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:

- The yoga of one taste
  - Small stage

## Meditation

Vipashyana: pith instructions by Padmasambhava (From A Spacious Path to Freedom)  
Meditation starts at 4:22

## Keywords

Vipashyana, Padmasambhava, A Spacious Path to Freedom, Yoga of One Taste

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# 29 It's never too soon to begin practicing non-meditation

Since this is our last afternoon we will now move on to what is commonly referred to as non-meditation, open presence, cutting through, etc. At a first glance it seems like just doing nothing at all and there aren't many ways of doing nothing, but if you're doing something then you're not doing the practice. Everything hinges on what you bring onto that "nothing", what the practice is imbued with.

Motivation is of course very important, and bodhicitta is the only suitable motivation here. Then the gold standard when it comes to open presence is open presence in pristine awareness, so you're not just resting in your ordinary consciousness or the substrate consciousness, let alone a wandering mind.

An imperative preparation that is needed is some degree of insight into the emptiness of inherent nature, especially of one's own mind and at least implicitly of all phenomena.

It may not be spectacular at the beginning, but that's how it starts.

We will be following a method drawn from the pith instructions by Yangthang Rinpoche.

- His method of shamatha
- His method of vipashyana of probing into the nature of the mind
- His method of transitioning from ascertaining the emptiness of the mind to resting in rigpa.

After the meditation Lama Alan emphasizes that it's not too soon to begin this practice. If we postpone it, we'll never get good at it. Just like with shamatha, this can be broken down into smaller problems or challenges. Lama also shares several ways in which yogis approach this

path, so we definitely have options. He then explains how relative bodhicitta arises effortlessly and spontaneously from ultimate bodhicitta.

We then continue with the texts:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of One Taste
    - Medium stage
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:
  - The yoga of one taste
    - Medium stage

## Meditation

Non-meditation: pith instructions by Yangthang Rinpoche

Meditation starts at 27:55

## Keywords

Non-meditation, open presence, cutting through, motivation, bodhicitta, pristine awareness, emptiness, Yangthang Rinpoche, Yoga of One Taste

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## 30 Dharmakaya permeates all phenomena

For this session we go right into the texts:

- Core Meditations on the Path of Mahamudra
  - Identifying Primordial Consciousness

Lama Alan covers the entire section and offers his commentary to the passages therein. He comments on the 3 types of wisdom (hearing, reflection and meditation) and again stresses the importance of shamatha in order to fully gain the wisdom of meditation.

He also gives a quick overview of the 3 main points of the third turning of the wheel of Dharma:

- Dharmakaya permeates all phenomena and therefore the minds of all sentient beings.
- Your stream of consciousness and dharmakaya are not really separate.
- Every sentient being has the potential to achieve perfect awakening.

After the meditation we go back to the texts:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of One Taste

- Great stage

## Meditation

Non-meditation: Padmasambhava's pith instructions from Natural Liberation

Meditation starts at 28:52

## Keywords

Primordial consciousness, 3 types of wisdom, third turning of the wheel of Dharma, Yoga of One Taste, Padmasambhava

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## 31 Q&A

- Jan-Paul
  - How to distinguish between rigpa and the substrate consciousness?
  - Is it possible to have a glimpse of the substrate consciousness before having achieved shamatha?
- Anjana
  - My question is regarding His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I watch all of his webcasts and I try to watch them live as much as possible as opposed to recordings. Many of them are teachings, empowerments, transmissions, etc. So when I'm watching them, listening and repeating what needs to be repeated, and then he gives the instruction, the transmission, and he says do like a hundred repetitions of this everyday. Is that then a samaya or commitment with him, even though I'm not present there physically?
  - So one of the parts was that he said to repeat the instruction or this mantra like a hundred times a day, so you follow that?
- Yongyi
  - On the first day we covered the prerequisites for achieving shamatha. I found some of those conditions really demanding.
  - Also I remember on the second day you mentioned that even if we practice for like eight hours a day, but if we're not careful enough in between sessions, it will be like taking 2 steps forward and 3 steps back.
  - So my question I guess is twofold. Would you recommend the general population to practice shamatha, even knowing that there's no way they can achieve it? Because most of them in modern society, they don't have the luxury of keeping other activities to the minimum.
  - And the other question is, how can we keep the continuity of practice when we're off the cushion, while at the same time not disengaging from the world?
- Susan



- I had a comment and a question last night, but today the question was answered through Padmasambhava, so now I just have a comment.
- I wish to basically bear witness to the truth that you, throughout the week, have spoken of the vast benefit of recognizing events of the mind as events of the mind.
- With regard to PTSD, some years ago, about 6 years ago, I was the "victim" of a violent crime, and I say that in quotes because I'm so grateful not to identify with that statement, it's the statement of the judicial system.
- And for many of the last 6 years I have struggled deeply and gone through therapies and therapies and on and on and on. And last fall in New York at the Garrison center for the dream yoga retreat, my dear friends brought me to this experience and it was radically life changing with regard to the PTSD, which prior to that point, even last year I would have debilitating episodes where at times I could not even physically move, like paralyzing. And throughout the rest of the time it was like huge surges of having to deal with that, and so I'm just so happy to report the efficacy of that practice. Just in the months between last September and now, I would say that the analogy I think of most is, it's like a tiger that was defanged. Before my mind would be bloodied, and often physically I would have very difficult symptoms. And now it's like, every now and then it'll be gumming me, and it's annoying and sometimes it brings disruptions but nothing like what I experienced before. Exactly just some saliva but not anything of lasting import, so I give thanks and I'm thankful to you on behalf of myself and my partner who has experienced alongside me these things and now bringing into the world this little being who is on his way. I thank you on his behalf as well.
- Laura
  - I think you know I'm getting ready to go into retreat and I was going to ask you about this, and then I realized it was kind of a good question that actually follows up on what you were just talking about. I'm kind of the person that you just mentioned in that when I started practicing seriously my daughter was about 2, and she's almost 30 now. I'm a grandmother now but that's a lot less requiring.
  - So what I wanted to ask you about was, I had this really interesting experience, because when she was little I would do the week longs, but I couldn't do much more and then I don't need to reiterate because you said the exact same trajectory. When she went to college I was able to do longer and my first 30 days and so on, and so over the last few years I've done increasingly, you know 3 to 5 months retreats on and off as you know. And one thing that I noticed, I don't know if I'm refuting you but I would question you because I haven't heard you refer to this directly. You're absolutely right, when I'm on full time retreat and I'm practicing, I notice there's a certain momentum that goes. And then when I come out of formal retreat, even though my life is pretty radically simple at this point, I live in the country, pretty simple, but I noticed the practice kind of diminishes in its vividness and its clarity of course because I'm doing other things. But what I have noticed is when I go back into retreat, that momentum isn't lost.

- One thing that you talked about, the ways you can get derailed by getting too intense and headaches and all that, I've been there, thank you. But there was one derailment that happened last time that I haven't heard you mention, and I wanted to mention it and just kind of ask you about it because I guess it will come up again. When I was in my last retreat maybe 3 years ago, my last full time retreat, I had this explosion of art, like a whole new art form came out just like BOOM, but it totally derailed my practice. I just figured it out in the last year, what happened is there was so much energy of creativity that came out that the next thing I knew, my retreat cabin turned into an art studio. And I was practicing but all of a sudden, and I mean it took a long time to figure out what had happened, my meditation and the little bit of art that was just supporting my meditation practice had something to do with my hands when I was listening to Dharma talks, became me doing a lot of art and there was a little Dharma playing in the background. And so as I'm getting ready to go back into retreat, I will obviously probably still create art, I want to keep that from happening again so any advice on that?
- Chris
  - So if you were me, a beginner meditator, just having received this radical download, I don't have children, a spouse, these things, what would the next week, month, year of your life look like?
- Diego
  - I almost think my question is redundant because it feels very related to all of the previous ones, but today you talked about the sacred tension, and I think you said that we shouldn't assume or aim to always be on one side of the spectrum. And so my question is how do we know we're making the right choice when going back and forth, when switching, or maybe it's not always a choice per se?
- Rick
  - You mentioned a couple of days ago that you had gone into a 2 year agreement with Wisdom Publications, I think you mentioned that. Does that include more online classes?
  - I'm a believer in those courses, I'm just about to finish my 7th of your courses, when I found out you were coming I told my wife: "I have to go meet my teacher".

## Keywords

Rigpa, substrate consciousness, Shamatha, samayas, PTSD, sacred tension

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## 32 Retreat conclusion

Lama Alan begins by explaining the logistics for the last session. We first finish with the last yoga, followed by our last meditation session, and finally Lama Alan offers refuge vows for those drawn to it.

But before that we first cover the synopsis we were missing from the previous sessions, along with Lama's commentary:

- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:
  - The yoga of one taste
    - Great stage

We then move on to cover the last of the 4 yogas:

- The Four Yogas of Mahamudra
  - Yoga of Non-Meditation
- Twelve Stages of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra:
  - The yoga of Non-Meditation

We end with our final meditation session, which also serves as our dedication for the retreat.

## Meditation

Loving kindness: Fourfold vision quest

Meditation starts at 1:20:14

## Keywords

Yoga of one taste, Yoga of Non-Meditation, fourfold vision quest

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## 33 Refuge vows

Lama Alan starts with a brief introduction to the refuge vows (in this case within the context of the Mahayana): what refuge is, the motivation for taking refuge and what it entails, followed by the refuge ceremony itself. This concludes the retreat sessions.

## Keywords

Refuge, Mahayana, vows, ceremony, motivation