

Eight-Week Shamatha Retreat, Fall 2013

Week 5

Day 28, am. 30 September

Today we are returning to 'the infirmary', to the foundation that is useful for all practices. The instruction is to "motionlessly relax your body.....allow your body to be like a corpse, your speech like a lute with its strings cut, and your mind like the primordial presence of space." This is not a practice just for those in (meditative) kindergarten or for those in the remedial category.

When you start to have the feelings "I should be making more progress", "I should try harder", it's a sign of ego-grasping and it's all about craving. These feelings can drive you crazy and they can become a habit. So just go to the infirmary as soon as you see this tendency arise. What we are seeking is stillness, but trying too hard leads to emotional stress and fatigue. Be patient, gentle and loving towards yourself, and with time you will find the inner calm through relaxation. Let the mind heal itself.

In addition to going to the infirmary, it is useful to engage in walking meditation in a place of natural beauty. While walking, rest in the senses: tactile – feel grounded; auditory – listen to the sounds around you; visual - let your awareness float out into space, loose and open. As thoughts come up, simply release them.

Guided meditation ...

When you think about achieving Shamatha, the task can seem overwhelming. So, it is useful to break it down into stages, which we will do over the next couple of weeks. We will look at the nine stages of the path to achieving Shamatha.

Stage 1: Directed attention. One achieves the first stage when one can direct one's attention to the chosen object. You achieve this through *the power of hearing*. You hear the teachings, and on that basis, you try to apply them. This is where all yogis start. It is easy to think that you are the worst meditator in the room, as you don't have any attentional continuity at all. You're like a butterfly flitting from excitement, to dullness, to excitement, to boredom, to hoping that the bell will soon ring to sound the end of the session.

The problem that persists at this stage is the inability to direct the attention to the meditative object for more than brief periods.

The dominant attentional imbalance is coarse excitation. But this doesn't mean that you are not exposed to dullness. While you intend to focus single-pointedly on the tactile sensations of the body, after just a few seconds, your attention slips off the object. On the outside you may look as still as a mountain, on the inside your mind is probably like a tornado.

The type of mental engagement is focus.

The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is movement, that is, it's turbulent as you keep getting carried away with thoughts.

The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is involuntary thoughts are like a cascading waterfall. But this is a sign of success, as you now realise the nature of your mind! It's not surprising, given the lifestyle we live in the modern western world. It's quite different to the state of mind of a nomadic Tibetan. One Tibetan friend of Alan's who is trained in Tibetan medicine and has lived in the USA for many years said that we westerners all have serious 'prana disorders' and considering this, it's remarkable how well we are!

It's dysfunctional to have a mind that can focus for no more than a few seconds. Our mind is continuously caught up in obsessive, compulsive babbling. We've become complacent and think this is 'normal'. It's normal in the sense that it's habitual and common. After all, we are still productive members of society! But as if this is sanity! Often we manage the symptoms with drugs, or simply 'chill out' in front of the television. This demonstrates how low we have set the bar for 'normality'.

The first of the four noble truths is *the reality of suffering*. Understanding the true source of your suffering and the ways in which you can eradicate it is within reach. It's all about being on 'the path' to liberation and awakening. This is truly inspiring. So the first step is to recognise the first noble truth of the reality of suffering.

Day 28, pm.

In this session, we seek to take emptiness off the bookshelf and view all phenomena from this perspective. It's not enough to say: "It's in my notes!"

There are two approaches to take:

- (i) investigate one type of object or phenomenon after the other to see if any are independently and inherently there from their own side
- (ii) fathom the empty nature of mind. Through this, you will realise the empty nature of all phenomena. When the mind is empty, everything that arises within it is empty.

“All phenomena are preceded by the mind, issue forth from the mind, and consist of the mind”.

So what is the nature of the mind? We say things like: “This thought came into my mind”, “My mind came up with this dream” and “I was watching it, then it disappeared from my mind”. So what is this container called ‘mind’? What are you referring to?

The saying: “You’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all” applies to such things as a molecule of water, but it also applies to thoughts, images, etc that appear to the mind

Padmasambhava said that if you carefully and completely penetrate the origin, the location and the destination of one thought, you will thereafter understand the mind. If you are of superior faculties, and you get this, you go directly to realisation of rigpa (break-through), you become lucid, and you can skip Shamatha, Vipassana, etc.

Guided meditation ...

If you look ahead with your eyes open, the colours and shapes you see are appearances. They are just illusions. What’s out there when the eyes are closed? Nothing? No, not nothing, but nor is it colours and shapes. So what’s there? There is a space of potential from your perspective. If you were looking at the same thing with the eyes of a dog, or the eyes of a bumble-bee, you would not be seeing the same thing. So the visual appearances have to be different. What arises in actuality depends on what you bring to it, and it’s changing from moment to moment. This means there are lots of possibilities. But it’s easy to reify what you see. Don’t do that. It’s just one more delusion.

But isn’t there a physical world out there, because we share a common experience of it?

The materialists believe the whole universe was there before we came along. This is a legacy of theistic thinking – that it’s what God created.

What is objectively causing this physical world? We assume it is physical. Everything we know about the physical universe – matter, energy, space and time – is all based on information. Information comes from measurement, but information is not physical. On the basis of information, the categories of matter, energy, space and time are superimposed on a world presumed to be physical, based on information which is not physical. It’s all coming from the mind.

The mind is a black box. Who has ever seen the mind? No one. Not even the buddhas. Appearances come out of the black box, but we can’t see into the black box. So it’s a leap of faith to say that what is out there is physical.

Interestingly, over time, the physical categories keep shifting. How do we know if it exists independently of our concepts? The fact is, you can’t. It’s all empty. But then what is the mind? Mind is primary (aspects of it continue from lifetime to lifetime, the body and speech do not). The mind is “the all-creating sovereign”.

There is one universe for every sentient being. Each of us is the centre of our own universe or mandala.

So, why do we share a commonality of experience? There are three possibilities:

- (i) God did it. He is responsible, but he is also unknowable. From a Buddhist epistemology perspective, if it’s unknowable, then it doesn’t exist.
- (ii) It’s matter. All phenomena are preceded by matter, issue forth from matter, and consist of matter. If there is an objective world out there, this makes sense. It was there independent of, and prior to, our system of measurement. This possibility just replaces ‘God’ with ‘matter’. Interestingly also, the definition of matter has been changing over time.
- (iii) The manifold worlds arise from collective karma. However, we also have our own individual karma. This karma is not unknowable, but it’s unknowable in principle.

In the practice of *Lojong*, we are trying to transform all felicity and adversity into our spiritual path, so we view reality from a different perspective. As our mental afflictions subside, wholesome qualities emerge. Is it having a physical impact on the brain? Yes. But it is also having an effect on the body. For example, we know as one goes to the depths and experiences a direct perception of reality, the impact on the body is enormous (such as the mastery or power over one’s lifespan; the shrinking of the body at death to a fraction of its normal size; bodies or parts of bodies not burning during cremation). These shifts go way beyond neuroplasticity. So your body and mind change, your perception of reality changes, the world you experience changes, all impure visions vanish as all your karma and klesha are gone.

When you reach this stage of pure perception, you exist in a pure realm and you see all sentient beings as awake. Buddhas can see everything from their own perspective as well as from the perspective of other sentient beings as they all have the same Buddha-nature.

So you have a choice. You can stay locked into the perception of yourself as a sentient being, or if you view yourself as empty of inherent nature, there are other options. The way other people appear to you, you can view them from the perspective of emptiness, then as you emerge into the world of possibilities, you see them as Buddha-mind and manifesting as a Buddha. So from this perspective you can transform your mind, your body and your whole world.

Day 29, am. 1 October

The next stage of the Mindfulness of Breathing is called the Burmese technique. It has probably only been used for the last 100 years or so and it is especially designed to stabilise the mind, to bring the attention right down to the ground.

Stage 2: Continuous attention. One achieves continuous attention on the object for up to a minute at a time (a minute is the equivalent of saying “*Om mani padme hum*” 108 times = once around the mala). However it is important not to take this as a goal, as this can lead to self-destructive, egocentric grasping. It is simply useful as a signpost. So, the second stage is achieved when you can hold the attention for up to one minute time and time again in the same session. It’s not about the infrequent spike of success.

It’s normal to experience a session or a day where everything just flows and you can hold the attention on the object with little effort. However, you often find that the next session or the next day, it is the opposite. This is because in a good session, you are engaging in deep dredging which brings a lot of thoughts, images and memories to the surface. It’s our karma manifesting as appearances. This is a sign that the practice is working. Take it as grist for the mill and keep practising. It’s not about how well the practice is working for you. It’s about how you are transforming what is being dished up to you. How you respond is entirely up to you. It is not being done to you.

You achieve this second stage by the power of thinking. For example: How am I doing? Am I making use of my introspection? How relaxed am I? How stable am I? Why am I doing this? With this thinking, we are learning to be our own mentor.

It can be helpful at this stage to also use counting in Mindfulness of Breathing. You can say “one” in a staccato fashion at the end of the first in-breath, “two” at the end of the second in-breath, etc. This technique also involves thinking – it is precisely designed to assist you with continuity of attention. If you have already achieved an uninterrupted flow of attention, then counting won’t help. However, if you are prone to a lot of coarse excitation, it can be useful. Another way to develop improved focus is to apply mindfulness and introspection to your present reality when you are off the cushion.

The problem that persists in the second stage is that most of the time during the session your attention is off the object. Remember, this is normal, so don’t be disturbed.

The attentional imbalance is coarse excitation.

The type of mental engagement is focus.

The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is movement.

The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is involuntary thoughts are like a cascading waterfall.

Day 28, pm.

Learning the dharma is like eating a meal. You come to it with a real hunger. It is said that there are three approaches to Dharma practice:

- (i) The banquet approach. You acquire a breadth and depth of Dharma knowledge through studying the texts and hearing a broad range of teachings from a variety of teachers. Then when you go into solitude, your teachers are with you, as you put all that knowledge into practice. You bring all their counsel with you.
- (ii) The rice and vegies approach. You learn some core teachings or texts that are primarily about practice rather than philosophical theory, which provide you with an adequate foundation of practical knowledge to then put into practice.
- (iii) The bowl of tsampa approach. You receive just the quintessential pith instructions that are personalised by a lama for you, in whom you have faith, and who is your only refuge, and then single-pointedly apply those instructions to your practice.

So, there are different ways to be inspired to practise and all three can take you to the same end point. Some people draw a lot of inspiration from erudition and knowledge of great masters. Others are looking for the chief sources of inspiration from the inside. That is, there are those who come to the Dharma via ‘the view’ and others who come by

way of the practice. If you decide to follow the latter, the way will not be easy, but it will take you to the utmost depths if you persevere. But take it seriously and don't waste your time. So, determine which approach suits you best.

Silent meditation ...

Some people can get very involved with the Dharma, but then, over time, their interest fades. It's common to hear "I'll get back to the Dharma when I have more time". How does a sheep become separated from the flock? The answer: Blade by blade (of grass). It's the same with losing touch with one's practice of Dharma.

Taking the aphorisms covered earlier, how do you apply them at work when you have a difficult boss, or when you lose your job, etc. The answer is in the next aphorism: "*By meditating on delusive appearances as the four embodiments, emptiness becomes the best protection.*"

People become deluded, but they get a lot of help from appearances. These can be misleading, and they are not as they appear. We think they are really 'out there', but where is the border between 'out there' and your mind? Between external space, internal space and secret space (non-duality of the two)?

There is no easy way to realise emptiness. Reality is not cheap. We need to recognise that objects out there are arising relative to our conceptual mind. They were not there prior to, and independent of, our conceptual designation. You need to apply all your intelligence to really understand this. You need to carefully investigate this to see if it is true or not.

The four embodiments, or four kayas, are the four aspects of perfect enlightenment. They assist you to transmute all felicity and adversity that comes your way into the spiritual path. For this, you need primordial wisdom or intuition rather than intelligence to understand this. It comes from a much deeper source.

Ascertain that all phenomena, including those that appear to inflict harm, are solely delusive appearances to your own mind. Ultimately no phenomenon has its own inherent existence; all are like apparitions emerging from space. Both the aggressor and I are simply non-inherent awareness; and there can be no harm from one to the other, just as the space in the east cannot hurt the space in the west.

The absence of inherent existence of everything, including your own mental afflictions, is the dharmakāya (the mind of the Buddha that transcends space and time). All phenomena are empty. That emptiness is diffused with Buddha-nature and non-dual, as viewed from the perspective of your own rigpa. It's not just intellectual, as it can be experientially recognised as stemming from your primordial consciousness.

That which is unborn is unceasing, and that unceasing luminosity is the sambhogakāya (the embodiment of enjoyment/bliss). Only someone with direct realisation of rigpa can perceive sambhogakaya.

That which is unborn and unceasing is also non-abiding, and that non-abidingness is the nirmānakāya (the empty, reflection-like nature of phenomena). All phenomena are not there from their own side. The mind is an agent, but it cannot be found. Even the buddhas cannot find it.

The non-inherent nature of all phenomena, as they are not established in any of the three times, is the svabhāvakāya: the indivisibility of the three embodiments. If you look for things in the past, they are over, the future hasn't happened yet, and by the time you are aware of something in the present, it's become the past. So you can't find any of them.

By recognising that your own mind is unborn, unceasing, and non-abiding, you may ascertain that it is free of all impurities and is none other than the four embodiments. They are the same but viewed from different perspectives. Regard all thoughts as expressions of the four embodiments.

Day 30, am. 2 October

Today we will revisit the classic Theravada method of Mindfulness of Breathing, where we focus on the apertures of the nostrils. It was not actually taught by the Buddha, but was common amongst Theravadan adepts who achieved stream-entry culminating in arhatship. It can be practised sitting, lying, walking or standing.

One focuses on the apertures of the nostrils or just above the upper lip, wherever one is most aware of the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. As the body settles down and one's attention becomes more refined, the sensations at the nostrils become more and more subtle. This requires greater and greater focus. Eventually, a mental image may arise spontaneously, called the acquired sign (or 'learning sign' in Buddhagosa's '*Path of Purification*'). One knows it is not just another distraction, especially as it will keep reappearing when the session is going well. It may appear as a point of light, a garland of flowers, or something else, but it takes a distinct form or shape, it comes in repeatedly and it's stable. When one is aware of its persistence and its stability, disengage from

the tactile sensation of the breath and switch one's focus to the acquired sign. Focus on that single-pointedly right through to Stage 9.

Then when one finally achieves direct crossing over to the form realm (Shamatha), the acquired sign breaks up and the counterpart sign appears which is 1000 times more subtle. If one can stabilise the attention on the counterpart sign, then one can achieve realisation of the first dyana. At this point, it is possible to sit for 24 hours in the formless realm and have a mind free of all appearances and obscurations. If one is not that gifted and you see the counterpart sign but then lose it, one is left observing the substrate, the sheer vacuity and you will be observing it from the perspective of substrate consciousness. At this point you will have achieved Shamatha – access to the first dyana. In subsequent meditation sessions, one option is to retrieve the counterpart sign and follow it to fully realise the first dyana. Or an alternative option is to invert your awareness, focus on the space of the mind, and achieve Shamatha again using substrate consciousness as the object.

When engaged in this method, make sure the visual attention is not focused on the nose and there is no muscular or energetic contraction around the eyes. The eyes can be closed, hooded or open, but keep the attention wide and open. Otherwise, one can experience a build up of prana or pressure, which can become chronic. That can lead to persistent headaches and a habituated tension that can derail your meditative practice. Instead, keep the focus light and soft, just enough to remain engaged, not too light that one floats off.

Silent meditation ...

Stage 3: Resurgent attention. You achieve this stage when most of the time, your attention is on the object, but every now and then for a few seconds, your mind wanders off. When this occurs, you swiftly notice your attention has slipped off and “patch it up”. Again, this is not a goal, but rather another signpost. It helps you to know when you have shifted into this domain. You may feel like you want to extend the session because it's going well, perhaps to 30 minutes or 45 minutes. You achieve this with *the power of mindfulness*, meaning recollection, not forgetting the instructions about the practice, not forgetting the meditative object, not getting distracted and thus falling into coarse excitation.

The problem that persists at this stage is that you still forget the object for brief periods.

The attentional imbalance is coarse excitation. The primary remedy for distraction is to relax, loosen up, then gently come back to the object. Don't try harder, just 'relax, release and return'. Dullness can also arise, that is, where the mind is sluggish, heavy, dull.

The type of mental engagement is interrupted (by coarse excitation)

The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is movement, but it's less and you are more aware of the stillness of the mind.

The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State), is still involuntary thoughts are like a cascading waterfall. If the practice is one of the other three forms (Mindfulness of Breathing, Awareness of Awareness, Merging the Mind with Space), the rate of flow of thoughts will be diminishing because you are actively practising releasing. In Settling the Mind in its Natural State you are practising non-grasping observation and so your attachment to thoughts might be diminishing but at this stage the rate of thoughts might not be lessening.

Day 30, pm.

When viewing reality from the perspective of the four kayas, it's not just that all phenomena are empty. Rather, all phenomena are manifestations of the four kayas. This suggests pure vision. But for most of us, we are viewing conventional reality. However, with the power of imagination, we can envisage seeing all phenomena as empty of inherent existence, we can withdraw conceptual designation, then out of primordial purity, we can imagine all phenomena as being pure. When you break-through to rigpa, then that is naturally how things will appear, all equally pure.

To use the analogy of a dream – When viewing the dream from the perspective of being lucid, you know that all the people in your dream are all equally manifestations of your substrate consciousness and therefore all equally pure

Let us return to the three-fold space – external, internal and secret space, and continue the analogy of a lucid dream. You know that you are dreaming and you know everyone in the dream. It is all equally coming out of your substrate consciousness. If you are in the midst of the dream, you attend to the communal space. Your awareness is out in external space with appearances arising. In addition, thoughts come up in your mind, which you are aware of. So you are also aware of your inner space. If you are lucid, you must know that there is no separation of inner and outer space, as you are dreaming and there is only one space. It's all coming from one perspective. It's all coming from the ground. Even though you know it's a dream, you don't know what will unfold. But if you expect something – attempt to manipulate the dreamscape - it can happen. There's no competition. You know what you are doing. For

example, if you expect the wall to be solid, you won't be able to walk through it. But if you change your perspective in the dream, you can walk through it.

So in the waking state, put your awareness out into external space and rest there. Then place your awareness on the internal space. There's likely to be a lot of chatter going on. However, if you strip it back 'naked' to its unconfigured nature without personal history, labels, concepts, etc., you would see the substrate.

While in a lucid dream, just stop and withdraw your attention as if to finish the dream, and in a matter of seconds, the dream will vanish. But you still have the stillness of the substrate. Now you are seeing inner space. You are not even aware of your body. It's your private space.

Now imagine coming back to the waking state and resting your attention in external space without focusing on any particular object. Then imagine you have achieved Shamatha and direct your attention to the inner space, and ask: Where is the barrier? When you rest in non-duality, all appearances are arising from the same place. Then you break through- *tregchö*. You cut through the bifurcation of subject and object and see all phenomena from the perspective of rigpa and primordial consciousness. That's the secret space.

Guided meditation ...

The purpose of realising primordial consciousness/Nirvana/knowing reality as it is, is to be of benefit to others. In addition to seeing things from your own perspective, you can also see everyone else's perspective – outer space, communal space, inner space. But you are not flip-flopping back and forth between the two realities. From the perspective of a Buddha, you are realising both simultaneously and non-dually.

The aphorism: "*By meditating on delusive appearances as the four embodiments, emptiness becomes the best protection*" is very esoteric. But the *Lojong* is about putting this into practice in a very practical way.

When people treat us badly, how can we transmute this, how do we equally welcome that, and avoid that tendency to resist? This is a challenge. View it as a precious opportunity to practise deep transformation. You get a reality check. See what comes up, then practice. Then you are in growth mode. Start by paying attention to the little things that annoy you. When they occur, just release them, and see yourself change over time. Take advantage of every opportunity to transmute. However, don't seek them out. Simply deal with what you face daily. It's not just what happens to you from the outside, it's also your mental afflictions. Recognise them as enemies of your happiness.

In response to a question about free will ...

'Free will' is the ability to make a wise decision, which is conducive to your own and others' well-being. People cannot agree on a definition. If drunk, how free is your will? If you're really angry? If you're fixated on someone? If you are full of self-grasping? We're not robots, but nor are we free to act wisely.

If you could make a decision without delusion, maybe then you would be free. Real freedom is to act out of bodhichitta. Even better, if you acted out of both ultimate and relative bodhichitta. If your perspective was from rigpa, that would truly be free. Therefore, to achieve free will, you at least need to achieve arhatship.

In response to a question about where mental afflictions come from ...

Look closely at them and you will see. They come from and dissolve into objectless openness. The seeds are there in your substrate consciousness from past karma, but they are largely dormant. The purpose of regret, virtue and positive karma is to burn the seeds of negative karma so that it does not ripen. You can compound mental afflictions if they have been habituated in past lives. If they have been acquired in this lifetime, they are easier to eradicate.

Day 31, am. 3 October

The method we move onto today comes from Asanga – a 'contemporary Buddhaghosa' – from the Mahayana tradition. We are trying to view the three spaces, which are indivisible, from the perspective of rigpa. We release all grasping, even grasping to the substrate consciousness, and break through to rigpa. Achieving this directly while on the path of Shamatha is most unlikely unless you are extremely gifted. So, when on the path to Shamatha, we are trying to emulate this. We are seeking to attend to everything from the perspective of the substrate consciousness (in doing so, it's like taking the fruition as the path).

In this practice, we are withdrawing our awareness from the surrounding environment, withdrawing into the tactile field of earth, wind, fire and air elements, and selecting within that tactile domain the sensations of the flow of prana. As the body and mind calm down, the volume of air required becomes less, and the sensations of the breath

become subtler and subtler. Remember the substrate consciousness illuminates the object (the flow of prana) but does not enter it, otherwise this would be grasping. So just rest in your own awareness, which is not moving and at the same time be aware of the movement of prana. Again there's a reference to the simultaneous observation of stillness and motion, the stillness of your own awareness and the motion of the sensations of the flow of prana.

Silent meditation ...

Stage 4: Close attention. This stage is achieved when one's attention is closely applied to the meditative object. One does not completely forget the chosen object while meditating. The sessions may now be 40 minutes or longer, if one so wishes. One may still have sessions or days that do not go well, but mostly, one can get into a flow, into a stream of meditation, where one has a sense of ongoing engagement with the object. Coarse excitation does not completely distract one off the object. However, there is still medium and subtle excitation that impinge upon one's awareness, but they don't drag one completely off – the object remains in attention, even if displaced to the periphery by a distraction. To achieve this stage, one uses the power of mindfulness, that is, not forgetfulness. The instructions are so woven into one's awareness that one is always bearing the object in mind.

The problem that persists is some degree of complacency with respect to your samadhi. You no longer feel a total beginner and you need to apply less effort than you did in the earlier stages. You kind of sit back a bit and your mind is not so sharp (some people who are unaware of the nine stages can think that they have achieved Shamatha at this stage as it's a significant milestone on the path to Shamatha).

There are still attentional imbalances such as coarse laxity and medium excitation.

With coarse laxity, the attention is not very intense on the object due to insufficient vividness (the attention remains on the object but not in a very focused way). Laxity means to sink, so there's a sinking down while thinking you are still kind of in touch with the object.

With medium excitation, your involuntary thoughts occupy the centre of your attention, while the meditative object goes to the periphery (refer to '*Calming the Mind*' by Gen Lamrimpa and translated by Alan, for details of the different levels of excitement and laxity)

The antidote is a balancing act. To address coarse laxity – refresh your interest (this is a 'meta-interest' as you know it is essential if you are to achieve Shamatha in the future), you restore your attention and then retain your attention. But at the same time, to address medium excitation, you need to relax, loosen up, release any thoughts from your rumination and return your attention to the meditative object.

The type of mental engagement is interrupted (by coarse laxity and medium excitation).

The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is a sense of achievement. You feel like you are getting somewhere with the practice as you don't lose your mindfulness of what's appearing in your mind, and there is a sense of ongoing stillness.

The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is involuntary thoughts are like a river quickly flowing through a gorge.

An important point is to be happy with where you are on the path to Shamatha. Regardless of which stage(s) you have achieved, at least you have a map of the road ahead.

Day 31, pm.

We will look more closely at external space and internal space and the non-duality between the two – secret space. Alan told the story of the Bahiya Sutra. With some sense of urgency, Bahiya asked the Buddha how he could achieve liberation. The Buddha agreed on Bahiya's third request, and Bahiya achieved arhatship by the time the Buddha finished the following paragraph:

“Then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognised, only the cognised. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognised in reference to the cognised, then Bahiya, there is no you in connection with that. When there is no you in connection with that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering.”

This has a powerful parallel with outer, inner and secret space.

With reference to outer space, when you try to find yourself in the visual, auditory and tactile sense domains, there is no one there. With reference to the inner space, where thoughts, images, memories and emotions appear in the cognitive domain, there is no 'me' to be found.

There is no 'me' or, in fact, any kind of reified entity in outer or inner space. There is no border between the two (non-dual). When this is truly experienced, you reach the end of suffering, or liberation. This teaching is very direct, practical and grounding. It is as relevant to us today in the world we live in as it was in the time of Bahiya.

The yogini, Sera Khandro, who wrote a commentary on '*Buddhahood without Meditation*' by Dūdjom Lingpa (Richard Barron translator), equates external space with the space of awareness. It contains six domains: the five sense domains and the mental domain (relative dharmadhatu). She states that internal space is our own authentic pristine awareness, where all phenomena are recognised as not existing, inherently independent of context and independent of conceptual designation. They are delusive appearances appearing as manifestations of the four kayas.

It's the realisation of the indivisibility of external space and internal space in which luminosity and emptiness are indivisible as the one taste, as effulgences of one's pristine awareness. That which appears is simply the luminosity of primordial consciousness. It is seen for what it is, that is, empty of inherent nature.

This point is also echoed in the central message of The Heart Sutra:

"Form is emptiness: emptiness is form.

Form is no other than emptiness; emptiness is no other than form."

When you see this from wakened consciousness, you know the indivisibility of emptiness and form, but also the non-duality of emptiness and form. Then you are lucid.

Silent meditation ...

We now move onto the next aphorism: "*The best strategy is to have four practices*".

It is classified as a special practice to accumulate merit and eradicate obscurations.

- (i) Accumulate merit – by engaging in wholesome behavior with your body, speech and mind, in order to develop beneficial habitual propensities, which nurture one's spiritual maturation. Counteract mundane hopes and fears, by yearning that all situations, agreeable and disagreeable, may lead you to spiritual awakening.
- (ii) Purify vices by means of the four remedial powers which are all directed to the negative karmic action, not at you. If you engage in something deliberately and know it was wrong, the negative karma is stored as seeds on your mind-stream. The four remedial powers are:
 - Remorse for past wrong-doings. This disempowers the seed on your mind-stream.
 - Resolve to turn away from misconduct. That means do your best not to do it again.
 - Support: taking refuge and cultivating compassion.
 - Engaging in purifying practices e.g. Vajrasattava, cultivating loving kindness and compassion, in fact any good deeds. These counteract the negative actions.
- (iii) Make offerings to spirits – "What we attend to becomes our reality". Tibetans have lots of words for spirits. In the western world we don't. Do "spirits" exist as anything other than figments of certain people's imaginations? A significant proportion of the population believes they exist. Spirits or ghosts have prana and are therefore physical but not material. But their existence cannot be measured by conventional scientific or material means. Science has no objective means of detecting the presence or function of consciousness (human or otherwise), so how could it possibly make any empirical judgments about the existence of spirits? However, no self-respecting scientist would study ghosts given our history – for many centuries spirits have been seen as something spooky and historically were woven into the justification of three centuries of European witch-hunting. With the emergence of modern science, with its roots in Christian thinking, ghosts were deemed to no longer be objectively out in external space but simply a feature of mental disorders and neuroses which exist in a person's internal space. If they are to be researched, they need to be investigated with means that can detect non-physical phenomena – for example, developing extremely fine 'first person' observation skills by way of Shamatha. (For more information on this, refer to '*The Taboo of Subjectivity*' by Alan Wallace)

Day 32, am. 4 October

We return to Mindfulness of Breathing where the idea is to balance the mind, heal the mind, and make it serviceable. It's a path of self-knowledge to experiencing substrate consciousness, which is a portal from the desire realm to the form realm and the formless realm. It's stem cell consciousness. It gives one the potential to develop extraordinary abilities of consciousness.

Silent meditation ...

Stage 5: Tamed attention. The transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5 is famous. It's achieved through a subtle balance of overcoming medium excitation and coarse laxity. When you see coarse laxity, you need to crank it up/increase the pitch of your attention. But when you do this, often you find that your mind starts to flutter and you fall back into coarse excitation. So, the antidote is to loosen up, refocus and rebalance. A sense of satisfaction is achieved at this stage. You accomplish this by way of the *power of introspection*. Introspection hasn't been mentioned before. It's not that it hasn't been needed at the earlier stages, but in Stage 5 an increased sharpness of introspection is very much required. So, one needs mindfulness and introspection in equal measure.

The problem that persists is that although there is satisfaction with the progress being made, there is also some resistance or ambivalence to samadhi.

The attentional imbalances are medium laxity and medium excitation. There has not been much progress with respect to experiencing medium excitation, but it is important to remember that not all the obstacles are counteracted at the same pace. This is the stage where more focus is placed on achieving clarity. With medium laxity, engagement with the meditative object is constant, but subjective vividness is lacking (subjective in the sense that it is one's own clarity of awareness that is lacking, not the clarity of the object observed). It's not experienced with the same clarity that has been experienced, even though briefly, at earlier stages.

The type of mental engagement is interrupted (by medium excitation and medium laxity)

The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is achievement.

The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is involuntary thoughts are like a river quickly flowing through a gorge. Stillness is enhanced, the movement of appearances to the mind is the same, as the sheer volume of thoughts has not decreased, but there is less grasping.

In response to a question about how the stages are observed when practising Awareness of Awareness ...

The stages are clear when you practice Shamatha with a sign and you will go through the nine stages regardless of which method you use. This is how the mind evolves. However, in Dzogchen practice, where the method emphasised is Awareness of Awareness, the nine stages are not even mentioned. Probably, that is because with Awareness of Awareness, you are practising 'Shamatha without a Sign' and therefore the stages are very much harder to observe. It's important to keep reminding yourself to not practice with too much desire – not the desire with respect to sensual craving, but desire in terms of hoping to achieve the fruits of the practice. It's essential that you just think: "I am doing the practice, I know I am doing the practice, and I know I am doing the practice correctly", and be confident that this is how you eventually achieve Shamatha.

So again, when resting in Awareness of Awareness, it is signless. There is no clear referent you are directing your attention to. Just rest there in stillness, release your mind into space and leave it there. Shamatha will rise up to meet you, or rather, you descend to it. Just keep bright or alert and melt your way down. Do it without elaboration, without cogitation, without evaluation. When you arrive at the substrate, you will know it.

Day 32, pm.

There are three ways to experience the threefold space:

- (i) Merging your Mind with Space – on the in-breath, not withdrawing the awareness, but keeping the barest peripheral attention on heightening awareness itself; and on the out-breath, releasing into and surrendering to objectless external space, and just resting there. Sustain this 'arouse and release' technique until you experience that there is no difference in your awareness of awareness between the two.
- (ii) Go into the "*In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed*". These are appearances occurring in external space. "*In reference to the cognised, only the cognised ...*" This is what you can perceive mentally. Then you will see there is no one there - not there, not here, nor in between. Just rest there.
- (iii) Where external space is the space of all phenomena: appearances in the five sense domains and those in the mental domain in outer space in all directions, 360 degrees. Appearances are expressions of your own awareness. Then you bring in insight to the emptiness of all phenomena, that is, that phenomena do not exist in the way they appear. Just like in a dream. Bring this to bear as you open up to external space, then you will be seeing empty appearances regardless of where they are. The non-duality and emptiness and doing nothing at all sustain the flow of knowing. It's like free-falling where there is no gravity.

Silent meditation ...

Returning to 'Make offerings to spirits'...

After 300 years of witch-hunting, which was a deep psychosis throughout Europe, natural philosophers/scientists (like Newton) were really the saviours, because theologians and philosophers couldn't help. This new way of

viewing spirits brought with it tremendous relief. Then science got some momentum and it led to “If we can’t measure it, then it doesn’t exist” and “if spirits do exist, we’ll just say they are equivalent to something we do know (mental states such as neuroses etc)”, thus, in effect, making them irrelevant and defusing the need for witch-hunts.

The shift in focus to physical, quantifiable things in the external space in the 19th century, particularly at the time of The Reformation, hastened the demise of Western contemplative inquiry. Hence, the scientific study of the mind was delayed for 300 years. With the emergence of behaviourists and then later more advanced technology to study brain function in the 20th Century, there was a reiteration of the view that had been promoted previously. That is, in reference to the mind, either say it doesn’t exist or equate it with something we know. Hence, subjective experience doesn’t exist. It’s an illusion, and it’s equivalent to brain activity. Richard Hawking said “Consciousness is wrapped up in the brain” and no one challenged him. Consequently in the 21st Century, the mind equates to behaviour or to brain activity. Any view contrary to this was unlikely to get any support, hence the dearth of scientific funding to explore the mind from the first person perspective. That which has been investigated relates to correlates between brain activity and mental processes (called mechanistic research in neuroscience), not the mind itself. The focus on the physical and quantifiable has shut down imagination. It’s like another kind of psychosis. So in the last 350 years, there has been no empirical evidence to increase our knowledge of the mind independent of behaviourism or brain function.

The yogis, the geshe and the lamas are the ones with the technology to demonstrate how the mind works. So there are other modes of inquiry possible to investigate ‘spirits’ either externally or internally to give rise to replicable discoveries that can really benefit human beings and the environment at large. There is real potential to highlight the areas of ignorance, to show what it is to be human, and to integrate this understanding into our lives in the 21st Century. It’s not enough simply to speak to the geshe, the yogis, the lamas. They are offering their wisdom. What is needed are open-minded scientists to work as companions.

Padmasambhava asked: “When making offerings to the spirits, do you see these offerings visibly diminish?” and “By the way, where do you think they live?” and “Where are they?” He said they are not out there in external space. They are manifestations of your own awareness, including some of your mental afflictions. They are appearances to your mind, just as thoughts, images, emotions, memories are. They are nowhere to be found. They are simply expressions of rigpa.

Even though the offerings you make are non-existent and their recipients are non-existent, it’s an important expression of one’s generosity.

Day 33, am. 5 October

Silent meditation ...

Stage 6: Pacified attention. At this stage, one no longer experiences any resistance to training the attention. This is achieved by the power of introspection. One is using introspection and continuing to refine it. A meditation session may last for two hours.

The problems that persist are meditative experiences catalysed by authentic meditative practice that manifest as experiences such as desire, craving, lust, drowsiness, depression, misery, physical pain, speech impediments, respiratory disorders, insomnia, premonitions, etc. In between sessions one may also experience nyam, for example, sensing that all phenomena are made up of multi-coloured particles. These nyam are not necessarily all negative. For example, one may experience great ecstasy, strong devotion to one’s guru, enhanced faith, and a greater commitment to renunciation. They are unpredictable. They come out of nowhere and disappear fairly quickly. (For more details of the kinds of nyam experienced at this stage, refer to ‘*The Vajra Essence*’ – Taking appearances and awareness as the path). The practice is going well, one experiences periods of deep stillness, but one is dredging very deep and stirring up things from one’s psyche. They should be viewed as signs of progress. One is getting a dose of “know thyself”. One needs to go through this to eventually achieve meditative equipoise. However, it can be experienced as brief periods of “genuine unhappiness”.

Day 33, pm.

We now return to *tonglen*. Firstly, ground your awareness. Then let your awareness go, and see who or what comes to mind. When the spirit moves you, stop and hold your attention on that sentient being and practise *tonglen*. Spend some seconds on each in-breath thinking: “May you be free of suffering, and the causes of suffering”. Imagine bringing that particular sentient being up from the depths of their suffering to the surface for air. Imagine their relief. Then spend some seconds on the out-breath wishing them fulfillment of their heart’s desire with “May you find happiness and the causes of happiness”. Let the appearance fade back and keep your awareness wide open.

Wait to see who next comes knocking at your door, and repeat. Reminder: "All sentient beings" means those whom you encounter and those who come to mind in everyday life.

Silent meditation ...

Returning to Stage 6 ...

One has moved beyond the resistance that was experienced at Stage 5. The challenge is to move through Stage 6 and not get bogged down. Whatever comes up, view them simply as empty appearances – almost like a holographic image. One doesn't need to counteract them; just see them for what they are. Recognise nyam as nyam. With this as a basis, just be present with them without hope or fear. Watch them unravel and observe the impact on your mind. Of course, if one thinks it may be a medical condition, then this needs to be checked out. If one rises to the challenge, these nyam will help to propel one along the path, empowering one's practice. These nyam appear at earlier stages but they are more intense at Stage 6.

The attentional imbalances are still medium laxity, but now also subtle excitement. Subtle excitement is where the meditative object remains at the centre but involuntary thoughts and other distractions emerge at the periphery. The type of mental engagement is interrupted, however there are periods of deep stillness. The quality of experience (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is achievement. The metaphor (for Settling the Mind in its Natural State) is voluntary thoughts are like a river slowly flowing through a valley.

Returning to the aphorism: "*The best strategy is to have four practices*"....

(iv) Make offerings to the Dharma Protectors. Tibetans take them very seriously. They are not enlightened but they are Samsaric beings/spirits. Some protect monasteries, others protect individuals. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has a Dharma Protector. Is making offerings to Dharma Protectors required if one is to practise *Lojong*? No. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said if you need a Dharma Protector, then why look any further than Buddha Shakyamuni? If you immerse yourself in Vajrayana or Shamatha and it becomes very intense with the nyam, ultimate bodhichitta and relative bodhichitta will protect your practice more than anything else. And as a Dzogchen practitioner, your Dharma Protector is pristine awareness.

In response to a question about what the collective karma could be that has caused women to be treated unfairly e.g. as victims of witch-hunting. Alan said that karma is difficult to understand, but given that like begets like in karma, one explanation is that men who have been awful towards women in previous incarnations are reborn as women and experience sexist discrimination (an extreme example could be the witch-hunts).

In response to a question about details of the Four Applications of Mindfulness, Alan referred everyone to the podcasts from the Shamatha Fall Retreat 2012, as it was a major topic in the teachings, and also to two texts: '*The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*' written by a German Buddhist monk (Nyanaponika Thera) about 50 years ago and also '*The Direct Path to Realisation*' with a good commentary also written by a monk (Analyo).

In the Four Applications of Mindfulness, one applies mindfulness to bare attention with respect to the body, feelings, mind and phenomena, but with special emphasis on what you confront on the path to liberation. Contemplate the body as the body, feelings as feelings, etc and ask: What are the factors of origination? What are the factors of dissolution? Attend closely and attain insights into impermanence, dukkha and non-self. Once you have achieved mindfulness, you apply it to all the experiences and interactions you have in a normal day.