

## Eight-Week Shamatha Retreat, Fall 2013

### Week 8

#### Day 48, am. 21 October

In our last week, we return to Merging the Mind with Space. But don't think of it as a fresh technique. Instead, it is a seamless continuation of Shamatha without a Sign, where in the last stage, we pitch our awareness out into space and leave it there. This is the necessary foundation for receiving the final instruction to breaking through to rigpa. There is no elaboration. It's simple. For some people the warm-up exercises contained in the technique Shamatha without a Sign are helpful in order to get some traction first. For others, launching straight into Merging the Mind with Space comes more naturally.

A gentle reminder of what we have covered earlier – the different stages we move through entail emerging from the substrate with substrate consciousness (which is self-illuminating), to a state where we have afflictive cognition (this is raw and primitive, a sense that I'm over here and space is over there), to non-conceptual mentation (pre-verbal and non-conceptual), to conceptual mentation (verbal and conceptual), to the stage where we superimpose our complete conceptual grid upon the world (objectifying the world with conceptual designation). This process perpetuates Samsara. Self-grasping and self-centeredness come in and take over.

In the meditation session this morning, we are going to roll the whole process back as if we were falling asleep lucidly, back to the substrate consciousness where our mind dissolves, and then stay there. So, settle your body, speech and mind in their natural states, keep your eyes partially open, and just bring your attention to the intervening space and rest there. Focus on the translucent, empty space in the immediacy of the present moment.

*Silent meditation ...*

Alan reiterated his aspiration for this retreat that every participant leaves the retreat knowing he or she is doing the technique correctly and having the confidence to continue with the practice.

#### Day 48, pm.

We return to cultivating the two bodhichittas. As we approach the end of this retreat, we can anticipate some of the situations likely to arise when we return to the world. Some of these will involve adversity. How we choose to respond to these situations – that's the clay in our hands. When adversity strikes you or your loved ones, it can sometimes be overwhelming. At times like this, it is very important to keep a much larger vision. In doing so, it does not in any way diminish the adversity experienced by that person. Afterall, we are all in the centre of our own mandala. It is not apathy and it is not indifference. It is simply saying that adversity strikes all of us at some point in our lives. We need to transmute the suffering of others into the path where we instantly feel the aspiration to return to the world to help others become free of suffering. That is the purpose of our practice.

When we attend to the adversity in the world, there are a number of perspectives:

- (i) From the perspective of waking reality, when we attend to our own adversity or that of others, can we recognise if there is any vestige of self-centeredness? Is that the only person who is experiencing suffering? Am I identifying with this person who is suffering but not that person who is suffering? It's important to keep a broad view and cultivate compassion for all those who are suffering.
- (ii) From the perspective that you have just died and slipped into the substrate consciousness, the life you lived doesn't exist anymore, so how important is the adversity from this perspective? It's not. In the latter part of the bardo, you can't remember anything from your previous life. What does exist from this perspective is the current of continuing consciousness and whatever configuration of karma that is yours. These are what will shape your future.
- (iii) From the perspective of emptiness, there is no reality of suffering, there is no cause, there is no path.
- (iv) From the perspective of rigpa, there is no concept of time, space and individuation. Everything is viewed as pure equality arising from pristine awareness. There is no felicity. There is no adversity. There is no suffering.

*Silent meditation ...*

In reviewing the sixth of the Seven-Point Mind Training, a particular way of life was described through a number of precepts or pledges - a life of ethics and a life of restraint. In the seventh point, the emphasis is on the constructive actions that can be taken.

*“Practise all contemplations by means of one”.*

Transform all tasks, duties and concerns into this Seven-Point Mind Training with its emphasis on the two bodhichittas. Overcome the division between mundane pursuits and Dharma, not by making Dharma mundane, but by elevating the mundane to Dharma.

This division between hedonic well-being and eudemonia – should they be compartmentalised? It’s easy to say: “I’ll get back to the Dharma when I’m not so busy”. In terms of one’s practice, the danger is creating the sharp division between the two instead of integrating them.

*“Respond in one way to all dejection”*

Dejection may come from lack of confidence in the practice, thinking: “I get sick due to practising, people despise me, and my afflictions (such as self-grasping) are actually growing stronger.” When you return to the world after this retreat, don’t expect accolades because you have been practising. People who have not been exposed to the Dharma will not understand how you could sit and meditate for eight weeks simply watching the breath! Recognise the disillusionment, and consider that many meet with discouragement while living in ways contrary to the Dharma. Practise *tonglen* towards them. In Dharma, we are fortunate because we see the problem and the remedy. However, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says: The Buddhadharma is not for everyone.

*“There are two tasks, at the beginning and the end.”*

Cultivate the spirit of awakening at the beginning of the day, then maintain it with introspection, and finally dedicate the merits at the end of the day. Saturate your life as much as possible with Dharma. Cultivating bodhichitta at the beginning of the day sets the aspiration for the day. Look back on the virtue and merit you have enacted over the course of the day and dedicate it. You can do the same thing with every practice session. The significance of this cannot be overstated. Establish a passionate heartfelt yearning to continue practising Dharma every day until you achieve enlightenment. It’s like the beads on a mala – a string of beads, all coherent, each leading to the next. This is the most important point in the whole Seven-Point Mind Training.

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In response to a question as to whether there are skillful means that can be used to help someone in the throes of anger...

When witnessing someone who is very angry, they are not in control, they do not have free-will. What you can do is embody the qualities of mind – such as kindness, compassion - you would like that person to experience right then and there. Give the person your full attention. When you speak, ensure your words are coming from a quiet, serene, calm place. Be reserved about giving advice in the form of Dharma teachings in a situation like this. Instead, use the words of a friend.

### **Day 49, am. 22 October**

This morning we will continue with Merging the Mind with Space, elaborating some aspects, but keeping it practical. As a preliminary step, maintain a peripheral awareness of the in- and out-breath. As the breath is flowing out, surrender your awareness into space while maintaining a flow of knowing of the absence of thoughts. If any thought comes up, release it instantly and become aware of the vacuity devoid of thoughts. It’s a knowing of emptiness. As you experience this total surrender on the out-breath, also become aware of the melting sensation of the body. As the breath is flowing in, ensure there is no sense of contraction at all and accentuate the vividness or luminosity of your own awareness of being aware. Hone in on the present moment.

Realising the empty nature of one phenomenon can lead to realising the emptiness of all phenomena, where there is an opening up to a wide open expanse of relative dharmadhatu devoid of boundaries.

*Silent meditation ...*

Developing greater insight into the empty nature of all phenomena can give rise to a deepening of your compassion. Many meditators report a sweetness arising as they practise Shamatha and experience the absence of thoughts. This supports the notion that ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’!

### **Day 49, pm.**

‘Placebo’ means pleasing. Therefore, it has a positive connotation. Its effects are often inexplicable. When someone believes something will happen to their body, it often occurs despite the person’s not understanding how it could happen. It works in mysterious ways - not for everyone, but for many people. When a person gives himself/herself a big dose of afflictive doubt, the placebos don’t work.

'Nocebo' means please me not. This is demonstrated, for example, when someone can't afford health care and resorts to the Internet to look for their symptoms. Finding what they think is their illness, they begin to develop some of the listed symptoms that they previously did not have.

These responses have everything to do with aspiration, what we believe and what we don't believe. It can be the same in cultivating dharma practice.

Having a clear vision and a belief that it will happen are very important. So set the vision to achieve Shamatha and the two bodhichittas, avoid attaching any time limit to this, and hold to it with aspirations, blessings and prayers. If it is truly meaningful, you will feel like you are 'coming home'.

#### *Guided meditation ...*

It is useful to unpack bodhichitta. There are two types:

- (i) the aspiration to achieve bodhichitta – where you arouse the authentic aspiration to achieve enlightenment to benefit others.
- (ii) The engagement or implementation of bodhichitta – with heartfelt motivation, you act in ways to benefit others.

Another way to understand bodhichitta is:

- (i) Shepherd-like bodhichitta. Like a shepherd who attends to the whole flock and checks that every sheep is safe and taken care of, before going to rest - shifting the priority away from oneself to the collective. In Dharma terms, this means doing whatever one can to bring other beings to enlightenment before then focusing on doing this for oneself. This does not mean one is bereft of joy. Rather, one experiences empathetic joy, taking delight in others' happiness.
- (ii) Navigator-like bodhichitta. This entails helping others along the path, but realising that you need to go with them. This does not involve self-centeredness. It is done simply because you will be more effective if you progress simultaneously.
- (iii) King-like bodhichitta. You realise that you could be more effective if you venture ahead of the others to go to the culmination of the path yourself, then come back for the others. This approach is the most effective.

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#### *"Bear whichever of the two occurs".*

The 'two' here refers to felicity and adversity. Whatever arises, continue practising, noting the relativity of both. As we conceptually designate good and bad days, it often feels like they have been labeled, or already self-defined! We designate everything relative to our experience. So a 'bad day' here isn't so bad when you think of the suffering that so many others in the world have to bear. It's always within a context. It's never absolute. Designating isn't done to you. You have a choice! Whatever comes, embrace it.

#### *"Guard the two at the cost of your life".*

Regard the two bodhichittas as more precious than life itself. Cherish them. If the value that they represent is true, they are more valuable than life itself.

#### *"Practise the three austerities".*

- (i) Remembering the remedies for mental afflictions, using prospective mindfulness, as outlined in the Seven-Point Mind Training
- (ii) Averting mental afflictions using introspection. Be on your guard.
- (iii) Cutting off the flow of mental afflictions as soon as they arise.

It is important to know the defining characteristics of mental afflictions in theory and in daily practice. All mental afflictions are mental factors, things that emerge in the mind that have the function of disturbing the equilibrium of the mind. They are catalysed by something either internally or externally, and they are either real or unreal. It's critical to remember that what is disturbing the mind is not 'out there'. So do not just look at the symptoms. Find the cause, then apply the remedies.

#### *"Adopt the three principal causes"*

- (i) Following a qualified mentor – you need a sense that the person has more understanding and more realisations than yourself with respect to the path you want to follow. You need to have confidence that the

person's motivation is grounded in loving kindness and compassion. The way the person teaches needs to resonate with you. Are their words and their conduct inspiring? Could they be a spiritual friend?

- (ii) Devoting oneself to all stages of the practice
- (iii) Cultivating the outer and inner conditions for fruitful practice, including faith, intelligence, and zeal: *tonglen*.

### **Day 50, am. 23 October**

We continue this morning with Merging the Mind with Space. This method is simply a variation on Shamatha without a Sign, Awareness of Awareness, and what is called Shamatha without a support.

So in the meditation session to follow, begin with Shamatha with a support, that is, Mindfulness of Breathing bringing the awareness right down to the ground. Then after the discursive mind has settled, on the out-breath, release the breath, thoughts, tension, concepts, and on the in-breath, focus, pay attention and sharpen the awareness. Do this for a few minutes. Then, on the out-breath, allow the awareness to lift off into space, and on the in-breath, elevate and accentuate the quality of the awareness. This will provide you with quasi support, so you don't space out. Do this until there is no difference in the quality of awareness between the arouse phase and release phase. Then, leave your awareness out in space and sustain an awareness of being aware. This is Shamatha without support.

What is the difference between this and open presence when one is resting in pristine awareness/rigpa? When resting in rigpa, one is totally lucid in the waking state. That is, one is viewing the phenomena around oneself as being devoid of inherent nature, being equally pure, and beyond past, present and future. You are viewing reality from the perspective of dharmakaya. So there is a marked difference between the two. One is in Samsara and the other is not.

*Silent meditation ...*

### **Day 50, pm**

*Silent meditation ...*

Let us continue with the text and to the next aphorism "*Adopt the three principal causes*" that will help you along the path to enlightenment.

#### 1. The first of these is to follow a qualified mentor

The story was told from the Pali Cannon of the Buddha's first encounter with another human being soon after his enlightenment. He was heading from Bodghaya to Saranath to seek out the five disciples with whom he'd gone through his years of austerity. A wandering ascetic passing by was quite taken aback by the Buddha's new radiant appearance and awesome demeanour. He asked: Who are you friend? Your face is so clear and bright, your manner so serene. Surely you must have discovered some great truth. Who is your teacher and what is it that you have discovered?" The Buddha replied: "I am an all transcender, an all knower, I have no teacher. In all the world, I alone am fully enlightened. There is none who taught me this. I came to it through my own efforts". The ascetic asked: "Do you mean to say that you have claimed victory over birth and death?" The Buddha replied: "Indeed friend, I am the victorious one." The ascetic said: "Well, good for you friend." And shaking his head, he left by a different path.

You will be venturing forth from this retreat soon, and there may be people you encounter who will be impressed by your demeanour, so be careful how you respond, be careful about wanting to evangelise, to share what you have come to understand and what has inspired you.

Being attracted to a particular person's charisma has been happening for millennia. There is nothing wrong with that. But what can happen is that one can take refuge in that person, because that person is believed to be profoundly unlike oneself. It can lead to a complete reification of that person as an idol and of oneself as ordinary. Then it becomes all worship – tell us what is true, tell us what we should do, tell us what is right and what is wrong... This can be a good thing if the other person is compassionate and wise. But it can also be laden with danger, because one's own consciousness, intelligence, good sense, reason, judgment is given away. History is full of what can happen – whether it's caused by nationalism, politics, religion, ethnicity, etc - where blind faith and blind

obedience to demagogues, tyrants, despots, megalomaniacs leads to tragedy upon tragedy, all coming out of this polarisation. And it can become institutionalised. Those who don't agree are labelled outsiders.

But the Buddha did not chase after the ascetic to try and convince him of what he had said. The Buddha said on many occasions not to accept his teachings out of faith in him, but rather to test his teachings and accept them only if they were found to be meaningful. Alan quoted the often-said line of His Holiness the Dalai Lama "I am a simple Buddhist monk". He never says anything about his realisations. It is important to bring about inner transformation but not to make an impression externally. Don't arouse attention.

As you encounter teachers whom you think could act as guides or mentors for you, see them all equally, regardless of how realised they are. View each one as either an emissary of the Buddha, like the Buddha or as the Buddha. An advanced practitioner looks at all his/her gurus as equal. This is because they look beyond the personality and adulation of the person, where they are not reifying either the teacher or themselves. Putting teachers in a hierarchy will not serve one well. Regardless of how many teachers you have, if there is one where you really feel you have a heart connection, acknowledge this person as your root guru, whether that person is alive or has passed away. And view all the others as emanations of that person.

2. The second is to devote ourselves to all stages of the practice.

That is, don't get locked in, don't get narrow, don't become small-minded. Keep a panoramic vision, while at the same time proceeding gradually according to where you are in your spiritual maturation. Focus on those practices that serve you well, practices where you feel you have some traction, practices that can transform you. Choose those that you are drawn to and that you understand, but occasionally look beyond these to sew the seeds for future practices. Include these as well.

3. The third is to cultivate the inner and outer conditions for fruitful practice.

One of our greatest freedoms is to be able to choose our external environment – we have the freedom to travel where we choose, to live where we want to live, to choose the people with whom we associate, etc. all of which support our practice.

The internal conditions are the five faculties – faculties that you have always had, but when actively cultivated and balanced, they become the five powers. You don't cultivate these faculties by listening to a teacher or receiving an empowerment. You develop them through your own Shamatha practice, and by developing these, they counter the five obscurations. This comes naturally from your Buddha-nature.

Mindfulness – as in retrospective memory, being intelligent and discerning about what is going on here and now, and prospective memory where you remember what you have to do if certain circumstances arise. It is a natural antidote to heedlessness. This faculty is the pivotal one, as it helps to balance the other four.

Enthusiasm – taking delight in virtue, for example, in the Dharma, in our practice, in achieving enlightenment. All virtue stems from Buddha-nature. It manifests as effort, diligence, perseverance, etc. This counters laziness that manifests as sheer apathy, self-denigration, and not having time for the Dharma or engaging in anything truly beneficial because you are so fixated on the pursuit of hedonic pleasures.

Samadhi – focused attention. This is when you are right in the flow. When this happens, you can ease off a little as it takes less effort. When you are not in the flow, you need to inspire yourself and cultivate more enthusiasm. This counters distraction. Mindfulness helps you to achieve the balance between samadhi and enthusiasm.

Faith – confidence and trust. It doesn't mean blind faith. It means faith in yourself, your peers, your contemporaries, your teachers, previous generations, etc. Faith is imperative for any type of meaningful inquiry. Without faith, you would burn out or become debilitated. It counters afflictive doubt.

Intelligence – discerning judgment, wisdom. Faith needs to be balanced with intelligence. If too heavy in faith and too light in intelligence, you can become a dogmatist, a groupie, a mere follower. But if too heavy in intelligence and light in faith, it is missing the keel on the ship. You lack groundedness or continuity. Both inform each other, and they can be balanced with mindfulness.

**Day 51, am. 24 October**

*Silent meditation ...*

In response to a question about lucid dreaming where people in the dream talk to you about things that you don't know, so, where is this information coming from?...

Generally speaking, it comes from the substrate consciousness, but it is important to remember that the mind has many facets to it. A lot is taking place on a subconscious level. There may be a number of different people in your dream, but even when you are lucid in a dream, these people are not simply puppets on your string, on the one hand. On the other hand, and especially as you become more adept at lucid dreaming through the practice of dream yoga, as you train in emanation and transformation, you can transform the people in your dream because they are only appearances.

Stephen LaBerge's research showed that if you read some printed matter in a dream, then it is taken away from your line of sight, then returned to your line of sight, if the text does not change, you can be 85% certain that you are not dreaming. If it is taken away for a second time, then returned again to your line of sight, and the text hasn't changed, then you can be 92% certain that you are not dreaming. This doesn't just apply to printed matter. It applies to anything. For example, you could be focusing on a person, you could turn away, and when you look back at them, they could be somebody else. But this is not the only possibility. The space of your mind, the relative dharmadhatu, the space in which mental events take place, doesn't have any clearly defined border. The Buddhist understanding of this is that it's individuated, that is, it is not a collective unconscious. It is porous. It is possible to have a visitation in your dream by a being who is not simply a fiction, a creation of your substrate consciousness e.g. Tara, Padmasambhava, etc. Such beings can speak such sweet words of wisdom that it's hard to believe it could be any being other than Tara or Padmasambhava. It takes a very pure soul, a pure vision to experience such a visitation. So, it's not just an appearance. If you do have a vision of Tara in a dream, you can't be absolutely sure it was Tara. It could be just a figment of your imagination. So be cautious about making claims.

Win response to a question about whether the teachings of the middle way, for example, the teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom, really given by the historical Buddha to millions of people on Vulture's Peak? Many people - for example, those who follow Theravada Buddhism who believe in metaphysical realism - believe they are tremendously beneficial, but they cannot accept them as an historical fact. Some say that those witnessing these teachings on Vulture's Peak did so from the perspective of pure perception where there is no absolute space and no absolute time. These teachings are so profound, who else but a Buddha could give teachings at that level? If sutras like these are true - that is, you take them to heart and they lead to profound realisation of emptiness and open up your capacities of consciousness, leading to liberation and perfect enlightenment - who else but the Buddha could have taught them?

### **Day 51, pm.**

Reference was made again to the porousness of the mind. That porousness goes both ways, which means that influences can go out and influences can come in. It's like praying to your guru and getting a response. When doing Vajrayana practice, you imagine the body, speech and mind of your guru dissolving into your own body, speech and mind, so that the two become one. When praying to your guru to answer a question, or seek advice, does the response come from the guru or from your own intuitive wisdom, from the depths of your own mind? All that matters is that the guidance you receive is authentic and is helping you to move further along the path. The same applies if you dream of your guru or the Buddha, or a yidam who gives you advice. Simply ask: is the advice sound, sensible, practical, in accord with the Buddhist teachings? When they are put into practice are they beneficial, transformative, liberating? These are the questions. And having put them into practice, you will know if they are beneficial. If the advice/ teachings were sound, then the source must have been sound. It doesn't matter if it was coming from some other being or from your own Buddha-nature.

So in the practice of *tonglen*, using the power of the mind and directing it skilfully, it is possible that we can provide genuine relief from suffering.

*Silent meditation ...*

A footnote to the story of the Buddha's encounter with the wandering ascetic ... The ascetic returned to the Buddha many years later, benefited from his teachings, became a once-returned and realised Nirvana. So the Buddha in his first encounter with the ascetic clearly sowed a seed.

The next aphorism is "*Cultivate three things without letting them deteriorate*"

(i) Faith and reverence in your spiritual mentor or guru - maintain that tie, that connection.

- (ii) Enthusiasm for training your mind – by getting inspiration from your own practice, by engaging with spiritual friends, meeting with your spiritual mentor, reading dharma texts and biographies of great adepts.
- (iii) Conscientiousness concerning your precepts and pledges – maintaining a very ethical way of life.

The next aphorism is “*Maintain three things inseparably*”.

These are the virtues of the body, speech and mind, which means devotion to wholesome, benevolent behaviour, speaking in a virtuous way and cultivating the two bodhichittas.

The next aphorism is “*Meditate constantly on the distinctive ones*”, the ones that stand out, the ones that capture our attention.

For example, people who compete with you, those whom you resent, those who harm you for no apparent reason. Living in a harmonious environment doesn’t provide opportunities for you to practise, to transform your own negative attitudes and behaviours. Living in an environment that presents these challenges does. If this also has some effect on shifting others’ attitudes and behaviours, that’s good. But even the Buddha could not purify other beings’ mental afflictions.

Then there are important relationships that you have that bring with them powerful karma. For example,

- (i) the relationship with your guru. Any positive karma, action or behaviour towards your guru will be accentuated.
- (ii) the relationship with your parents. Any positive action here will be like turbo-charged karma
- (iii) the relationship with bodhisattvas. Virtuous action here is accentuated.

Likewise, any negative actions towards people in these relationships will have significant karmic repercussions, simply because of the nature of these relationships. The karma is so powerful that it can actually ripen in the same lifetime.

The next aphorism is “*Do not depend on other factors*”.

Regardless of whether you experience felicity or adversity, don’t put off doing your practice. *Lojong*, the Seven-Point Mind Training, is designed to guide you along the way. However, we know that certain external conditions are required to seriously practise Shamatha. Other practices, less so. And remember that practising Dharma does not just take place on the cushion. Use and develop your faculty of faith, and watch how reality rises up to meet you.

The next aphorism is “*Now practise what is important*”. Take advantage of this precious human life by prioritising spiritual practice over mundane concerns, prioritising the cultivation of bodhichitta over other practices, prioritising your spiritual mentor’s personal guidance (providing he or she is authentic) over the more generic teachings of the scriptures, placing a higher priority on your inner practice over changing your external environment.

“Those who hear the Dharma are rare. Among those who hear, those who deeply ponder the Dharma are rare. Among those who deeply ponder the Dharma, those who sincerely practice the Dharma are rare. Among those who practise the Dharma, those who persevere with the practice are rare. And for those reasons, spiritual maturation and awakening are rare”. And this is why so few people achieve Shamatha. Finding the requisite outer and inner conditions is very rare indeed.

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In response to a question about why realised beings continue their practice ... Bodhisattvas are not enlightened beings but they are on the path to becoming perfectly awakened. This is a long path. As long as one is on the path, then there is still time for meditation. In the Pali Canon, it states that even the Buddha used to go off into the forest to meditate when he was fatigued. He also wanted to set an example to his students.

In response to a question about needing to achieve Shamatha before one can achieve higher realisations... Higher realisations are possible without achieving Shamatha first. It’s possible to achieve bodhichitta and realise emptiness without first achieving Shamatha. It’s possible to gain some experience of rigpa without first achieving Shamatha. But if you are looking for the path, then Shamatha is necessary. In 2013, it’s too early to give up on the path. Many people have, including Tibetan Buddhist masters. The path is the fourth Noble Truth.

## **Day 52, am. 25 October**

We are now in transition mode as we prepare for departure. It’s worth noting two useful but relevant modes of meditation. One of these that is very important in the modern world of chaos is the retreat, even if it’s for twenty

minutes every day – a time-out, a time for withdrawal. Shamatha is perfect for this. It's like a retreat from Samsara. This is particularly helpful when our mind has been disturbed. If your session does not go so well, rather than getting upset that the session wasn't as good as the previous one or those in Phuket, compare how you feel at the end of the session having released on every out-breath in the previous 24 minutes with how you felt at the start of the session. Hedonically it may not have felt good, but eudemonically, it was good. You have helped to restore the balance.

The other mode is expedition. The Seven-Point Mind-Training is expedition. We can rely on this wonderful skill set to re-engage with our lives, our families, our work. Use challenging experiences to transform our mental afflictions. So there is time for retreat and time for expedition. We can be nourished in both expedition and retreat. Use bodhichitta as your motivation.

*Silent meditation ...*

Another point about preparing to return to the world... When caught up in a variety of chaotic contexts, use the skill that has been developed here at Phuket in your Shamatha practice, and that is, to not get caught up in the chaos, or swept away with it. In the midst of it all, be like the stone in the river, still, while everything else whirls around you. It is not withdrawing, it is not disassociating, it is simply applying what you have learnt to maintain stillness, while being quietly present, attentive and engaged, but being in a position where you can choose how you will engage with what is in front of you.

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In response to a question about whether to participate in short-term retreats on Dzogchen, Mahamudra and Vajrayana...

The answer is really a question: Are you drawn to them? Would you really like to receive that empowerment? Are you ready to make those commitments to practise them every day for the rest of your life? If not, don't participate. Chasing different lamas, teachings and empowerments can be very fragmented. Selecting those that augment what you already have is a good idea. So, choose well.

In response to the question about how to live in the modern world after a long-term retreat...

After your retreat, you will get old, become sick and die! You can't plan how you will be after retreat. It's an adventure. Nothing is certain. Notions of security are an illusion. But it's a good idea to choose the middle way. Living contentedly with very little makes one less anxious about outer stuff. Living in simplicity and becoming less and less reliant on things 'out there', becoming more and more reliant on taking inner refuge, then one can live more fearlessly.

**Day 52, pm.**

There is a wonderful symmetry and synergy between these two practices of ultimate and relative bodhichitta. In terms of ultimate bodhichitta, we are going in that direction with all our Shamatha practices, but particularly Shamatha without a Sign and Merging the Mind with Space, which smoothly slip so easily into Dzogchen meditation. As we tap into our inner resources and go deeper, virtue, loving-kindness, and compassion flow spontaneously. It is something discovered, not cultivated. This flows so easily into the practice of *tonglen* and the realisation of relative bodhichitta. At its root is great compassion, which has its home in pristine awareness. Eventually it reaches the stage where it arouses and wakes up rigpa. Each one is priming the other. We're cultivating the flower at the surface, and probing into the depths. They are part of the one continuum.

*Silent meditation ...*

The next aphorism is "*Make no mistake*" which means:

- Mistaken or misplaced forbearance means only having a tolerance for the challenges of mundane existence but not extending that tolerance to the challenges of Dharma practice, such as nyam.
- Mistaken desires which means desires not for spiritual maturation, but for mundane goals. It's calling for a radical revolution in the way one views reality, ones priorities and one's way of life.
- Mistaken experience. This is striving not for hearing the teachings and reflecting upon them, and meditating, but striving for outer and inner mundane pleasures. Mundane pleasures are obvious. You can see them, and it's much easier to be allured by them. The benefits of Dharma are a lot subtler.
- Mistaken compassion is pitying Dharma practitioners who undergo hardships, but then feeling no compassion for those who dwell in suffering and the causes of suffering. The latter is much more worthy of compassion than the former.



- Mistaken priorities is obviously where one places a higher priority on mundane affairs of this life rather than on one's spiritual practice
- Mistaken satisfaction is not rejoicing in the virtue of sentient beings, buddhas and enlightened beings, but rejoicing in the misfortune of your enemies and those whom you despise.

The next aphorism is "*Do not be erratic*".

This is about losing inspiration in the Dharma, focussing on this life alone, engaging in non-virtue, succumbing to mental afflictions, instead of being concerned about the hereafter and focusing on the Dharma. It can happen as a result of the company you keep, where you are drawn away from your spiritual practice. One can prioritise other things over the Dharma for a while, then come back to it when time allows, then be drawn away again.

The next aphorism is "*Practise with total conviction*".

Shantideva said before embarking on any endeavour, check it out carefully to see if it is worth doing. Having decided it is worth doing, with firm conviction, carry it through to the end. Being half-hearted when facing these situations can set up a pattern or a habit. This applies to Dharma practice. Check it out first. See if it is authentic and beneficial, and if it is, engage in it with total conviction. It is in line with the saying "If something is worth doing, it is worth doing well."

The next aphorism is "*Free yourself by means of investigation and analysis*".

These are two of the five dhyana factors. The first is about coarse investigation. If this withstands your scrutiny, then the second applies, which is probing deeper. These are often referred to as applied thought and sustained thought. We already have these faculties, but they come into their strength when you achieve Shamatha. The Buddhadharmas deserves more than blind faith.

We have already covered the qualities of a qualified competent teacher. But it is important to consider the qualities of the good student.

Are you are a suitable vessel? In other words, are you worth the teacher's time? The essential qualities are: unbiased, discerning and diligent. They are indicative of a suitable vessel for pouring the teachings into the student's heart and mind. The student is keen to put the teachings into practice, to implement them.

If you have these three qualities, then you will recognise these same qualities in the teacher and in fellow students. There will be cause for rejoicing. You can't see particular qualities in other people if you don't have them yourself.

Investigate the mental affliction in yourself that you think is the biggest problem, look for the trigger, be ready to recognise this when it happens, then try to eliminate the affliction altogether. Then resolve never to be caught up in that mental affliction again.

The next aphorism is "*Do not try to make an impression*".

You do not need to show off your kindness, your practice, your discipline, your great associates to convince people you are something special. It just compounds the problem of self-grasping. It's afflictive.

The next aphorism is "*Do not be bound by distemper*".

When others harm you, abuse you, do not retaliate, and do not foster resentment.

The next aphorism is "*Don't be temperamental*".

Don't flare up at any little adversity that comes along. It is a source of irritation for your companions and damages your own health. Mature practitioners are not easily perturbed, they don't get upset, they take things in their stride.

The last aphorism is "*Do not yearn for gratitude*".

Do not expect others to reward you. Engage in generosity with no strings attached.

## Summary

The practice of the two bodhichittas for a lifetime, both during meditation and when off the cushion, calms all beings. It is not only beneficial to your own heart and mind but also calms those around you. It brings happiness to everybody. Perhaps it is that one actually creates an energy field around oneself.

This is particularly pertinent in this era of five degenerations: adverse conditions, evil dispositions, decreased lifespan, powerful mental afflictions and false views. So this is pertinent particularly when there are so many obstacles to spiritual practice. Without a practice such as this, no other practice will lead to success. It's not enough to have a "fair weather practice", that is, you practise only when things are going well, the practice will be on-again-off-again, up and down.

Practising in an era of degeneration – when Dharma is endangered, like now - brings more merit than practising in a Buddha-field or pure land for an eon. So relate everything to this practice, integrating everything you do with Dharma.

A final quote from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche... “There exist many teachings, profound and vast, such as Mahamudra and Dzogchen. But our capacity is small. We are without perseverance and lack sufficient respect and devotion to be freed through teachings such as these. Nevertheless if we practise this Seven-Point Mind-Training, we’ll experience great benefits. It is an extraordinary teaching, the very essence of the bodhisattva teachings, and it has been praised again and again. Therefore, let us practise it without distraction”. This is the conclusion to the Seven-Point Mind Training.

However, Alan followed tradition and returned to the very first aphorism: “*Train in the preliminaries*”. This means reflecting upon the significance, the meaning, the rarity of enjoying a precious human life of leisure and opportunity; reflecting upon the reality of impermanence and one’s own mortality; reflecting upon the nature of suffering; reflecting on the nature of cause and effect, of actions and their consequences. So, reflecting on these - ‘the thoughts that turn the mind’ - to bring about an authentic motivation to find genuine happiness... Alan’s purpose in going back to the beginning was to keep the book open rather than closing it and putting it away.

### **Day 53, am. 26 October**

*Silent meditation ...*

In response to a question about how one would know auspicious signs if they came up in one’s dreams ...  
When one is doing intensive Vajrasattva practice, the purification of body and mind – there are a number signs listed to show purification is taking place.

In response to a request for information on Shambhala and Kalachakra ...

The King of Shambhala and his entourage travelled to India to seek teachings on Kalachakra from the Buddha. The Buddha manifested as the Kalachakra and the whole mandala, invited the King into that mandala, and bestowed upon him the Kalachakra empowerment. The King then took those teachings back to Shambhala, where it was well preserved. The condensed Kalachakra tantra and great commentary were eventually brought to India. Atisha then took them to Tibet. Shambhala, located north of Tibet, is accessible if you are pure in body and mind. Human beings live there, and people get profound realisations in Kalachakra. They can see us. We can’t see them. It’s a pure realm. It is possible to go there, but you’ll see an empty land. You need sufficient purity to see the pure realm. It’s a parallel universe. For many people over the centuries, people have prayed to be born in Shambhala. The whole story of Shambhala has been taken seriously for a very long time...