

## Eight-Week Shamatha Retreat, Fall 2013

### Week 7

#### Day 41, am. 14 October

This week we revisit Shamatha without a Sign. There are differences between this and Dzogchen meditation, but it can turn into Dzogchen meditation where one eventually breaks through to pristine awareness. The difference lies mainly in grasping. When you settle in the substrate consciousness, all the allures of the Desire Realm are gone. You've crossed over into the Form Realm. You've disengaged. Your substrate consciousness is free of grasping to things in the Desire Realm, but you can still be grasping to the clarity and the stillness. If you don't free yourself of this grasping, you can stay there indefinitely and never break through to rigpa.

Dzogchen meditation is nothing more or less than a sustained view of reality from the perspective of rigpa. By definition, it is nested in the triad of:

- (i) the view
- (ii) the meditation (where you are not doing anything at all), and
- (iii) the way of life that is designed to develop and sustain ultimate and relative bodhichitta. It's not about being a bodhisattva on the cushion and a schmuck off the cushion!

In the meditation to follow, release all grasping, and see if you can discover the Dzogchen view from the inside out. Keeping your eyes open, rest your awareness in space without taking space as the object, don't meditate on anything, don't do anything, dissolve your ordinary sense of self and de-activate your sense of self as a sentient being. It's a close approximation of Dzogchen meditation. You are not doing anything to obscure your substrate consciousness. Sustain the flow of a clear, still cognisance, without blanking out.

#### *Silent meditation ...*

For those people going into a long-term retreat, you need to put the requisite causes and conditions together for it to be successful.

The outer circumstances include:

- (i) A supportive environment, that is, with sufficient food, clothing, shelter and medical care when needed. For this, you are likely to need a minimum of between \$10 and \$20 a day (excluding rent). This is difficult if you are young and you have not acquired the necessary resources to support yourself. In this case, you may need to rely on the generosity of a benefactor.
- (ii) A place where you are not disturbed by people or carnivorous animals (eg. mosquitoes carrying malaria or Dengue fever, dogs, etc).
- (iii) A location that is pleasant which is not inhabited by enemies – ideally somewhere surrounded by nature.
- (iv) A location where the land is good – it does not make you ill (eg. with pesticides, herbicides, polluted water and air).
- (v) Good companions who share your ethical discipline and your views – ideally of the same gender. They need to understand and support what you are doing.
- (vi) The location has few people around during the day and it is quiet at night.

In addition to these, it is helpful to have:

- (vii) No visa problems remaining in your location for an extended period.
- (viii) A resident teacher who is qualified and skilled.

#### Day 41, pm.

The focus in the afternoon sessions from now on will be on the pure meditative essence of the Seven-Point Mind Training, that is, ultimate and relative bodhichitta. When it was first devised, it wasn't so much a public Dharma. It was more for people who were "all in" with the Dharma.

In contrast, Lam Rim was devised for everyone. In the classic Lam Rim text by Atisha (*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*), they all culminate in Shamatha and Vipassana. First you cultivate renunciation, then bodhichitta, the six perfections, then Shamatha, Vipassana and the union of Shamatha and Vipassana. When engaged in discursive meditations as laid out in the Lam Rim, you are activating your coarse mind. The progression is from non-discursive (Shamatha) to discursive meditation (Vipassana). There is no path without the non-discursive/non-conceptual component. The mind has to be free of dysfunction. Whenever we experience blocks to the flow, we have discursive meditation to assist. Then it's not just thinking, thinking. It's thinking, then the heart opens, then you linger as the understanding sinks in, then you move on. There's a point where bodhichitta becomes spontaneous and it's effortless.

In the Seven-Point Mind Training, the first point is do the preliminaries, the second, having achieved stability (that is, Shamatha), reveal the mystery (ultimate and relative bodhichitta), then the rest of the points are recommending a particular way of life. With these seven points, you should be able to transform everything into the path – “I’m all in”.

Beware of thinking that ultimate bodhichitta (realisation of emptiness) is too difficult to achieve. In Dzogchen, it’s realisation of rigpa (through which you achieve realisation of emptiness). You have to believe that out of body, speech and mind, the mind is primary. In investigating: Where is the mind? Does the mind exist? What is its origin? etc., you discover for yourself that it cannot be found.

When are you practising tregchö? How advanced do you have to be? You start when you begin practising Mindfulness of Breathing, Settling the Mind in its Natural State, Awareness of Awareness, Merging the Mind with Space and the threefold space. So when you think ‘ultimate bodhichitta’, think the whole bandwidth. When you show loving kindness to yourself or your loved ones, you have started to cultivate relative bodhichitta. These will both lead you along the path to liberation.

In the meditation session to follow, we will combine ultimate bodhichitta and relative bodhichitta. Choose the methods you wish to practise – Mindfulness of Breathing, Settling the Mind in its Natural State, Awareness of Awareness, Merging Mind with Space, the variations of *tonglen*, Avalokiteshvara – and choose how long you would like to spend on each. There are many different possibilities. Over the next couple of weeks, keep changing the combination to keep it fresh.

*Silent meditation ...*

The next aphorism is “ *The Mahayana teaching on transferring consciousness is precisely these five powers, so your conduct is crucial.*”

These five powers you can draw on for life. But they are also very useful in death, perhaps not if you die very suddenly, but if you die slowly, with a clear mind and not too much pain.

We so often forget that where there is birth, death is inevitable. Why are we never ready for it? How can we die well? We need to prepare for death early or we will have trouble being ready when the time comes. The five powers can help. Certain types of action create propulsive karma. That is how most sentient beings end up in their next rebirth. Be very careful what you wish for in the bardo. You are like a stem cell being directed by your aspirations. To be able to direct your aspirations and your prayers when in the bardo, remaining lucid in the dying process is critical.

The five powers to assist you to die well are:

- (i) Power of positive seeds – Give up all your material goods to your objects of refuge with a sense of fearlessness regarding the hereafter. That is, give up all attachment – body, psyche, house, homeland, etc. If you don’t, it will give rise to anxiety and fear.
- (ii) Power of prayer – as you are dying, disclose all your misdeeds, take refuge, make offerings and ask for blessings to sustain the two bodhichittas during the bardo and future lives, to meet with spiritual mentors, and to be led by them on the path of joy.
- (iii) Power of revulsion – self-grasping is the source of all misery, so determine not to latch onto a new body in the bardo, but let your mind dissolve into space.
- (iv) Power of resolve – to recall the two bodhichittas in the bardo and continue to cultivate them so you won’t be shocked by the bardo and forget them.
- (v) Power of familiarisation – the constant practice of the two bodhichittas.

Just before you die, say goodbye to everybody you love. Either die alone or with a spiritual friend who understands what is happening to you. Having people around you who are weeping and clinging will not help you. You need to let go. Cut your attachment. Alternating between ultimate and relative bodhichitta is the perfect preparation. Aim to die lucidly.

#### **Day 42, am. 15 October**

When practising Shamatha without a Sign, we are not doing anything that will obscure the mind. When resting in space, and maintaining clarity and presence, there is an awful lot that we are not doing (craving and hostility) that normally obscures the substrate consciousness. Ignorance is the key obscuration that results in craving and hostility. Normally, for example, when craving arises, we first reify it as an object. Then we lock onto it. This is how we keep Samsara spinning.

When resting awareness in space with on-going cognisance, we may think we are not making any progress, but the mind has an extraordinary capacity to heal itself. Many people think if we are not out there in the world doing something virtuous (the development model), we are wasting our time. When you release/relax and you are not obscuring your mind with excitement and laxity, something marvelous can happen. It's often referred to as 'grace' - an objective source of blessing coming from your own Buddha-nature.

In the meditation session to follow, rest your awareness in space, not taking space as the object, and without grasping. In this way, we make ourselves open to grace and blessing. Allow this welling up to unveil itself. Rest for 5-10 minutes without expectation, just resting your awareness in space. Then when the spirit moves you, allow your awareness of being aware to become very explicit. Acknowledge this and a sense of clarity and warmth can arise right where you are.

*Silent meditation ...*

Shamatha is unlike many other practices in that you can practise it in a wide variety of environments - on the cushion, walking, waiting in the traffic, etc. However, to *achieve* Shamatha, there are certain conditions that have to be met to allow you the essential continuity of practice.

The inner qualities that are required include:

- (i) Have few desires. This is essential inner preparation for Shamatha. If you are used to entertaining yourself when you are bored with television, Internet, iPads, etc, being in retreat will be an enormous challenge. You need to wean yourself off all these outer props to prepare yourself for solitude.
- (ii) Have contentment. This is about being content with what you do have, both in terms of your mundane needs being met and your attitude to your practice. Being content that you are doing the practice, you know you are doing the practice, and you know you are doing the practice correctly - whether it be on the cushion, or in between sessions.
- (iii) Have few activities and concerns. In between sessions, avoid doing anything that will be a distraction that may clutter your mind.
- (iv) Keep very pure ethics. Avoid any activity that may throw body, speech and mind into imbalance - whether it's yours or anyone else's. In addition, welcome all the local sentient beings to your retreat environment with the pure motivation of your practice.
- (v) Reject/release all compulsive, obsessive rumination. During the course of the day, try to sustain still, clear mindfulness that is even - like a bath-tub gradually filling up with water. Be gently relentless with this. Then you are likely to fall asleep lucidly.

The study of *Lojong* is a great help to developing these inner prerequisites.

## **Day 42, pm.**

We return to Awareness of Awareness, and there are many different ways of entering the practice: the ninefold breathing, mindfulness of the body, counting 21 breaths, going into Awareness of Awareness as if you have already achieved Shamatha, or traditional ways such as taking refuge or cultivating bodhichitta. Choose whichever one you feel is the most conducive to your generating motivation for the practice.

*Silent motivation ...*

Returning to the dying process ...

One needs to be ready to transform all adversity in life, so that one doesn't experience adversity at death. Ideally, it will be like riding the great wave, finding the 'sweet spot' and surfing easily through the dying process, then slipping into the clear light of death. It could be the best meditation of one's life.

With Shamatha laying the foundation for the realisation of rigpa (ultimate bodhichitta) and The Four Immeasurables laying the foundation for bodhichitta (relative bodhichitta), you are well equipped. In the dying process, go back and forth between the two and be satisfied that you are doing everything you can. Eventually your mind will collapse into the clear light of death, ideally lucidly.

The best preparation for the bardo is dream yoga, where ideally you are lucid and fearless. This way, you won't fall under the illusion that you are still alive. You recognise that you are not locked into anything and you can choose where to go. If this is not possible, continue practising ultimate and relative bodhichitta.

At the end, adopt the 'sleeping lion' posture of the Buddha. This is not the only posture. Lying on your back in the supine position or sitting upright are also suitable positions. You can practise Mindfulness of Breathing until your last breath, then shift to Settling the Mind in its Natural State where all the senses implode, then as your awareness

descends to the substrate, practise Awareness of Awareness, then Merge Mind with Space when you move to the clear light of death. All of this can be done consciously. If the ultimate nature of the mind is dharmakaya, which is unborn and unceasing, it cannot die.

If you are identifying with your body, you will not be able to ride the wave. In fact, the wave will land on you, causing great turmoil. If you withdraw your attachment to the body, it dies along with your coarse mind (psyche) but your subtle mind does not. If you don't identify with your coarse mind either, and instead simply observe it, that is, with your best approximation of your substrate consciousness, you will recognise that your subtle mind is not dying. Then only the silky smooth translucent flow of awareness continues. So the vital point here is to release all grasping, so you are not identifying with anything that will die. If you have been trained in 'phowa' techniques, you can also take control of the transference of consciousness through 'phowa' and propel your consciousness through the bardo to where you want, rather than karma and klesha taking over.

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Don't take a short-term view when evaluating the progress you are making in Shamatha. Of course, expect ups and downs in your practice. After some weeks - rather than days - assess if there is a real change happening in the right direction, that your practice is bringing about the intended results. If not, check with your spiritual mentor that you are doing it correctly.

The next aphorism is "*The whole of Dharma is synthesised in one aim*"

It comes down to one thing - the amount of self-grasping, which goes hand in hand with self-centeredness (both of which are the root of all suffering). If you see that these are subsiding, that is, becoming less frequent and less intense, then progress is evident. Check to see that all your physical and mental activities are not reinforcing self-grasping and self-centeredness. If they are, you are still caught up in the eight mundane concerns. Even your Dharma practice can augment self-grasping.

Why are we vulnerable to suffering at all?

- (i) we are identifying with that which is not 'I, me, mine' as 'I, me, mine'
- (ii) we are not identifying with who we actually are - dharmakaya. Rigpa is not something you have; it is something you are.

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In response to a question whether rigpa is individual or part of a larger universal mind ...

Rigpa is neither. It transcends all categories. It does not fit a conceptual box. It transcends all conceptual elaboration.

In response to a question as to why there are four schools of Tibetan Buddhism ...

They stem from four different teachers. Refer to John Powers book "*A Concise Introduction To Tibetan Buddhism*".

In response to a question about how some of these great yogis could spend years in retreat and also have families...

There are many different stories here. For example, Dilgo Khyenste Rinpoche at 13 years of age went into a 14-year retreat. At 27, he started to experience physical problems and was advised to marry. This he did and had a daughter. He had a capacity to continue to live in the conventional world, while dwelling in the Dzogchen view all the time. If a person is born a tulku, it is much easier, as they do not have to go into long-term retreat to achieve realisation of rigpa.

### **Day 43, am. 16 October**

We return to Shamatha without a Sign. In the meditation session to follow, begin with utter release into 'not-doing', then as you become more vividly aware of your awareness, make this flow of knowing explicit. Then go into oscillation. As you rest in space, heighten or raise the pitch/energy of your awareness, take more interest in it, but only for a few seconds, keeping a peripheral awareness of the breath if that is helpful, then release your awareness into space.

Then take the next step. Invert your awareness so you experience being the observer and simply see what you see, then release. Examine whether the observer has inherent existence. If it is empty of inherent existence, then it must follow that the mind is empty and all the objects that arise in the mind are empty. This helps to break down the grasping-based demarcation between that which is 'I, me, mine' and that which is not.

All adversity and felicity arise from our delusion. If you care about finding happiness and a lack of suffering, realise that everything stems from craving, hostility and delusion. If we can cut this off by realising the lack of inherent

existence of the observer, and hence erode the basis of duality (subject/object, I/it, us/them, mine/yours), we can defuse them right at the core.

*Silent meditation ...*

Alan referred to Atisha's "*Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*", which covers the Lam Rim. In it, Atisha says that you can't help people to progress along the path if you don't have extra-sensory perception (ESP). Without Shamatha, ESP will not arise. Of course, people can have ESP without having achieved Shamatha, but it is not very reliable. Having achieved Shamatha, one's ESP becomes reliable. And the union of Shamatha and Vipassana will provide you with so much more in the way of the perfection of wisdom (the realisation of emptiness and an understanding of dependent origination).

### **Day 43, pm.**

This afternoon, we'll continue with cultivating ultimate and relative bodhichitta. There are different platforms from which you can launch your practice:

As a sentient being, as we have conceptually designated and contrived ourselves.

This can feel like a burden. But it's changeable. Just as we have constructed it, so can we de-construct it. We can choose to reconstruct it with a more wholesome reality by transforming who we are.

We can dissolve our sentient being self into emptiness, dharmadhatu, coexistent with our pure nature, dharmakaya. This is taking the fruition as the path.

We can transform ourselves into one of the yidams, for example, Avalokiteshvara, and visualise ourselves in the form of divine pride. We can take in all the suffering of the world or all the blessings of all the buddhas into the inexhaustible orb of white light at our heart and send out radiant white rays of compassion and loving kindness to others.

It may be of interest to point out that you can achieve Shamatha within the context of Vajrayana practice, through the stage of generation, by simultaneously realising emptiness and clarity.

*Silent meditation ...*

As a footnote to the previous aphorism, "*The whole of Dharma is synthesised in one aim*" ...

Self-grasping is not constant. It is not always at the same level, for example, when you are asleep, sitting quietly at home, or reading a derogatory email. There is causal efficacy in the self-grasping. It catalyses many mental afflictions. So it's useful to see if you are making progress by assessing how frequently and how strongly your mental afflictions come up. Can you identify the triggers/catalysts/buttons that have been pushed? Take these mental afflictions and, using *Lojong*, transform them. Recognise that they don't inherently exist at all – they are derivative of self-grasping and are not hard-wired. Also recognise that the arising of these mental afflictions gives you the opportunity to see your own self-grasping and take action to transform them.

As long as you are locked into your conceptually designated self, you will never know who you really are. Release the 'I am' and then you are poised to achieve tregchö.

The next aphorism is "*Maintain the chief of two witnesses*".

The two witnesses refer to other people and yourself. Others may praise you as a wonderful Dharma practitioner. They can have a view about you, but they see only a small part of your overall behaviour. They do not fathom the depths of your heart and mind. In company, we try to show our best face. You are the only one who has privileged access to your thoughts, emotions, memories, etc. Those outside see only our behaviour. We have a much bigger data base than that. But our capacity for self-delusion is large. Having good spiritual friends and mentors who can be honest in assessing and commenting on our behaviours is very important.

We are the chief witness. It is our job to be discerning moment-by-moment with respect to what is coming up in our minds. We need to hone our introspective skills so that they become more and more reliable.

Wanting to create a good impression is just another form of self-grasping. Distinguish between mundane concern over 'what the neighbours think' and meaningful regard for others. There comes a point where you feel at your core that you don't care what others think of you; it has zero significance. It comes as a kind of relief that you don't have to worry about that anymore. However, at the same time, be sensible and careful not to give others the cause for gossiping and spreading unfounded stories about you or other people. This is for your own and other's protection (including the gossipier).

The next aphorism is “*Constantly resort to a sense of good cheer*”.

When someone is suffering, rather than attending to them as an ‘it’, empathise with them, care about them, show compassion for them. Try to imagine their suffering so you can empathise with them, keeping in mind that each is in the centre of his or her own mandala. If you can alleviate their suffering, of course, do that. If you can do nothing to help, don’t be unhappy. This won’t help. Accept it. For your own spiritual maturation, whatever comes your way, transmute it all into Dharma.

When you see a mental affliction rising up, face it with a smile and think: “Out of the two of us, I’m going to win”. Even when adversity strikes, face it with good cheer and transmute it. This leads to major growth.

As you go deeper into the practice, you become aware of how regularly reality rises up to meet you, to help you. The blessings of the buddhas are always there. As you mature and see how beneficial Dharma is, you can appreciate that facing your mental afflictions assists you on the path. You can confront them all with good cheer. They empower you. See them not only as necessary for your spiritual growth, but welcome them. Then you are a true *Lojong* practitioner.

#### **Day 44, am. 17 October**

In the ongoing, moment-to-moment genesis of Samsara, primordial consciousness nakedly exists but it is veiled in delusion. Then something mysterious happens with the stirring of karmic energies. The substrate consciousness breaks forth and there arises a cognisance of self. Out of this comes mentation that is non-conceptual but with the capacity to distinguish between self and other. Then conceptual mentation arises where the conceptual mind starts to classify, and finally the full elaboration of the conceptual framework where everything is reified.

So in returning to Shamatha without a Sign, as we roll it back, experience ‘complete not-doing’, allowing the sun of your consciousness to arise vividly, then extenuating and relaxing your awareness in and out with the oscillation. This time the target area is focusing with some degree of inquiry as to who is the agent. Who is doing it? It is not metaphysical because that means it is beyond the scope of experience. In contrast, this practice is radically empirical. When you use introspection to probe, it’s not nobody doing it. Something or someone is doing it. When you probe in on that which is, what comes to mind? This is an empirical question. What is making this happen? What is the nature of this something? See if what comes to mind is an agent or is an agent non-existent. What is being challenged here is: Is there a totally separate inherently existing person, prior to and independent of, conceptual designation?

In the context of the path, we can and do engage in unwholesome and virtuous acts. But if they are virtuous acts that are done voluntarily with a reified sense of self or a delusional sense of ‘I am’, it comes with tainted virtue. Tainted virtue will keep you spinning around in Samsara indefinitely. In contrast, taintless virtue is done without a sense of ‘I am’, it is done with a reality base of ‘I do exist but not inherently’ and it’s rooted in your being an authentic being.

In the meditation session to follow, we will be ‘storming the walls’ or knocking down the walls of ‘I am’ only to find that the castle behind is empty!

In Shamatha, one is working through from the very primitive form of grasping to ‘I am’ to the fully reified form. Having achieved Samsara, grasping still exists but it has gone dormant. The karmic energy is still there below the surface, despite the presence of bliss. Eventually if one is to break through to experience pristine awareness – which is who one actually is – one has to release all grasping to bliss, luminosity and non-conceptuality. Then one slips down to the universal ground. Actions that flow from this state are not pre-meditated; they are pure, and they flow spontaneously and effortlessly. This is where the quality of free-will resides. One is utterly free to do one thing:

“As long as space remains, as long as sentient beings remain, so too shall I remain to dispel the miseries of the world”

*Silent meditation ...*

There are a few more comments to make as a concluding overview of the significance of Shamatha with respect to the path.

There are different paths: the Shrivakayana (which leads one to arhatship), the pratyeka buddhas, and the five Mahayana paths. With the Shrivaka path of accumulation, the motivation is renunciation or a ‘spirit of emergence’. It’s not just disillusion with the Desire Realm. Rather it’s disillusion with all of Samsara. One needs to be disillusioned with the Desire Realm, the Form Realm and the Formless Realm. One sees the pointlessness of all human endeavour.

When you consider the first two Noble Truths and see that suffering underlies everything in your life (let alone others' lives), how is it that you don't just emotionally implode? How do you balance that? Shamatha can help. It's like having 'time out'. You can tap into bliss whenever you want to. It's authentic and it's yours. Where renunciation is supported by Shamatha, you are preparing to launch onto the Path of Accumulation, then stream-entry, then you are in the flow to achieve Nirvana.

#### **Day 44, pm.**

We return to ultimate and relative bodhichitta. As a novice, they may seem incompatible, that cultivating one almost erodes the other. For example, if every being is just an appearance to the mind, how can you show compassion and loving-kindness? Or when you see someone experiencing inconceivable suffering, which seems so real. But as one goes deeper, and as yogis have found for centuries, the more mutually nurturing they seem to be.

The centre of ultimate bodhichitta is above all to realise the lack of inherent nature of your own mind, then by inclination, everything else has a lack of inherent nature. As you see for yourself that what you have been grasping – that someone who is separate and autonomous – there is no such thing. Of course, you exist but you don't exist in that fashion. Self-centeredness becomes silly if no self is here, as is the idea that my well-being is more important than others' well-being.

There are two truths, relative and conventional, and one doesn't negate the other. You need to keep on probing to understand. There is still causality – I can influence others, and they can influence me. You see that moment-by-moment you are arising in dependence upon your environment. It's an on-going process. Without you, there is no me. Without right, there is no left. Without up, there is no down. This is the simple reality of dualism, causally interacting, always in a state of flux.

When cultivating relative bodhichitta, as you attend to the ocean of the suffering of the world, you can feel that it is so overwhelming. It feels such a burden and you wonder if it is necessary to take on the massive burden of others' suffering. It is necessary because suffering has no owner. This is not being pious. It is just being realistic because my suffering does not exist independently of others' suffering. This understanding enhances the view.

With respect to *tonglen*, attend to others as subjects, not objects. Attend to them as sentient beings. As you attend very closely, you find they are not independent of you. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said in response to a question whether he ever felt lonely: "No. I always feel connected to others." While you attend to others, it draws your attention away from yourself. You realise that your well-being is not more important than theirs. This is not philosophy. It is practical. Both ultimate and relative bodhichitta are just common sense.

Imbue your practice with the union of the two bodhichittas. With *tonglen*, it is natural to gravitate to those who are experiencing blatant suffering. This attracts the general attention. So much of this blatant suffering is caused by craving, hostility and delusion. Our mental afflictions are not intrinsically hard-wired. Perhaps it is better to deal with the causes, rather than the symptoms. But where do we start? Why don't we start with our own minds where we have a lot of control?

As we practise, let us look deeper than blatant suffering and focus on the underlying causes. See what we can bring to the world that is good. Sure, we can help address blatant suffering. But not many people understand the underlying causes, that is, that all suffering is rooted in ignorance and delusion. You can bring real insight with your understanding of this and your knowledge of the antidotes. Cultivating ultimate and relative bodhichitta can help. By assisting people to overcome self-grasping and self-centeredness would be of immense benefit. However, you need to clean up your own act first. Having done so and to eventually become a buddha is the means by which you can develop the greatest possible capacity to help others. In doing so, it might start a chain reaction...

#### *Silent meditation ...*

In the Seven-Point Mind training, we are now focusing on lifestyle. There are a number of promises or pledges you make to yourself to sustain the core based on ethics, samadhi and wisdom – all designed to liberate your mind. The challenge is that we have all these bad habits that can crush the core.

Monks and nuns take a large number of precepts to protect the core. The same applies when taking the Bodhisattva vows. A description of these pledges or precepts is outlined in detail in '*Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*' by Shantideva. Pledges are about behaviour. They are a way of attending to reality by way of prospective mindfulness. They form the next aphorism: "*Always practise the three principles*":

(i) Do not contravene your commitments to training the mind.

Not being dismissive of vows and ethics. Ethics is the root of all spiritual practice, not just Buddhism.

Not regarding this mind-training as being all that is needed, while being dismissive of other teachings. The knowledge contained in some teachings such as Dūdjom Lingpa's 'The Vajra Essence' is sufficient to achieve rainbow body in this lifetime, but it doesn't mean you don't look elsewhere and learn from others.

- (ii) Do not have a sense of bravado in your mind-training. Eg. Seeking out dangerous people or situations in order to demonstrate the potency of your practice. Adversity will come to you, so you don't have to go looking for it.
- (iii) Do not have an uneven mind-training. Eg bearing harm from humans but not non-humans, respecting some while despising others, loving some and hating others.

The next aphorism is "*Change your priorities but stay as you are*".

- (i) Mentally practise *tonglen*, without ever disengaging from practice, but let your physical and verbal conduct stay as it was.

Demonstrate the ethical way of life of a monk or nun, or Dharma practitioner, on the outside. But inwardly, seek to perfect the six perfections and cultivate the two bodhichittas. You may also choose to secretly be a Vajrayana practitioner.

Work on your mental afflictions inwardly, but stay the same on the outside. Unless of course, if you have some obvious bad habits which you will also need to change externally.

- (ii) Don't verbally express your virtues to others, or radically alter your behaviour; rather, while bringing about a real change in your mind, do not draw others' attention to your practice or progress. Don't try to make an impression.
- (iii) Let your mind mature spiritually without others knowing it.

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In response to a question about whether lineages trace back to a person or a school...

Lineages originate from remarkable individuals. Each school has its strengths in terms of emphases and practices. All have proven to be effective over the centuries for leading people to enlightenment. There is no basis for sectarianism. Some people are nurtured by all four schools of Buddhism. Others find everything they are looking for in just one school. You need to find out for yourself.

#### **Day 45, am. 18 October**

We return to Shamatha without a Sign, but this time we will do some warm-up exercises. After settling your body, speech and mind in their natural states, become aware of your awareness. Then direct your awareness straight up into space, then back to the centre, way out to the right, then back to the centre, way out to the left, then back to the centre, way below you, then back to the centre, down into your heart, then back to the centre, then finally, out into space.

Why are we doing this? You may have a sense that the mind, and therefore your awareness, exists in your head. If one reifies the thought that the practice is actually taking place in your head, it will be difficult for you to progress. If you need a spatial correlation, it is better to use the heart, not the head. This is not a visualisation exercise as there is no sign. Simply direct your attention out into the various spatial domains without visualisation.

*Silent meditation ...*

To sustain the level of awareness and bodhichitta necessary to take on the suffering of the world, the realisation of emptiness is required. Such realisation is rooted in a profoundly sane mind and a perfectly tuned/pliant body. Shamatha is therefore a necessary foundation. It provides the platform for Vipassana and bodhichitta. The union of Shamatha and Vipassana is a prerequisite for achieving the six perfections and getting onto the path to Buddhahood. The purpose of all the practices and all the study is to reach the path. In this 'degenerative era', if we don't take the opportunity to try and reach the path in this lifetime, we may find it is much harder in future lifetimes.

#### **Day 45, pm.**

*Silent meditation ...*

The cultivation of the two bodhichittas is central to the Seven-Point Mind Training and to Mahayana Buddhism. Both entail the release of the ordinary sense of self. As long as we grasp onto, and reify our ordinary sense of self, we will never achieve Shamatha.

With respect to ultimate bodhichitta:

- (i) In meditation, we allow the mind to dissolve and slip into non-duality. It has no personality, no human-ness. One can see through the illusion of having a separate, autonomous, reified self. This realisation that

there is no inherently existing self brings with it a deeper sense of release. If you are suitably prepared through Dharma practice, this realisation can be viewed as one of the greatest gifts. If not yet suitably prepared, it can be experienced as an inexpressible loss.

- (ii) After you have realised the emptiness of self, when you come out of meditation and someone asks you who you are, you will still respond with your name, where you live, where you grew up, who your parents are, etc. – an expression of your conventional sense of self. It's not delusion. It's authentic, but at your core, you are only still identifying with that at a relative level; at an ultimate level you know this is not who you are.
- (iii) In Dzogchen practice, you release, the final vestiges of grasping, when you are viewing your existence from the perspective of rigpa. You break through even your conceptual designation as a sentient being, and finally know who you really are. There is no suffering, there is no path, you were never anything other than a Buddha, and "you see your own face" which is dharmakaya. You have an awakened mind.

With respect to relative bodhichitta:

The subtle sense of one's own well-being being more important than others' well-being is turned around 180 degrees. One looks at one's self from the others' perspective. There is a sense of equality. There is no preference. It's transparently obvious and one opens one's heart and mind to all sentient beings. One also sees that the well-being of the collective is infinitely more important than one's own well-being. In realising this, one relinquishes one's sense of self.

The realisation of emptiness and the realisation of bodhichitta, both spring from the same ground. If you realise rigpa, you realise emptiness, and from this, relative bodhichitta naturally arises.

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Alan then covered some quintessential points on lucid dreaming. These can be read in detail in his book "*Dreaming Yourself Awake*". Another useful reference are the writings of Steven laBerge who has performed extensive research on lucid dreaming: [www.lucidity.com](http://www.lucidity.com).

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Continuing on with precepts or pledges ...

Monks and nuns take 253 precepts, all of which are based on cultivating virtuous prospective memory. Some lay people also take some or all of these vows, and/or the Bodhisattva vows. You're unlikely to be equally prone to all the mental afflictions that these vows are intended to protect you from. Some won't seem relevant. Others refer to habits that you might recognise that you have. Identify those in the list that are relevant and be ready to recognise the non-virtuous impulse arising so you can stop yourself before it takes hold. Simply *relax, release and return* to the present moment.

Some of these precepts include:

*Do not speak of others' limitations.*

Why? The reason is that it will erode your cultivation of bodhichitta. In some situations, it is appropriate to speak of others' limitations, for example, if you were a doctor or a psychotherapist, but also a Dharma friend who may be trying to help. It's all about motivation. When you feel the impulse to putting someone down, check your motivation. If it's about mental afflictions such as jealousy, craving, contempt, etc, don't say anything because it is toxic. If you think a person should hear what you have to say for their own benefit and you think they will be receptive to hearing it, perhaps in such cases, talking about it can help.

*Think nothing of the other side*

This applies to all sentient beings, but especially to Dharma friends and Dharma practitioners. It is never appropriate to dwell on their faults. If you are identifying with those thoughts, then you are doing damage to yourself. When one engages in this, one has an elevated sense of self-worth. It reifies "I am superior" and it is injurious. You can't see inside a person's mind – it's a black box. So you can't assume the causes on the basis of the effects. Any judgment you make, or any picture you paint, of another person, will be dependent on 'the colours in your palette', or the colours of your own mind. So remember the Christian saying: "Judge not lest ye also be judged".

#### **Day 46, am. 19 October**

Again we return to Shamatha without a Sign. So, rest your awareness evenly in space, be aware of being aware, heighten your awareness then release it into space, then pitch your awareness up, centre, right, centre, left, centre, down, centre, to the heart, then out into space and leave it there. Gently sustain the awareness of being aware without grasping, without hopes or fears, without desires, simply not needing anything. Be confident and take satisfaction in the fact that you are doing the practice correctly, and that you are accomplishing Shamatha. For the

time being, know that it is the most meaningful thing you could be doing, and it entails doing almost nothing at all. There are no grounds for regret. Your motivation is the realisation of bodhichitta.

*Silent meditation ...*

If you are dissatisfied in the practice, it's not that you lack faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, or your guru. It's because you lack faith in yourself. The power of the practice comes from within, not from outside. It's developmental, but more importantly, it's about discovery. Having faith and confidence will carry you through.

This faith and confidence, together with a total dedication to the path, are what is needed today at the level of the collective to give the Buddhadharmas its second wind. Nearly all the great yogis and lamas of Tibet are dead. If we fail to keep the Buddhadharmas alive, the stories of these Tibetan masters will just become old stories and the Buddhadharmas will eventually disappear.

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As stated in *'The Vajra Essence'*, when Padmasambhava was asked: If all meditative experiences (including nyam) whether pleasant or rough bring no benefit, why practice Shamatha?

His response was: once you recognise the mind, then control it with mindfulness and introspection. With mindfulness and familiarisation, you see that all subtle and coarse thoughts have vanished. Your unstructured consciousness is devoid of anything on which to meditate. When you reach the stage of non-meditation and non-doing, the guru can give you pointing out instructions for subsequently realising rigpa. For this to occur, you need to undergo great struggles in seeking the path, you take movement of thoughts as the path, and soon recognise this is the path. It is necessary to go through rough stages because of your afflictive mind. When you settle your mind in space, where there is no referent of attention, not even the substrate itself, you realise pristine awareness. Rest in this. Thoughts are no longer objective referents. You no longer view them from the perspective of a separate, autonomous sentient being. Meditation is transformed into wisdom. Your mind becomes like water that is clear of sediment.

**Day 46, pm.**

What is the motivation behind our practice? It cannot be overemphasised that whenever we engage in virtue, a type of positive energy is accumulated that will take effect either in this lifetime or future lifetimes. It contributes to the accumulation of merit. However, such merit can also be lost.

How will the positive energy be spent? This depends on what you actually want, or what is the most meaningful motivation for you. You can accumulate merit from being a loving mother, an honest business person, someone doing service for others, etc. If your motivation is based on bodhichitta, then the more real your bodhichitta becomes, and the better your long-term investment. If your motivation has its roots in power, wealth or prestige, that's where your virtue will ripen.

Whatever you might think, it is always the right time to practise. For example, if you are feeling dull or sleepy, simply engage in a discursive meditation on relative bodhichitta.

We don't have to wait to have really strong confidence that we can progress along the path. If we maintain the continuity of motivation, live an ethical life, and at the end of the day, dedicate the merit of our wholesome activities, progress will occur. You will die with confidence and with no regrets. Arouse the motivation and aspiration: "Might I achieve perfect awakening even in this lifetime". If you don't, you have a lot of momentum heading in the right direction. Or maybe your aspiration is to reach the path in this lifetime. Aim high. Have a sense of urgency and commitment for the long-term. If you do reach the path, you will have achieved sanity and established a launching pad for all other practices.

*Silent meditation ...*

Continuing with the pledges under the Sixth of the Seven-Point Mind Training...

*"Abandon all hope of reward"*. Abandon all hope of gaining high status in this life, respect, fame, magical powers of healing, fortunate rebirth, your own liberation, and even your own perfect enlightenment – especially while you are doing the practice. Hope always contains a notion of grasping. Release all desire for any particular outcome.

*"Avoid poisoned food"*. Avoid acting out of self-interest, acting while not regarding self-grasping as the enemy and acting without rejecting self-centeredness.

*"Do not indulge in self-righteousness".* Avoid flaring up in indignation and resentment at the misdeeds of others. If self-righteousness arises, attend closely to the influences that have led to your own virtues. It's important to remember that the reason you are in your current situation, or the reason you have a particular quality or skill, is due to the kindness of others. This will deflate your sense of self-importance.

*"Do not engage in malicious sarcasm".* Whether the words are true or not, every single word is negative karma. Review your own conduct. If the driver is a mental affliction, then identify what the triggers are. And be on guard. When you see malicious sarcasm coming, stop yourself in time. And don't try and justify it even if the words are true.

*"Do not wait in ambush".* Avoid holding a grudge and retaliating when your target is off guard, and avoid seeking out others' faults.

*"Do not load the burden of a dzo on an ox".* If there is an undesirable task or responsibility that is rightfully yours, do not try to shift it to someone else.

*"Do not flatter to get on top".* Flatter neither yourself nor others.

*"Avoid pretense".* Avoid trying to make an impression. Avoid any kind of practice in which your inner motivation is at variance with your outer conduct.

*"Do not bring a god down to the level of a demon".* If you serve and respect a mundane god, it may help you, but if you show disrespect, it will retaliate like a demon.

*"Do not take advantage of another's misfortune".* For example, gladly anticipating a relative's death so that you can get your inheritance. Meditate rather on your actions and their consequences.

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In response to a question about transforming adversity into the path ...

Take care to withhold your mental affliction so it does not become contagious. For example, expressing contempt for someone. Let the mental affliction subside before you engage with others. When you encounter belligerence, should you be apathetic? A doormat? Won't the other person see this as a weakness? Won't you be taken advantage of and bullied?

The advice here is to take one moment at a time. Micro-manage each situation. Observe the other's mental affliction but don't get caught up in it. If you see the impulse to retaliate start to arise in you, put the spark out before it turns to flame. Behave with the best, sound judgment. Let it be measured. Act out of Dharma moment-by-moment. You'll save yourself from regrettable episodes.

When you see someone behaving inappropriately, ask yourself: what is the likelihood of the person responding in a positive way to the comments I am thinking of making? The common answer to this question is: Not much. Where this is the case, regardless of your comments being wise and true, it's better to keep them to yourself.

#### **Day 47, am. 20 October**

No teachings.