

Eight-Week Shamatha Retreat, Fall 2013

Week 3

Day 14, am. 16 September

This week we move to a new Shamatha method – Shamatha without a Sign, or Awareness of Awareness, taught by Padmasambhava. It is the most profound of all the Shamatha methods.

In his book “Natural Liberation”, Padmasambhava explains two approaches:

- (i) First to be introduced to the (Dzogchen) view and upon that basis, seek the meditative state (Shamatha as a platform to achieve meditative equipoise). This approach could make it difficult to identify pristine awareness because it is so overloaded with acquired concepts.
- (ii) First establish the required meditative state and then be introduced to the view. This makes it impossible not to identify pristine awareness. This is the Mahamudra approach.

This is the first of multiple stages of Shamatha without a Sign described by Padmasambhava: It involves steadily gazing into the space in front of you, consciously concentrating, without meditating on anything. Increase your stability, and then release. As you are meditating, occasionally seek out: What is that consciousness? Then release. And rely on unwavering mindfulness.

Your purpose is to dissolve your mind into the substrate consciousness.

Guided meditation ...

In response to a question about the physiological changes accompanying Shamatha beyond the benefits to the mind...

From the research undertaken as a result of the Shamatha Project 5 years ago, it has been suggested that the practice of Shamatha may slow the aging process. Another interesting speculation is ‘if one engages in regular authentic Shamatha practice, might it slow or prevent the decline of brain function, e.g. dementia/Alzheimer’s Disease. Anecdotally, this seems to be true when observing the elderly lives of high lamas. Both Andrea and Alan, over the last 35 and 40 years respectively, having engaged with a large number of yogis, have never come across one who had dementia. But of course, longitudinal scientific studies are needed. It also seems reasonable that daily meditation would have positive health effects by counteracting stresses and anxieties that can build up in normal socially-engaged life.

In response to a question about whether it is a good idea to go into long-term retreat as a couple, when sexual attraction is inevitable...

For one couple involved in the Shamatha Project and a subsequent 18-month retreat, their relationship was enriched by the experience. You need to keep in mind that you are seeking to purify the five obscurations, the first one of which is sensual craving. But if you have a loving, meaningful relationship with spiritual friendship at its core, then there is real potential to support each other on the path. You are trying to throw off the veils of all five obscurations in order to achieve Shamatha and you can assist each other in doing this. Alan believes that it is not for him to dictate what couples should do in this regard but for them to determine what works best for them individually and for their relationship.

In response to a question as to why Padmasambhava said to his disciples to practice this method for “one day” ... He was clearly speaking to people who were very gifted. For those of medium and low faculties, it takes much longer. In trying to achieve rigpa, you focus on tracing ‘the scent’ to the source. Having achieved rigpa, you do nothing but rest in the flow of awareness. You do not activate your conventional self. You don’t need to do anything; it is being done to you. When it comes to full blossom, you achieve Buddhahood. For the rest of us, we need to have patience and keep practising.

Day 14, pm.

Again, we will be focusing on Shamatha without a Sign. We come to this practice with an on-going sequence of subtraction, not addition. We are peeling back the layers of configurations of our consciousness, until it is unconfigured – back to the bare essentials. So we started with Mindfulness of Breathing. We moved to Settling the Mind in its Natural State, where we took the attention away from the somatic field of the body and placed it on the space of the mind and the mental events arising within it. And in doing so, our awareness remained in its own place. Now we are taking off another layer as we focus on our awareness by way of cognisance. With subtraction, we see awareness as it was already there, and we rest there in naked consciousness, not attending to any object and not getting caught up with distractions and grasping. If you find you have lapsed into dullness, return to being just

cognisant. The flow of cognisance is always there. There is no room for doubt. Sustain that knowing. Every now and then ask yourself: What is this consciousness? Invert your awareness and investigate, then release again.

Don't make this more complicated than it needs to be. 'Doing' and 'trying' is missing the point. We are trying to overcome the obsessive addiction to 'doing'. We are simply resting in the sheer luminosity of awareness, but without slipping into dullness. We are all in the midst of a flow of consciousness whether we are awake or asleep.

This is the only Shamatha practice in Tibetan Buddhism where there is no mention of introspection or monitoring of the flow. Just rest in your awareness and stabilise your attention, be still and relax, then pay attention loosely with no target, then relax, focus, relax, focus, relax... It creates a kind of pulsing. This will overcome laxity and dullness. Nowhere does Padmasambhava say join this with the rhythm of the breath. We use Mindfulness of Breathing just as a preliminary step, with a peripheral awareness insofar as it is helpful.

Guided meditation ...

What is the difference between Dzogchen (tregchö) practice and this first stage of the Shamatha without a Sign practice? The difference is that if you have realised rigpa, you will be resting in rigpa and viewing reality from there. Otherwise, you will be practising Shamatha without a Sign, and if you have mastered it, will be resting in the substrate, not rigpa.

Moving to the next aphorism: "*Even the antidote itself is liberated in its own state*". It's by nature free. An antidote doesn't need an antidote. This is about ultimate bodhichitta. It's a direct antidote to the root cause of Samsara (i.e. being in a state of not-rigpa). Rigpa is the antidote for Samsara, that is, knowing reality from the perspective of being aware.

In the book, *The Vajra Essence*, there are seven qualities of vajra, but they are qualities that you already have, that is, when they are unveiled or stripped off from that which is not you – stripped off your ground awareness.

- (i) invulnerable – to all karma, mental afflictions and habitual propensities
- (ii) indestructible – by any objects or conditions
- (iii) real – for it abides in the originally purity of its intrinsic nature of the great primordial ground of the whole of Samsara and Nirvana
- (iv) incorruptible – it can't be contaminated by good or bad qualities
- (v) immutable – it is unfluctuating and unmoving in the three times (past, present and future). It's beyond change
- (vi) totally unobstructable – even by subtle obscurations
- (vii) invincible – can't be transformed by Samsara or Nirvana. They are the one taste/equally present (non-duality). Resting in rigpa, there is no preference for Samsara or Nirvana.

Achieving this is the most important thing you can do. It's about waking up. Alan related the Buddha's parable of the prodigal son as told by Padmasambhava, which is quoted in the book "Naked Awareness" by Karma Chagme (and translated by Alan).

Day 15, am. 17 September

We are moving to the second stage of Shamatha without a Sign. Padmasambhava describes this as: Position the body as before, sitting upright, gazing downwards, releasing your mind without meditating on anything, relaxing your body and mind. Remain in clarity. Now alternate between focusing/arousing and releasing. Observe who is concentrating the mind. Ask yourself: Who is the agent? Then release again. Sustain this oscillation. By doing so, fine stability will arise and you may even identify pristine awareness.

Guided meditation ...

When we are arousing the mind, we are pushing the envelope of clarity. When releasing, we are pushing the envelope of ease and comfort. Each time we do this, the clarity becomes sharper and sharper, and the relaxation greater.

As you move closer towards stage 9 on the Shamatha path, the effort required becomes less and less until eventually, it is effortless. The effort continues to decrease until you reach Buddhahood. When practising, when you know that your mind is as sharp as it will get to today, just relax and be still in bare awareness without any oscillation. Rest your mind in the sheer luminosity and clarity of awareness, without doing anything.

Day 15, pm.

Guided meditation ...

We continue with the cultivation of ultimate bodhichitta, and with the next aphorism: "*The essential nature (of the path) is resting in the nature of the substrate.*"

There are two meanings of rigpa:

- (i) It can mean simply knowing, through visual, auditory, etc consciousness
- (ii) It can mean pristine awareness

There are also two meanings of Dharmadhatu:

- (i) It can mean the domain of experience of mental consciousness and mental consciousness illuminates all the 5 sensory domains (relative Dharmadhatu)
- (ii) It can mean the space of the mind, the ground of Samsara and Nirvana

There are two meanings of substrate:

- (i) It can mean the very nature of unknowing (such as when in a non-lucid deep sleep). You are resting in the substrate but with extremely little lucidity
- (ii) It can mean the ground of everything in Samsara, the universal basis to everything conventionally experienced. After achieving Shamatha, you are also resting in the substrate but with high definition lucidity

The Buddha said: "For one who clings, motion exists. But for one who does not cling, there is no motion." Where there is no motion, there is stillness, where there is stillness, there is no craving, where there is no craving, there are neither comings nor goings, where there are neither comings nor goings, there is neither Samsara nor Nirvana.

From the absolute stillness of the substrate, the symmetry of the sheer vacuity is broken and with the stirring of karmic energy, the substrate consciousness emerges. This emergence continues, afflictive mentation (mental states) arises and there is a gathering together of a sense of self, but this is pre-articulate – a sense of "I'm here but space is over there". Even very primitive beings have this sense. It's about "me" and "not me". Out of that arises mentation, which is still primitive, then one starts to see an array of diverse appearances. There is a distinction between subject and object, between this and that. Then the cognitive grid comes in when one distinguishes appearances and objectifies them. This fills one's world with subject and objects, mine and yours. Subject and objects are literally conceived by the conceptual world. So one demarcates inner from outer, then one reifies this and grasps onto it as inherently real and independent of any conceptual designation, believing it was already there, (as if one is simply witnessing it – this is the view of metaphysical realism).

When resting in meditative equipoise, there is inactivity of body, speech and mind and a stillness brimming over with insight. It's simply being present. When resting one's body and mind, energy goes into the central channel and one can generate a lot of heat – simply by doing nothing. The purpose is to try and achieve pristine awareness. What is the substrate in this context? It is synonymous with emptiness in union with primordial consciousness. One is resting in the ultimate non-duality. As a result of holding one's own ground, one experiences true freedom.

There is a Dzogchen term which means 'open presence' or letting be. It means being open and present without dullness. In the book "Buddhahood without Meditation" (not yet published), four types of open presence are described:

- (i) the view of open presence
- (ii) the meditation of open presence
- (iii) regarding the pristine awareness of open presence
- (iv) appearances and mental processes of open presence.

You don't have to do anything. It is being done to you.

Day 16, am. 18 September

Guided meditation ...

So you settle your body, speech and mind in their natural states, and then do Mindfulness of Breathing to calm the discursive thoughts, if this is helpful. Partially open your eyes and gaze downwards, not focusing your gaze on

anything. Then, if useful, adopting a gentle oscillating movement with your awareness, arousing interest in the awareness with the in-breath and relaxing deeply with the out-breath. Now direct your awareness (not your gaze) up into space above without visualising anything or having any fixed sense of the boundary of your awareness in the direction above, then relax ... out to the right, then relax ... out to the left, then relax ... below, then relax... Next let your awareness rest in the centre of your heart chakra in the centre of your chest, then relax ... out in all of space, then relax completely just resting in the presence of awareness itself ...

Awareness of Awareness is like an oil lamp unmoved by the wind. Any movement is the product of grasping, either attachment or aversion to a mental event. Awareness, resting in its own place, does not have any movement.

You can experience altered perception, some glimpse or taste of a realisation or more refined state of consciousness, if you receive pointing out instructions from a highly realised teacher. However, if the mind is not a suitably prepared vessel, it manifests fleetingly – without stability - and, with time, this altered perception will slip away and become just a memory, just intellectual understanding. If the ground has not been prepared sufficiently, it will not be sustained. The root of all meditation practices depends on the achievement of Shamatha. Stability is a prerequisite for the others.

In response to questions ...

The Mindfold eye-mask can be useful when practising this method, as it cuts out your experience of anything in the visual domain, which then helps you to focus on the mental domain.

In Awareness of Awareness, you are not taking an interest in the contents of the mind, but you are also not taking an interest in the space of the mind. There is no target at all. You are simply resting in stillness. When your awareness descends, as your mind melts away, and you get to rock bottom, you are in fact in the substrate. You have already inverted the attention towards its source.

Day 16, pm.

Guided meditation ...

The two Shamatha methods of Settling the Mind in its Natural State and Awareness of Awareness allow habitual propensities to churn up to the surface. They can catalyse karmic events in your body, your emotions, memories, desires, etc. So expect the unexpected! You are likely to initially regard them as obstacles to your meditation. They are called 'nyam', which are anomalous, transient, psychosomatic experiences catalysed by your meditation.

But there is a fork in the road, and you can make a choice as to which path you take.

- (i) When these nyam are experienced as obstacles, you can get stuck because you reify them, objectify them and get caught up in the cycle of hope and fear, and try to make them go away (Note: Of course if it is a medical condition, you need to be sensible and deal with it appropriately).
- (ii) As you experience what is churning up, don't reify them, don't grasp onto them. View these nyam as empty appearances. Don't empower them by your attention, because they are arising from your mind-stream, not from anything externally, inherently real. Let them be, without desire or aversion. They are only obstacles if you think they are and if you don't, they will vanish of their own accord.

The next aphorism is "*Between sessions, act as an illusory being*".

Act as if your very presence in the world was an apparition. Banish the idea that you are real. You appear to be there, but you're not real from your own side. Notionally, it is as if you were a bardo being, except in that state, other people can't see you but you can see them.

"Things are not as they appear" is a statement that has come up many times in the past from a range of religions and philosophies. In Buddhism, its purpose is to encourage you to release reification, especially when it comes to the eight mundane concerns, which revolve around wealth, power and reputation. When we grasp onto these – either with attachment or aversion – it is always based on reification. Then we get stuck. So to undermine this cycle, view them differently, view them as empty of inherent existence. Wherever there is grasping, suffering will follow.

As an impure illusory body, you are still identifying with your conventional form, but you are not reifying. You are no longer believing that you are inherently real, only conventionally real. Your form is the same but your attachment to its contents has been released.

As a pure illusory body, you have realised emptiness and dissolved your mind into dharmadhatu (rigpa) by realising the absence of the inherent nature of all things and seeing conceptual designation for what it is. You are no longer bound by the conceptualising matrix. You are resting in pure potentiality.

There are Vajrayana and Dzogchen approaches to realising this and they differ in their methods but not in their results.

The Vajrayana approach: using the power of imagination, in the space of your mind, you dissolve everything into emptiness. Out of emptiness you regenerate your own identity into an archetypal form of Buddha nature, such as Avalokiteshvara/Chenrezig. You dissolve your own identity into Avalokiteshvara, so your form is as a pure illusory body. Then you sustain this with the power of your imagination. When performing a sadhana (ritualised practice), in the stage of generation, you are a sentient being using skillful means and imagination to adopt, for example, the sense of being Avalokiteshvara, because you believe you have Buddha-nature. Of course you do have, and always have had, Buddha-nature but you haven't yet directly gained experiential access to it.

The Dzogchen approach is just to release all grasping to your conventional self, of being a sentient being, of having memories, desires, a personal history, a story, etc. and know you are a Buddha, know you are rigpa. None of it was you anyway. As you release deeply, you eventually achieve bliss and non-duality in the substrate consciousness all the way down to rigpa. This is without imagining you are a Buddha, but rather knowing you are a Buddha. So the first approach is based on the premise that you *have* Buddha-nature and you are using skillful means to emulate it until you realise that you are no longer imagining that you are a Buddha – you are a Buddha. The second approach is based on the premise that you *are* Buddha-nature already and by just letting go of everything that you are not, you will be drawn home into Buddhahood.

Either way, regard yourself as an illusory being. As William James says: “For the moment, what you attend to is reality”. If you are in meditation and thoughts and images come up, that is what you attend to. If you are back at work and you attend to others' defects and flaws, that is what will be real. If we view ourselves just as sentient beings, then that is because of what we attend to. Reality is just moment-to-moment sheer attention. Even the past isn't real, because it depends on who is telling the story – it depends on the systems of measurements and the interpretative framework. What becomes actual depends on how we attend to it.

Therefore, you don't need to be a helpless victim. By shifting your perspective, you can shift your reality. Transform all felicity and adversity into the spiritual path and transmute the whole experience.

One approach is to use your intelligence to investigate that what is 'out there' is not real. Eventually you achieve deep insight. And when you get it, you can't go back! It's another revolution! It needs intelligence and investigation. However, with the Dzogchen approach, you don't get there only by way of intelligence (mental consciousness). You also get there by viewing reality from the perspective of rigpa or primordial consciousness (the closest word in English is 'intuition'). There is a fusion of the two.

Don't rely on an individual (a teacher), rely on the Dharma.

Don't rely on the words, rely on the meaning.

Don't rely on the provisional/contextual meaning, rely on the definitive meaning.

Don't rely on your mental consciousness, rely on your primordial consciousness.

So the intelligence approach is, in the waking state, to act as if it were a dream.

But in the Dzogchen approach, it is a dream! All things that appear are non-existent.

There are three aspects of Buddha nature:

- (i) The consciousness of the Buddha (dharmakaya) saturates all existence. Buddha-mind pervades the mind-stream of all sentient beings
- (ii) Buddha-mind is not separate from the mind of all sentient beings
- (iii) All sentient beings have the potential to achieve Buddha-mind.

So one can think “Maybe I don't need to designate myself on the basis of my body, my speech, my mind, since they are not inherently intrinsic. Maybe I can take Buddha-nature as the basis of my designation. I am Buddha. My mind is rigpa”. So, from this perspective, Buddha-nature is something you already are, not something you have to acquire.

Day 17, am. 19 September

Today we turn to a text by Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltsen that complements *Settling the Mind in its Natural State and Awareness of Awareness*. Over the centuries, the great teachers have said very similar things and described very

similar practices. This gives you confidence in their authenticity and suggests that as ‘they seem to work’ regardless of the century in which they are being practised, they probably are authentic practice without the need for further modification.

Drawing on an extract from the root text on Shamatha, he advocates letting the view emerge from the meditative experience. He says: Find a comfortable cushion, assume the seven-fold posture (or a posture that works best for you) and do the nine-fold breathing (3 x breathing in through the left nostril, then forcefully out through the right nostril; 3 x breathing in through the right nostril and forcefully out through the left nostril; 3 x breathing in through both nostrils and breathing out forcefully through both nostrils), clearly distinguish between the radiant purity of awareness and defilements of the mind (so again, the stillness of the former, the movement of the latter), and with a pristinely virtuous mind begin by taking refuge (entrusting ourselves to the pursuit of genuine happiness) and cultivate bodhichitta....

As our hearts become more open to the ocean of suffering, it’s easy to become overwhelmed by sadness, but ask yourself: What can be done? There are myriad ways to help those in need. But why is there such blatant injustice? It boils down to ignorance, craving and hostility in Samsara. So try first to get rid of ignorance, craving and hostility from your own life. Purify your mind and bring forth compassion from our own pristine awareness and direct it in such a way that it can be of the most service. In other words, cultivate bodhichitta.

... Meditate on the profound path of guru yoga. Focus on your root guru who is an emanation of the Buddha and bring his or her qualities to mind. Then offer everything you have – your body, speech and mind – offer prayers and supplications for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. Imagine your root guru coming to the crown of your head, and facing the same direction as yourself, melts into light, enters your body through your crown and comes to settle at your heart. Imagine your mind is indivisible from the mind of your root guru/the Buddha.

In the meditation, do not modify the nature of luminous appearances such as hopes and fears, but rest in unwavering meditative equipoise. Do not prefer the presence or absence of events in the space of the mind, just rest your awareness in space. Don’t blank out and instead, maintain a flow of cognisance. With introspection, observe any movement of awareness towards distractions.

Day 17, pm.

We are now moving to the topic of relative bodhichitta. In the meditation session today, you will be introduced to the practice of *tonglen*.

Guided meditation ...

There are two approaches to cultivating relative bodhichitta:

(i) The approach that is commonly taught, where one first cultivates loving kindness and compassion, then moves to the cultivation of relative bodhichitta. This is the Sutrayana approach where both compassion and wisdom are considered essential. One without the other lacks skillful means. Therefore, it’s a question of balance. It’s a developmental approach where we are developing the qualities of boundless loving kindness, that is, loving kindness without preference or bias. And when developing boundless compassion, more emphasis is placed on the evil-doers than the victims.

(ii) The other approach asks ‘Do you need to engage in all the practices contained in the 400 pages of *The Vajra Essence*? No. But you need to do Shamatha, Vipassana, tregchö /break through and tögel/direct crossing over. These all seem heavily weighted towards wisdom. However, if you realise rigpa (ultimate bodhichitta), relative bodhichitta rises spontaneously out of ultimate bodhichitta. So you don’t focus on cultivating relative bodhichitta but on realising rigpa.

The world of conditioned phenomena is made up of dependently related events. For example, if we consider a laptop computer:

- 1) the computer is dependent upon the parts, but it’s not the parts
- 2) you can’t say there is a computer screen unless there is a computer
- 3) for the computer to be there, there needs to be conceptual designation

Eventually you see the computer and everything else as if they are in a dream. This includes yourself with your illusory body. You can then ‘break through’ and realise they are a dream.

So there are two approaches:

- a) Shamatha → pointing out instructions → realising emptiness → break through → lucidity (rigpa), or
b) You can directly experience rigpa and simultaneously realise emptiness as an inevitable byproduct of realising rigpa

So, if you look at the cultivation of compassion, you have the aspiration: “May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering”. But it goes beyond an aspiration to an intent or a commitment. There is a resolve that: “I will take it upon myself to bring this about”. But who is this person? It can’t be me. It doesn’t make any sense if the referent is ‘me’. Maybe it goes beyond me in this lifetime, back to past lives and forward to future lives. But the referent can’t be the same person because I have a different body and mind in each lifetime. Then maybe it has to be the substrate consciousness, which is continuous over lifetimes. This makes more sense. Perhaps I can designate myself on the basis of the substrate consciousness, however to liberate all sentient beings on that basis would take a very, very long time. So, that doesn’t make much more sense either. So, therefore, the referent can only be rigpa.

How can this occur? If you want to be sincere, there is only one answer. You need to first achieve perfect awakening yourself, and in doing so, manifest Buddha-mind. From that platform, make the resolve. This is relative bodhichitta. It needs to spring from the deep development of The Four Immeasurables. This is the only sane resolve. And we know that suffering is not inevitable. So the resolve comes out of a fusion of compassion and wisdom.

Are there any dangers of doing Shamatha without developing compassion? Yes, because you might succeed! Bliss, luminosity and non-duality may arise, but if you haven’t cultivated the strong aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, you are likely to get stuck. You have missed the whole point. It’s not about doing your own thing for your own sake.

Similarly, with the realisation of emptiness. If you are well-prepared in terms of renunciation, The Four Immeasurables, and bodhichitta, when insight into emptiness dawns upon you, it will be like you have found the most precious treasure. If you are not ready, you will feel like you have lost your most precious treasure (your reified sense of self).

Why is His Holiness the Dalai Lama not miserable, sad or angry all the time, given the atrocities that have occurred in Tibet? Why is he always joyful? Because he understands the importance of the fusion between wisdom and compassion. Out of his realisation of emptiness comes a lightness of being that is ever-present.

The practice of *tonglen* – of giving and taking - involves wisdom and compassion. In the beginning stages of doing this practice, it can seem overwhelming taking the suffering of the world into your heart but the white light (bindu) at the centre of your heart is your Buddha-nature, is inexhaustible, cannot be modified and is much more powerful than the sufferings of the world (the analogy of the sufferings of the world being like a feather landing in the fire of Buddha-nature and dissolving without trace immediately).
Shamatha also provides a refuge for you, to take some time out and restore the balance.

Day 18, am. 20 September

Returning to the text by Lobsang Chökyi Gyalsen

What are you attending to in Shamatha without a Sign? You are focusing on the nature of awareness, that is, the sheer luminosity and cognisance. Remember it’s about subtraction, not addition. You are doing less, not more. You are stripping it down naked to just being aware.

He describes two approaches:

(i) Whatever thoughts arise, recognise each one without grasping, then let it dissolve of its own accord.

There are two metaphors to illuminate this:

- a) In ancient India, when ships were at sea and there was no sight of land, to determine the direction to take to reach the nearest land, the navigator (you meditating) would release a raven from its cage (a thought). As ravens do not have webbed feet, they can’t swim, so they need to find dry land. The raven would circle up higher and higher looking for the nearest land. If there were no land to be seen, the raven would have to return to the ship if it were to survive (dissolve back into the space of the mind).
- b) A beautiful bashful maiden (a thought) is walking through the central square of the city. A ladies’ man (you meditating) watches her with piercing eyes as she passes. As soon as she realizes, she quickly disappears from view (dissolves back into the space of the mind).

(ii) Alternatively, like a participant in a dual, you can completely cut off any thoughts as soon as they arise. A metaphor here is:

With a swordsman(you meditating) and an archer standing 50 metres apart, it looks a very one-sided dual. But as the archer takes out arrow after arrow (thoughts) from his quiver, aims and shoots, the swordsman who is ready and waiting, deflects the arrow at the last moment with his sword then relaxes again ready for the next arrow. For this to succeed, the swordsman needs to be highly attentive but also very relaxed.

When there is stillness between thoughts, relax loosely without losing mindfulness. This way, the mind will settle. Relax without wandering. When the mind that is tangled up in ideation, loosens up with mindful relaxation, it frees itself from habitual, compulsive discursive thoughts.

Guided meditation ...

Day 18, pm.

When we refer to 'all sentient beings', it often sounds a bit vague or a bit overwhelming in size. What can it mean in practical terms to give some orientation during *tonglen* practice? One of Alan's teachers defined this as everyone you meet/have contact with, and everyone who comes to mind in daily life.

We will shortly do another *tonglen* meditation practice. This time when we meditate, as we attend to one or more sentient beings, rather than being selective, just open your awareness and see who comes to mind. See who comes knocking at your door and invite them in. Maybe it's for 15 seconds, maybe it's for 3 minutes, but then let the appearance fade out, and wait to see who the next person is who knocks on your door.

In Settling the Mind in its Natural State, an image of a person might come to mind. What are you attending to? Is it the image or is it the person represented by that image? It's the image arising here and now in the space of your mind. In the practice of Shamatha, you don't want to be drawn off to the referent – the actual person. In contrast during *tonglen* practice, you don't develop loving kindness for an image. These images represent people and we therefore attend to them by way of the mental image. Today we will focus on those people who are still alive but this practice can also be performed to cultivate loving kindness for people that have passed on.

What is the primary purpose of *tonglen*? The purpose is to develop greater empathy, loving-kindness and compassion, to cultivate bodhichitta, to transform your mind. You know the practice is working, when, wherever you are going, you are poised ready to act with compassion, poised ready to respond with loving kindness by way of your speech and physical behaviour. You also know the practice is working, when you find yourself naturally hesitating to perform some negative action by way of your speech and physical behaviour. such as saying harsh or unkind things. Some real transformation is taking place.

When attending to a person or a group of people, might there be any actual benefit for them? It's hard to evaluate the efficacy of our practice. There are many anecdotes of people attending to others, who may be some distance away, yet who benefit. It's easy to say it was mere coincidence. Buddhists would say that it definitely can happen, but it is still mysterious as it is not a direct, infallible, causal relationship. The answer lies in the karmic connection, which enables (catalyses) some sort of transmission between sender and receiver(s). Similarly, Tibetans believe in a 'secret pulse'. Where, for example, a child is too ill to travel to a doctor, the mother will go alone. The Tibetan doctor can diagnose the child's problem through palpation of the mother's pulse, and prescribe appropriate medicine for the child. Importantly, whether or not attending to a person or a group of people results in actual benefit, it is a powerful practice for opening your heart and overcoming self-grasping.

Guided meditation ...

In Atisha's Seven-Point Mind Training, there is a sequence to the points. He covers the wisdom teachings first, then moves on to cultivating bodhichitta. This is a synergistic or middle way approach.

So, in *tonglen*, as you move from close attention to yourself to closely attending to others as if they were yourself, then back to yourself, then to others, and back again, you start to get the feeling that you are not really there. It's like a mother who sees her child suffering, and her sense of identity extends to incorporate her child, so she experiences suffering from her own perspective. Developing the insight of emptiness, does not mean that you no longer feel this compassion for others. Actually, it strengthens it.

Compassion needs to be even, regardless of who is involved, whether it's the head of the Syrian government, the US congressman who wants to bomb the Syrians to punish them, or the victims involved in the civil war.

The classic analysis of compassion by Buddhaghosa clearly explains the difference in meaning from the Western psychologist viewpoint and the Buddhist perspective. Compassion is defined as an emotion by most Western psychologists. Compassion is an aspiration in Buddhism. If the aspiration isn't there, then it's not compassion. If you are deeply saddened, it's not compassion, it's empathetic sadness or sympathy.

We live in a time when we are explicitly exposed to the sufferings of the world in an unprecedented volume, via the media. Broadly, there are three ways in which we might respond:

- (i) One feels deeply saddened for a person who is suffering. One can feel the situation is hopeless as there is nothing that one can do to help. Feelings of despair can arise. If this continues, it can lead to clinical depression. The outcome can result in you being sad and depressed which then triggers others to feel deeply saddened for you, and it can set up a chain reaction. Very little benefit comes from this response.
- (ii) One sees a person or group causing suffering, or a government policy that is resulting in suffering, etc. and blames the suffering on them. Where there is a target, they can be punished. It arises as a desire, to retaliate, to make the initiator suffer also. It might come under the guise of compassion, but it is actually malice. However, others can see the retaliator as malevolent, and they too want to get even, so another chain reaction can start. And they will claim their hatred is justified, but it is actually a mental affliction. Again, very little benefit comes from this response.
- (iii) Out of that great potential of empathetic sadness, compassion can blossom as an aspiration "May this person/sentient being be free of suffering and the causes of suffering". One sees the possibilities and moves beyond the sadness and suffering to envision the person being free of the suffering. From the bodhisattva perspective and arising from the capacity of *rigpa*, the response goes beyond this, to say "May I be able to relieve their suffering, may I be able to liberate them from the true causes of suffering, so that they may be truly free of suffering".

The near enemy of compassion is despair. Empathy leads to a sense of hopelessness, which results in feelings of despair. It can look like compassion. It's a facsimile.

The distant enemy of compassion is cruelty – enjoying, causing or prolonging another's suffering. Of all the vices we can imagine, cruelty is probably the worst of all.

What arouses this genuine aspiration "May this sentient being be free of suffering and the causes of suffering"? When you see others afflicted by suffering, if they can do something about it, it doesn't arouse much compassion. But if they are helpless, having no skills or strategy to do something about it, and you sense they may need some help, this may arouse empathy. Where you can see that there is a real possibility that the suffering can be alleviated, the aspiration can then become a reality, and you help get together whatever is needed.

When meditating on *tonglen*, how do you know it is working? When the impulse for cruelty is subsiding, e.g. when there is no word of sarcasm, no word of abuse, no retaliation, etc. no matter what that person has done. In other words, cruelty is not in your repertoire. How do you know it is not working? When, as you attend to the suffering of another being, you are only aware of their mental afflictions – delusion, craving, hostility – and you slip into sadness or despair.

When you feel overwhelmed by the suffering in the world, have the strength of heart to see the possibilities of freedom from suffering. Just like the people on the front line or the great yogis in Tibet, who live and breathe compassion. Say to yourself: "May I become like that".

Day 19, am 21 September

Today we will finish Shamatha without a Sign. Back to the text ...

"When thoughts arise, if their nature is observed, the thoughts will naturally disappear, and a clear vacuity will arise".

View the thoughts as thoughts and the mind as mind. This sounds obvious, but in fact, we don't do that. We get caught up in appearances and their referents.

"Likewise if the mind is examined when it is still, a vivid, unobscured luminous vacuity will arise.

When thoughts arise, don't block them, but recognise their movements and observe their nature and they will dissolve, and rest in the nature of awareness".

He, too, is referring to stillness and motion.

So, he is integrating the two methods of observing the space of the mind and Shamatha without a Sign.

"In meditative equipoise, your mind is not obscured, rather it is limpid, clear and luminous. It is a clear vacuity. It is vividly awake. Such is the nature of the mind. It is empty and it is luminous. This is superbly witnessed by direct perception". You cannot hold on to it or demonstrate with words to people who don't have the experience.

"Whatever arises, rest lucidly without grasping".

Many Tibetans say that this is practical advice for achieving enlightenment. This is not the case. As Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltzen says: For novices, this is a method to achieve mental stillness and to identify the relative nature of the mind (that is the substrate) - in other words, to achieve Shamatha.

Guided meditation ...

In response to a question on the difference between the substrate, the substrate consciousness and what continues after death ...

The substrate refers to the space you are observing, and the substrate consciousness refers to the experience of it and its contents.

The subtle continuum of mental consciousness, prana (which is physical but not material), and the subtle continuum of energy (the store of mental imprints, karma) all continue from lifetime to lifetime.

Ian Stevensen, who was Chair of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia researched past life recall in children and published his findings in a book '*When Reincarnation and Biology Intercept*'. Despite the rigour of the research and the amazing findings, the results have basically been ignored by the scientific community.

Day 19, pm.

Guided meditation ...

Returning to Lobsang Chökyi Gyaltzen's text...

The practice of *tonglen* integrates the cultivation of both loving kindness and compassion. The more you are focused on the cultivation of The Four Immeasurables, the more you have the foundation for the development of great Loving Kindness, Great Compassion, Great Empathetic joy and Great Equanimity.

So looking at the analysis of Buddhaghosa ...

There is a difference between loving-kindness and attachment. 'Attachment' is defined differently in modern psychology, often as a positive emotion. Likewise with 'love'. When you say, for example, "I love chocolate", it's often no more than expressing an attachment that you like it. Loving-kindness doesn't mean you like it. You hear people say: "I love my car". That's attachment.

There is a crucial distinction between loving-kindness and attachment. 'Loving-kindness' is the heartfelt aspiration for the other person's well-being, which involves warmth, connectedness, and a yearning for them to find happiness. Loving-kindness for oneself is also shown in a warm, loving and affectionate way. The Buddha said: "One who loves himself will never harm another". So having expressed loving kindness for oneself, then extend that loving-kindness out to others - to loved ones, friends, acquaintances, those you feel neutral about, those you don't like and your enemies - in an even way. In doing so, you are seeing through all their delusions and you are wishing them well: "May you find happiness and the causes of happiness". When doing this, feel the sense of connectedness.

Self-centered attachment can look like a facsimile of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is about others, self-centeredness is about oneself. Many displays that look like loving-kindness are not. What you are really thinking is: "You are just an instrument for me to get what I want". So one can appear in the guise of the other. One is an affliction, the other is not. You cannot love someone too much, but you can be attached to someone too much.

Loving-kindness is an "I-You" relationship (where you are engaging with someone just like yourself) and its about you (the other person).

Attachment is an "I-It" relationship (treating the other person as an 'it'). It's about me. So "I love my car" should be about an I-It relationship.

Buddhaghosa says the near enemy of loving-kindness looks like loving-kindness but it's self-centered attachment. It's antithetic to loving-kindness.

If the child you loved so much during childhood becomes a difficult adolescent with behaviours you don't approve of, if your response is to pull away/to withdraw, then it's a sign that your behaviour before the child went off the rails was mostly about attachment. If on the other hand your response is to show increased heartfelt love, care and concern, then your behaviour was mostly loving-kindness.

The distant enemy of loving-kindness when it slips into intent is ill-will: may you not find happiness and the causes of happiness. It's malice and no one can mistake it for loving-kindness.

What catalyses a sense of loving-kindness? Seeing the 'lovableness' of someone. This is very different from seeing someone as attractive. You don't need to try to be lovable. This is very different for example, from someone putting on make-up and trying to make themselves attractive to you. With loving-kindness, you are attending deeply to the substance of the person. With attachment, it is very much attending to the surface.

When do you know you are cultivating loving-kindness? When any impulse for malice subsides.

When doing *tonglen* where your mother is the subject of your loving-kindness, think back on all the loving-kindness your mother has shown you throughout your life, starting as early as you can remember. You wish to repay her kindness towards you. You also take it upon yourself to protect her from harm and do whatever you can to bring about her happiness.

In the fully fledged *tonglen* practice, you imagine willingly taking on the actual suffering of your mother with the wish "May her suffering ripen on me", "May she be free", then dissolving the suffering in the inexhaustible white light at your heart. Don't feel dismayed if you do temporarily feel a heaviness with this practice. In taking on the suffering, you are purifying yourself. And the heaviness will pass.

This leads to the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion, then Great Loving-Kindness and Great Compassion, and ultimately to the cultivation of bodhichitta.

So what we have been covering here relates to the next aphorism: "*Mount them both upon your breath*".

'Both' here refers to *tonglen*. Loving-kindness and compassion are really two sides of the same coin. It is a good thing to practice *tonglen* when meditating in your own room. But it is also beneficial to do as you go about the activities of your daily life, for example, when standing in the supermarket queue or dealing with a difficult person at work. Breathe out loving-kindness, breathe in compassion, saying "May you be free". Do it quietly, and no one will know!

It's useful to do when watching or reading the news. Many people's response is to fall into the two default modes: "It's not my problem and it's too depressing" or "I can't do anything" and falling into apathy. So, *tonglen* is a good practice to do when you can't do something tangible to help. A good reference here is the book: "*Enlightened Courage*" by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

Tonglen is not just for those who are suffering. It can also be done for those who are striving to do good. Also, for those who are bringing malice or evil to the world, with the aspiration: "May you be free of the causes of suffering". So, it's a way of transmuting the experience.

In response to a question about the substrate consciousness ...

The substrate consciousness is not permanent. It is changing constantly. It doesn't continue into the next lifetime, but neither does it get cut off. Like an ice cube, which when it melts, neither disappears into nothing, nor stays as an ice cube – it transforms into water. The substrate consciousness melts into rigpa.

Day 20, am. 22 September

No teachings