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Experiential Instructions on Śamatha  
Drubpön Lama Karma  
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Translator's Introduction:

In the following account Drubpön Lama Karma describes his practice of śamatha under the guidance of his spiritual mentor, Lama Neljorpa Sönam Druktop. His formal śamatha practice in solitary retreat took just six months, but it was preceded by many years of study and practice in Tibetan Buddhism (since the age of eight). As he explains here, this six-month retreat was later followed by five years of integration of his meditative equipoise into a more active way of life in serving as scribe to the treasure revealer, Pegyal Lingpa. Lama Karma spent that time in a constant practice of mindfulness but not in strict, closed retreat. He commented at the time that he was sad not to be in formal retreat, but Lama Neljorpa replied that it was indeed retreat since he was not engaged in mundane activities. Lama Karma spent a total of more than eighteen years devoted to retreats in the wilds of eastern Bhutan.

Drubpön Lama Karma:

[02:22] I was asked to give an account of the stages of my practice when I was in retreat. In general, I don't like talking about my experiences, not even my dreams, and my lamas would not be pleased. They say that someone who does that is a "jaded practitioner who spills from the mouth," whose mind is incorrigible and untamed by the Dharma. There is no custom to talk about these things publicly. But Lama Alan asked me to talk about what I requested of my lama when I was practicing śamatha, and what kinds of certainties arose through my practice, including the conjoined practices of śamatha and vipaśyanā.

[05:32] Continuing on from yesterday, when we were about to meditate, today I will explain different methods of śamatha meditation, including śamatha with a sign, śamatha without a sign, and the śravakas' way of meditating. There are many different methods taught by the lamas of the past. Today I will first discuss the way of meditating that relies upon counting the breaths. Counting the breaths is said to be a way to determine śamatha, or to settle your mind in its natural state. Normally, we have never tried to take care of or control our minds with our minds, but we let our minds follow after whatever thoughts and appearances come up. That is how the ordinary mind operates. But if we are going to meditate, we have to take care of our minds, and a method for that is to count the breaths, which leads to good experiences, proper ascertainments, and clarity of mind.

[08:02] The mind is like the king of the body, speech, and mind. It has great strength and tremendous ability, but it has very little ability to place limits on itself. Therefore, when the time comes to meditate, we must reach the point where we can bring the mind under control. When you are able to bring the mind under control in this way, then, gradually your mind turns inwards, and does not follow freely after thoughts. Little by little, it is corralled within. So you must train your mind to be able to settle in its own place. When we practice counting the breaths, once we become well experienced in that, with no need to continue counting the breaths, the mind naturally settles. Normally, in our daily lives, the mind becomes distracted by an amazing

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number of thoughts, but when we have cultivated śamatha, there is a state of mind with no thoughts at all, which, marvelously, you can experience with ease. All the more so, once you have achieved śamatha, you can go there. But it would be difficult to go there all at once. So as a method for going there we depend on the respiration. In the beginning you train in dependence upon the respiration, and then, like ascending a staircase one step at a time, you can't get to the second step without reaching the first step, and without reaching the second step, you can't ascend to the third. So just like gradually ascending a staircase, you need to understand the stages of practice and then the śamatha of those who have gone through the process of developing good habits will become stable. This is a special method for making progress in śamatha.

[11:21] Count one breath for each full cycle of exhalation and inhalation. Don't count two for one exhalation and one inhalation. For example, if you exhale and then inhale, in a very relaxed way, that is called one cycle of respiration. So, in the beginning, count each of those up to seven cycles of the breath. Don't count a lot of breaths, for this will create obstacles from the conceptualization arising in between. Although thoughts continue to arise, here is a method so that you don't fall under their domination: you merge the many thoughts into just one thought for each cycle of the respiration, like many streams merging into the one Ganges River. Then, in the course of counting one cycle of respiration, thoughts will still be there, but once you have channeled them together, you make them into one thought, and then gradually it will be easy to reach stability. If you continue to let your mind follow after all the various thoughts of the three times—past, present, and future—you will not be able to stabilize your śamatha.

[14:25] For beginners, it's best to count just seven breaths, for the siddhas of the past have said that one should have short sessions and many of them. There's great value in this. I have much experience in this regard. When you think, "Now, I'm going to meditate," and then stay there meditating for a very long time, sometimes the mind wanders around in the past, present, and future, sometimes it doesn't; sometimes it's clear and undistracted, but you cannot remain there. Rather, when counting the breaths, you should think, "I might make a mistake," and really focus as you exhale and then inhale, and when you make your mind remain on that, you gather all the thoughts together into a single thought. With the concern that you might lose count, when you sustain this mindfulness, then in this meditation there is the mindfulness of śamatha, which is without forgetfulness. Then with each exhalation and inhalation count once, maintaining your mindfulness with the constant concern that you might lose count. If you count more than seven, thoughts will infiltrate your mindfulness. But as a beginning, as one successfully counts from one to seven again and again, after getting trained in that, without ever becoming distracted by infiltrating thoughts when counting from one to seven, then you can count up to twelve. Thus you lengthen it.

[17:56] Normally, during the first second we're thinking about one thing, then during the next second, we're thinking about something else, in the third second yet another thought arises, and since the mind isn't under control, we don't recognize that these thoughts are arising, for they're like water that spreads all over a plain. But now, by counting the breaths, like draining all the water into one channel, thoughts are merged into the thoughts of counting, thus decreasing in number.

[19:37] So you gather all the thoughts together and place them into the count. When one follows the explanation from experience, meditating for a long time like that, the result will come. If one has experience in meditation, then one knows the meditative experiences. One understands. But if you just hear and talk a lot about meditation, you have no experience. A long time ago, I received from my lamas the instructions on how to meditate. Then I meditated a great

deal. Later, when I was meditating near a river gorge, at first, I would hear the sound of the river outside, but as my mind gradually calmed down and remained still, I would hear the sound of the river from within. I would hear all sounds within. Such experience arises through familiarization, and you need to know how far your meditation has progressed.

[21:41] Normally, we don't notice tiny sounds, but when meditating, with familiarization over a long period of time, on occasion you'll very clearly experience momentary sounds like that of your own heart beating, which we don't normally hear when we are doing other things. When we do, this is a sign that conceptualization has subsided. Once they have subsided, various sensations and experiences continually arise.

[23:05] Once you have brought your respiration to a pace that is slow and gentle, that is enough. You don't need to make the breath faster or slower. You don't need to breathe more quickly. Breathe gently, with your mind relaxed and happily settled. After you've practiced a lot in that way, when your practice of śamatha is going well, then sounds like that of the wind, cars, airplanes, and human voices will be experienced inside. When you focus outside, outer appearances will be unimpeded and luminous, like a drawing made of rainbows; and then when you look at visual objects such as mountains, rivers, snow, sky, gardens, and forest, you will see them clearly and without obstruction. Meanwhile, when you look inwardly, it will seem as though everything is of the nature of emptiness and luminosity, with nothing to be seen. When you meditate on the union of these two, [i.e., focusing outside and inside,] all sounds will be experienced from within. This comes from a great deal of śamatha meditation. If you have not yet reached even just the single-pointed stage, you won't understand these things. From śamatha, you go to the single-pointed yoga, and you eventually progress to the yoga of one taste and the yoga of non-meditation. This is the way to progress in Mahāmudrā. So you have to get to the single-pointed yoga, right? This is a practice for arriving at śamatha, the single-pointed yoga. So we have to understand these things, which I explained earlier.

[26:50] Another sign of progress is that you can remember events from previous lifetimes or else from a long time ago in this lifetime that you had completely forgotten. But when you are cultivating śamatha, it is possible for the memory of them to return. There's a story of one great meditator who lent a book to his friend, and he forgot about it for many years, and then one day when he was meditating, the thought suddenly arose that "O, one day, years ago, I lent this book to so and so." He remembered this. This is good meditation! You can remember anything. This is what Milarepa says<sup>1</sup>:

Please doubt the mistake of thinking  
self-emergent, spontaneous effulgence  
and many memories showing up directly  
are all just about the same, same, same.

རང་བྱུང་ལྷག་པའི་རང་ཤར་དང་། །

ཐད་ཐད་མང་བའི་དྲན་པ་གཉིས། །

འདྲ་འདྲ་འདྲ་ལ་ཉེར་དྲགས་མཛོད། །

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<sup>1</sup> This verse is from the *Spiritual Songs of Milarepa* (*gsung mgur mdzod nag ma*).

Right now, for us, “self-emergent, spontaneous effulgence”<sup>2</sup> could mean memories from your many past lives—in this context. Being able to remember clearly things you did from an earlier part of this life, having that memory reawakened, is what having “many memories showing up directly” refers to. But this can happen even to those who have not yet practiced meditation. We can have all sorts of memories about things we did in the past, and those are not “self-emergent, spontaneous effulgences,” but rather just “many memories showing up directly.” “Self-emergent, spontaneous effulgence” means remembering distinct events from your past lives. Sometimes this can indeed happen. It is coming from the root of practice. But then there is also just the reawakening of memories from the earlier part of our lives.

[30:06] Another method is to focus on an image, such as the form of a deity, such as the body of the Buddha, which is a kind of śamatha with a sign and is a practice for us Buddhists. For this you first prepare of painted scroll of the body, not too large or too small, not larger than one cubit and not smaller than one hand-span in height. It should be clear, but not shiny, and in a relaxed, joyful way, focus on that, not too close or far away—a distance of about the length of an ox yoke. [32:58] If it’s far away, thoughts will be more scattered, and if the image is too large, that will cause thoughts to scatter. Having a smaller object is a method for drawing thoughts inwards. In the stage of generation practice, in the samādhi of generating the deity, we focus on very tiny visualizations, such as the seed syllables inside the samādhisattva, but they must be very clear. These are powerful means to withdraw the mind inwards. But if the visual object is too small, so that you cannot see it clearly, it’s hard to focus on it, so this is not good. [34:04] The object of meditation should not be fluttering due to wind or moving about, but should be stable. There are extensive explanations of the many benefits of practicing śamatha this way in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*. But this is a rough account of the reasons for practicing like this.

[34:54] First, this method serves to calm the mind, and secondly, focusing on the body of the Buddha develops a state of mind with intense clarity. So it serves you well for both for the practice of śamatha and the stage of generation. [35:35] When you focus on the image of the Buddha’s body, at the beginning focus your gaze on the coil of hair between the Buddha’s eyebrows. When you get bored or dull, shift your gaze to different parts of the body, such as the eyes, nose, arms, legs, and implements. Then you can also focus on the whole body and again narrow in on specific parts of his body. [37:55] At the beginning, when you are training, you should look with your eyes and focus your mind on what you see with your eyes. It is a method to tame your mind. Sometimes, when your mind becomes stable and thoughts have subsided, then even if you close your eyes, you will still see the image mentally.

[38:55] There was a shepherd boy who became a disciple of Milarepa, known as Lukdzi Repa, who later became a mahāsiddha. When he was looking after his flock of sheep, he encountered Milarepa and asked him to teach him meditation. Milarepa instructed him just to visualize on the tip of his nose an image of the Buddha, remain there single-pointedly, and then come back to me. So he went away, found the wall of a ruin and while leaning against it with his body straight, and his hands in meditation posture, he meditated on a tiny image of the Buddha. But after some time, he forgot [all else] and seven days went by. He was a shepherd, and his parents and other relatives were worried that he had become lost. They looked for him everywhere and eventually came to Milarepa and asked him whether their boy had come here.

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<sup>2</sup> In general, this phrase refers only to that which arises spontaneously from realization of pristine awareness, not merely from the substrate consciousness, so that is the deeper distinction which is being referred to here.

Milarepa told them that their son had come to him to learn how to meditate, he taught him to visualize the Buddha, and then he left. They asked how long ago this had happened, and he replied it had been about seven days. [40:10] Eventually they found him, but he seemed to be zoned out, with his eyes downcast. When they touched him, they aroused him and asked what he had been doing. He replied that he had been meditating. “Is that what meditation is about?” they asked, commenting that they hadn’t seen him for seven days. He replied that he had just sat down to meditate. From his perspective only a moment had gone by, but his mindfulness [of all else] had been lost and seven days had gone by.

This happened several times, so they told him they couldn’t look after him anymore, for this had brought them much distress, so he should return to Milarepa. The shepherd reported back to Milarepa that he had focused on Śākaymuni’s body, but he lost mindfulness [of all else], without any sense of the passage of time. Only afterwards, when he saw how the sun had moved, did he recognize that time had passed. When he entered meditation it was evening, and when the clarity of his mindfulness was restored it was morning. Only in that way could he believe that time had passed. Milarepa told him, “This is called ‘stagnant śamatha’ and is not a sign of having achieved śamatha, nor a virtue of having reached the Path, nor is it something that should or shouldn’t happen. But if you revive this with vividness of attention, this will help you in the practice of vipaśyanā. As an analogy, just as the sun rises gradually, so do the signs of the Path in meditation occur only gradually. You should not think they happen all of a sudden. When you meditate, signs of the qualities of the Path arise, but you shouldn’t think stagnant śamatha is something excellent. Now if you can remain with me for twelve years devoted to the practice of vipaśyanā, then you can report on your progress in vipaśyanā. If you can’t do that, then you won’t be able to give such a report.” The shepherd then asked Milarepa to guide him, saying, “I enjoy meditating, and with thanks, please teach me.” Later, he became a great mahāsiddha known as Lukdzi Repa (Cotton-clad Shepherd). [47:32] But for the years in between, he said that whether for five days or six days, every two days or three days, it was difficult because he would lose mindfulness and could not gain control of his mind. Later, he wrote down in his autobiography how he practiced, what kind of experiences he had, and how Milarepa corrected him.

[48:48] Those are examples of practices of śamatha with a sign, and the stages of practice on that basis are set forth definitively in the sūtras and treatises in nine methods for stilling the mind, or nine mental states by which one engages samādhi, but we are not able to practice of all them now. For now, the first three methods of stilling the mind are important, so they should be known. They are directed engagement, continual engagement, and resurgent engagement. For śamatha these are extremely important.

[50:10] When you begin practicing śamatha, conceptualization seems to increase. In fact, they’re always arising, but we don’t take charge of them or recognize them. But when we practice śamatha, we can clearly recognize how many thoughts come up and how the mind works. As conceptualization increases it seems to arise as unhappiness, or as though we are being tossed about in a great storm. Everyone experiences many of these kinds of powerful thoughts—which are unlike anything they have experienced before—when they practice śamatha, and they may feel discouraged, thinking they’re really poor at meditation and that they won’t get be able to anywhere in meditation. Then they should seek advice from a qualified lama who will tell them that this is a sign of experience, that those thoughts were occurring all along, but they weren’t recognized. The lama will tell them that this is the “meditative experience of recognizing thoughts” that comes once you are practicing. I personally had a lot of difficulties

with this, for I had a lot of experience with this. Previously, when I was meditating thoughts would rise up strongly: I found it very difficult when I was practicing śamatha in retreat for six months while sealed inside a mud hut. It happened to me just like that. That phase is known as the meditative experience of recognizing thoughts. If you don't meditate, you won't recognize thoughts.

[53:45] When I came to Lama Neljorpa to request guidance in my meditative practice, he first gave me a practice to purify the body, speech, and mind. If one failed to pass the test related to that, then he would not grant the instructions on investigating the origin, location, and destination of the mind. When I did succeed in that, then he guided me for several months in inquiring into the origin, location, and destination of the mind. Then he taught me “the triad of stillness, movement, and awareness,” after which he introduced me to pristine awareness, saying “Now, your meditation is this.” So he pointed it out precisely with his finger. Then during the six months in the sealed meditation hut, for two months I didn't even recite my daily commitments but solely practiced śamatha. After about seven days, I became extremely depressed with the amount of conceptualization that was coming up, with one thought coming up after another relentlessly. When I recognized that, all through the night, with my eyes wide open, they would arise constantly, and that was torture. I thought, “I'm making this suffering for myself. I can't handle it! If this is the kind of difficulty that arises if one meditates, it would be better just to try to enjoy myself! It would be better to do something else, to recite *maṇi* mantras, to offer the regular gaṇacakras, perform rituals, and meditate on the stage of generation.”

Later, when my lama came to see me, he told me, “This was happening to you all along, but in the past, you weren't aware of it. Conceptualization is occurring constantly. Now due to your practice, as you've been cultivating śamatha, you are recognizing what's going on in your mind. This is called the ‘meditative experience of recognizing conceptualization.’<sup>3</sup> This is the first barrier to dhyāna. If you don't cross over this hurdle, if you try to avoid it, since you won't be able to recognize conceptualization, your practice will develop only partially. Only about one out of a hundred can get through this. It's difficult. If you can meditate, then you will become adept in coping with these naturally-arising feelings and experiences. If one doesn't meditate, one may meditate for an hour or two each day, then rest and become distracted, but one won't progress. You have to meditate single-pointedly after you have sealed your hut. When you meditate single-pointedly, then the first meditative experience of dhyāna, ‘the experience of movement,’ occurs when conceptualization bursts forth like a cascading mountain brook. You will encounter its essential nature. In the Mahāmudrā instruction known as *The Ganges* the Indian Mahāsiddha Tilopa said that for novices, thoughts flow like a cascading mountain brook. These thoughts weren't absent previously, but you weren't aware of them. Once you cross over the first hurdle, then gradually, over time, you must reach the ‘meditative experience of recovering from preceding thoughts.’ Then, little by little, they gradually withdraw. Now you have recognized thoughts, and you must definitely cross over this hurdle; if you cannot cross this hurdle, then no matter what practices or rituals you perform, fine experiences will never come. So this is the first experience.”

[1:03:41] For six months I focused solely on śamatha in the sealed hut. Sometimes various thoughts would arise a bit more strongly, sometimes the practice would be pleasant, and I had all kinds of experiences. When I emerged from my meditation hut after six months, all

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<sup>3</sup> This is also known as the “experience of movement.”

appearances manifested as never before. Outer appearances of the grass, rocks, crops, trees, and mountains arose, but when assessed with mindfulness and introspection, I saw them differently. I reported this to my lama, and because my lama had gained the realization that is “like space,” he [understood immediately, and] quoted the saying from Jetsun [Milarepa]<sup>4</sup>:

Please doubt the mistake of thinking that  
being affixed to the nectar of śamatha  
and meditation that has taken hold  
of the indwelling as one’s own place  
is all just about the same, same, same.

སྒོམ་གཏུག་མའི་རང་ས་ཟིན་པ་དང་། །

ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་ཚུལ་འབྱར་བ་གཉིས། །

འདྲ་འདྲ་ལ་ནོར་དོགས་མཛོད། །

So he told me that I had not yet taken hold of the eternal kingdom of the indwelling [mind], but some say that meditation which takes hold of the eternal kingdom of the indwelling and being stuck to the nectar of śamatha are the same! “Right now, whatever you see and whatever you feel and whatever you look at is arising as an experience in the nature of clear luminosity and emptiness. So if, whatever you look upon, you remain without moving, with your mind completely unwavering, then whatever you see will have the aspect of clear luminosity, so you will see everything as having become empty, and a state of mind will arise that realizes things to be completely devoid of true existence.”

Once he had said this, my lama laughed and said, “You’ve been practicing śamatha quite a lot, so you are affixed to the nectar of śamatha<sup>5</sup>, but as for taking hold of the eternal kingdom of the indwelling, in the future, with respect to all of this, if you continue to meditate a great deal, then you will come upon something like that, and at that time, you will take hold of the eternal kingdom. Right now, your śamatha has become affixed to its nectar. You have achieved a partial degree of vipaśyanā, enough to recognize it, but it’s not actual, definitive vipaśyanā, because, as it is said<sup>6</sup>:

When you recognize  
this self-cognizing awareness,  
which is luminous and free of grasping,  
as spontaneous actualization,  
you have reached the end of the single-pointed yoga.

གསལ་ལ་འཛིན་མེད་རང་རིག་འདི། །

ལྷན་སྲུབ་ཡིན་པར་ངོ་ཤེས་ན། །

ཚུགས་ཅིག་མཐའ་ལུ་ཕྱིན་པ་ཡིན། །

<sup>4</sup> This, too, is from the *Spiritual Songs of Milarepa*.

<sup>5</sup> This is a phrase that means having reached the ninth stage of śamatha meditation.

<sup>6</sup> This verse is from *The Golden Key to the Essential Meaning of Mahāmudrā* (*phyag rgya chen po'i bsdus don gser gyi lde mig*).

When your mind is clear and free of grasping, then from the perspective of your state of mind, it is not holding on to anything at all, and you have actually seen that, this is an aspect of vipaśyanā, but at this point actual, definitive vipaśyanā has not yet arisen.”

That was my way of meditating. I’ve been asked to speak about this, so I have.

[1:09:25] My lama told me that from now on I should not let my mind wander at any time. I was to sustain my mindfulness and introspection without distraction twenty-four hours every day. From that point onwards, for five years I didn’t engage in any studies of deceptive dharmas but focused solely on sustaining the mindfulness and introspection I had developed earlier. For just five years of such practice, my mind would still become distracted at night, but I was able to maintain continuous mindfulness throughout the whole day. Then, at a certain point, I served as the scribe for Pgyal Lingpa as he was narrating his mind treasures, and according to my lama’s instructions I would examine how many lines I could go before my mind would wander, or how many pages I could go before being distracted. I would observe how long I could maintain mindfulness during one session with him without becoming distracted, and how many steps I could go before my mind would wander, after a session had finished and I was walking. I had a long way to walk home, for I lived up in the mountains. Sometimes I would go by car with my lama, and sometimes going by foot. On all such occasions I had no other practice than to maintain undistracted mindfulness, *staring down the face of appearances*,<sup>7</sup> in reliance upon mindfulness and introspection. After about five years, from the time I awoke in the morning until I went to bed at night, I was able to sustain continuous mindfulness [of pristine awareness]. [1:10:50] So this was probably the medium stage of the single-pointed [yoga]. It was not the great stage.

At that point, I was able to experience luminosity not only during the day but also through the night. Sometimes while dreaming at night, I would recognize dreams that had been aroused from afflictive habitual propensities. Dreams would arise as the clear light, and sometimes I would be able to observe the stages of dissolution. For us right now, when we fall asleep, our minds dissolve into the substrate consciousness, we dream, and apart from the time when we wake from sleep, we don’t understand what is going on at all. When you practice śamatha a lot, you can recognize the stages of dissolution and re-emergence of the dark near-attainment, the white appearance, and the red emergence. And when I was about to wake up, I could observe all the dream appearances dissolving back into the substrate. Then when mindfulness was restored, and appearances of coarse mindfulness emerged, I could observe the gradual arising of daytime appearances. So, when śamatha is cultivated, it is useful for us in that way. That was my way of meditating.

[1:17:29] For ordinary sentient beings, whenever appearances arise throughout the day, they don’t recognize pristine awareness, so they are distracted to appearances, they’re caught up in conceptualization, and habitual propensities are stored in their substrates. When they fall asleep, all the appearances to their eight modes of consciousness dissolve inwardly, and then in the end they go into the dark near-attainment. This is the very same dark near-attainment that you will enter while on the path. It is what happens at death too, right? But right now, while we

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<sup>7</sup> This is a technical term that means embracing all appearances with single-pointed mindfulness, usually in the context of a single-pointed mindfulness that is immersed in pristine awareness, and not merely the mindfulness of śamatha.



are practicing, after we've crossed beyond the dark near-attainment of the substrate, then, from the reversal of that dark near-attainment, mindfulness is restored and subtle consciousness and appearances emerge. Dreams emerge the whole night long, drawing on habitual propensities stored in the substrate, and one sees those dream appearances. Then, when they are worn out, and the duration of dream appearances is finished, they dissolve back into the dark near-attainment, and when the dark near-attainment reverses sequence, our current appearances arise from it again. So this goes back and forth, such that we're deluded during the dream state and, if we don't recognize pristine awareness, we're deluded during the waking state. The buddhas realize that appearances in the dream state and waking state are both devoid of true existence, and they recognize that dreams and the waking state are equally delusional, so they realize this without delusion. We don't realize that. We may think we're deluded in the dream state and that nothing is truly existent, but during the waking state we think everything is real and truly existent. But buddhas know that all our currently appearing phenomena are deceptive. When you come to know that, then with the practices of the path, on the basis of your *śamatha*, you use the awareness of *vipaśyanā*, and then you'll be able to establish many objects of consciousness with the taste of pristine awareness.

[1:21:21] Now we should probably abbreviate. Whenever we meditate, there are two very important instruments to be put to use: mindfulness and introspection. [1:21:47] When we first focus our attention on an image such as that of the Buddha, when it appears in its entirety before the mind, and the mind quickly comes to it, this is called *directed mental engagement*. Maintaining our attention on that appearance without abandoning it is called *mindfulness*. There are two meanings of "mindfulness" (*dran pa*). On the one hand, it refers to recollecting past events, including actions we've done long, long ago. In that case we call it "remembering" (*dran pa*). But here we are not using that mental faculty. In the context of *śamatha*, mindfulness refers to sustaining our focus [for example,] on the image of the deity, which is appearing in its entirety, without letting it become distracted. In addition, it enables us to be aware of the vivid and empty aspects of the object, without slipping into laxity or excitation. This is "mindfulness."

[1:23:37] When we are counting our breaths, it is with mindfulness that we sustain our attention as we count "one, two, three..." taking extreme care not to lose count. When our attention strays, and we lose track of the count, this is due to the loss of mindfulness. [1:24:18] Then, "mental engagement" means the object is appearing to the mind. When the object is appearing, but our attention is once again distracted, the mental faculty by which we recognize this fault in mindfulness is called "introspection." Mindfulness and introspection are our most important tools.

[1:26:32] There are also two distinguishing qualities of our minds. The quality of mind by which we clearly distinguish the particular characteristics of the external objects to which we may direct our attention, such as identifying "that is a light, that is a painting," and so on, as well as using investigation and analysis to identify individual characteristics, such as, "that is white, that is red, that is black," etc., may be called *self-cognizing and self-illuminating*. [1:28:00] Along with that, the part of the mind that experiences the onset of the thoughts that identify individual qualities such as color is called *introspection*. This is the precise place where we point out the name [introspection]. [1:28:20] Therefore, with a focus on experience, when you meditate, there will come an experience where there are no thoughts at all, where, amazingly, they have all been pacified. You can experience this! At the same time, in order to be able to remain in this peace, you need strong enthusiasm. [1:28:53] Whether meditation goes well or not depends on mindfulness and introspection. If you are someone whose mindfulness is stable and

introspection is sharp, and if you actually do meditate, then when you meditate, your meditation will go quite well. Even if mindfulness is present, if introspection lapses, then our mindfulness will not be restored to its object once it has been distracted elsewhere, so you will not be able to attain resurgent engagement.

[1:30:09] When, relying on mindfulness and introspection, you are able to sustain your attention for a while, that is called continual engagement, and with resurgent engagement you develop even greater continuity. At that stage, if you cannot remain engaged with the object continuously, you're immediately able to recognize when your mind has become distracted by a single conceptualization, such as drifting off into memories of going to India, visiting Bodh Gaya—when conceptualization flows on and on, taking your mindfulness with them. But at the stage of resurgent engagement, you immediately recognize with introspection that your attention has strayed, and you bring it right back to the object. [1:31:24] Introspection is like a shepherd, for it looks after the mind to prevent it from being carried away by conceptualization. When the attention strays, introspection restores it again and again to the meditative object. If it is not restored, then conceptualization will flow continuously.

[1:32:00] At the moment when the mind has settled well for a given session, it's important to continue. If you don't cut off scattering before conceptualization has had a chance to arise in a stream, then stability will not arise. Right now, our practice of meditation is not stable. Until the mind is stabilized and conceptualization no longer infiltrates, you need to correct for scattering. Until conceptualization doesn't arise at all for five or ten minutes or even half an hour, you should have short sessions again and again, for if you do that, conceptualization won't as easily carry you away. "Many sessions of short duration." That's what has been taught by past supreme siddhas, and it's important. One might think it's important to have long sessions, but unless one's meditation is inwardly stable, coarse or subtle undercurrents of conceptualization will continue to flow, like water moving beneath grass, hay, or husks of grain. Attention will stray as if it had been carried away by a thief. You need to recognize whether or not your mindfulness is stable, and when you restore it and you're able to stop conceptualization, it is like waves that subside back into the ocean. Or like a rainbow fading back into the sky. Once you have recognized the nature of your mind, it's best if conceptualization simply disappears into that basic nature.

[1:36:07] It's important to properly recognize stillness. If you don't, then the proximate enemies, laxity and dullness, will arise. You need to recognize movements of the mind. If you don't, then undercurrents of thoughts will flow. Likewise, you need to recognize awareness. If you don't, you will be lost in confusion.

[1:38:40] [Khenpo Namchak Dorji]: There's a practice that is called *staring down the face of appearances* or *staring down the face of pristine awareness*. This means that whatever appearances arise, you recognize them with mindfulness and introspection.

Drubpön Lama Karma: Apart from staring down the face of appearances there is no other practice.

Whether walking, relaxing, standing, or lying down,  
Gather the mind.

This is what it means to practice virtue,  
without sessions or in-between.

འགྲོ་འཆག་ཉལ་འདུག་སེམས་ལ་འདུག།

ཐུན་མཚམས་མེད་པའི་དགེ་སྤྱོད་ཡིན།

There is no period between sessions. There are neither sessions nor post-meditation sessions. When you are practicing staring down the face of appearances, during sessions you are “gluing yourself to meditative experience,” so with regard to “post-meditation,” it is not as though there is one and then a second. During both you are practicing *staring down the face of pristine awareness* or *staring down the face of appearances*.

### Guided Meditation

[1:39:37] Whether our meditation sessions are short or long, they should be comprised of three stages: preparation, the actual meditation, and the conclusion. The preparation is the generation of bodhicitta, the actual meditation is non-referential, and the conclusion is the dedication. The preparation—the generation of bodhicitta—is virtue, so your practice is imbued with skillful means. Regarding the non-referential actual meditation, neither thoughts, nor the roughness of thoughts, as it were, arise within the meditation. The mind settles in its own nature, or awareness settles in its own nature, which means that it’s not sullied by thoughts of the past, future, and present, but is perfectly pure. The mind’s essential nature is empty, its manifest nature is not simply vacuous but is luminous, so there is a union of emptiness and luminosity. When it arises vividly, it will not succumb to laxity and excitation. This is called the non-referential actual meditation.

[1:42:20] Whatever roots of virtue you practice, the end of the session should not be obstructed with negative thoughts. After you’ve finished practicing, continue with authentic prayers of dedication of all your virtue for the sake of all sentient beings throughout space. This is like pouring a drop of water into the ocean, so that until the ocean dries up, your drop of water, being mixed with the ocean, will not be extinguished. Likewise, your roots of virtue will not be extinguished until enlightenment is achieved, but will increase more and more. Longchenpa spoke of these three things to cherish as you traverse the path to liberation, and whether your sessions are long or short, they must be imbued with these three.

[1:44:15] Within the triad of teaching, listening, and practicing meditation, we have finished teaching and listening, so now it’s time to meditate. “May all sentient beings throughout space achieve the precious state of enlightenment!” First, engage in the ninefold cleansing of the stale winds. [Lama Karma demonstrates how this is done, with fists on the knees.] [1:46:44] Then, there are some winds remaining that have not entered, so you want to take in the remaining winds. So those of you who are familiar with the vase breathing, you may proceed with that. If you are not familiar with the vase breathing, then you can simply release the remaining breath gently through the nose and mouth, with your hands on the knees. Relax your mind. Then, as it is said, “If you make the auspicious form with your body, then realizations will dawn in your mind,” so adopt the seven-point posture of Vairocana [with your legs crossed in the vajrāsana], or if that is uncomfortable, then you can sit up straight in the bodhisattva posture. Your entire body and mind should be relaxed. [1:48:56] Then offer prayers of supplication to the lineage of your lamas, finishing with:

Come, my precious root guru, shining in glory,  
sit atop the lotus and moon upon my crown,

and in your great kindness take me after you;  
please grant me the *siddhis* of body, speech, and mind.

དཔལ་ལྡན་ཅུ་བའི་སྐྱེ་མ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

བདག་གི་སྤྱི་བོར་པད་ལྷའི་སྟེང་བཞུགས་ལ། །

བཀའ་རིན་ཆེན་པོའི་སློན་སྐྱོད་ལྲིམ་བཟུང་སྟེ། །

སྐྱེ་གསུང་ལྷགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་སྲུབ་སྦྱོལ་དུ་གསོལ། །

Then, you can visualize the one whose essential nature is your root lama in the form of our Teacher, Śākyamuni, coming to be seated upon the lotus and moon above the crown of your head. Then call for blessings that your meditation in this session will go well. Imagine that you receive blessings, and then your lama melts into light and as a ball of light enters your crown cakra, descends to the center of your heart, and finally dissolves into your heart. Then imagine that the Buddha’s mind and your mind become inseparable, of one taste.

[1:50:57] Once you have come to that point, you enter the actual meditation. View thoughts of the past as aspects of your mind, and prevent them from entering. Do not usher in thoughts of the future, but stop them. This brings your consciousness to the present. Don’t investigate or analyze this consciousness. When practicing śamatha, this consciousness that is the dominant condition, what you call your “mind,” has no place where it is established. Therefore, when you observe the essential nature of your mind, when you can’t point to it, you see that it’s empty. But not only is it empty, the luminosity of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile sensations remains unimpeded. As Milarepa said to Rechungpa, his spiritual son:

May this wish-fulfilling jewel of the  
precious samādhi of luminosity and emptiness  
arise in your mind-stream, Rechungpa, my son.

སློམ་གསལ་སྟོང་གི་བསམ་གཏན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།

ལུ་རས་རྒྱུང་པའི་ལྷགས་ལ་འཁྲུངས་པར་ཤོག།

The mind has the two inseparable aspects of luminosity and emptiness. Its emptiness is devoid of laxity and its luminosity is devoid of dullness. Laxity and dullness are transcended. You will never quite arrive at the consciousness of the present moment that transcends origination, cessation, and abiding, which is empty awareness, but you remain right there for as long as you can. That is called *meditative equipoise*.

[1:54:24] Whatever thoughts arise, simply release them. Don’t try to block them, for you will never succeed. Also, don’t fall under the influence of an autonomous stream of conceptualization, for that is delusional. [1:54:50] With respect to these thoughts, we need to understand how to release them into their ground, their aspect of liberation. The ground, the mind that is unborn and unceasing, has an aspect that is utterly empty. Although all kinds of thoughts may arise from that, when thoughts have been turned around, they can be released once again, within that aspect of freedom. [1:55:24] We need to be able to give rise to a conviction towards the state that does not “identify” the essential nature. [This practice is said to be *free of identifying and of not identifying*.] Rechungpa said, “Thoughts of the past have ceased and disappeared. Those of the future have not yet arisen. Those of the present are unidentifiable.” It is called “the transcendence of identification.” The mind whose essential nature is free of

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identification finally leads to the Madhyamaka view, the Mahāmudrā view, and the view of the Great Perfection. When cultivating śamatha—depending on the level of your practice, be it great, middling, or small, on the qualities of your channels and elements, and the strength of your courage, or how far one has advanced—for some people, due to the purity of their karma, it is possible for them to recognize their own pristine awareness. The mind that is free of thoughts of the three times is the best.

[1:57:13] When you hear the sound of the chime fading away, settle your mind in its natural state, and from that point onwards, do your best not to become distracted. [Lama Karma sounds the beginning chime and the ending chime comes at 2:20:14.] Meditative equipoise is said to be *space-like*, for it is like empty space. When you arise from meditative equipoise with your space-like, luminous, empty mind, if you think, “Now my session is over, so I don’t need to meditate”—don’t think you’re now on vacation. Between sessions you must sustain the mindfulness of meditative equipoise and blend it with your everyday activities. You should unify your meditative equipoise and post-meditative state.

[02:21:18] When you’re first practicing, you may practice for an hour of formal meditation and shorter periods of post-meditation, such as ten minutes, which you try to blend with your meditative state. As you are able to maintain your meditative mindfulness through your post-meditative periods, then you should extend the post-meditative practice to twenty minutes; eventually, you would train with one hour in meditative equipoise and one hour of post-meditation. Gradually, you decrease the time spent in formal meditation and increase the time in the post-meditative state. With the increase of pliancy, during all your activities of eating, washing, walking, and sleeping you can integrate the mindfulness of meditative equipoise with your post-meditative experience. When you can indivisibly merge the two so that they are unified, you will be able to arrive at high levels of meditation.

[2:23:05] In his *Three Phrases That Strike the Crucial Points*, which synthesizes all the crucial points of the Great Perfection, Garab Dorjé states, “There should be no difference between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state, and no separation between meditation sessions and between-session periods.” Meditative equipoise occurs during your formal sessions, and between sessions the mind tends to wander. But if your meditative equipoise can enter into the times between meditation sessions, then meditation persists without distraction. When the mindfulness and introspection of your meditative equipoise enters into your activities, then you’ve made those two periods inseparable and no difference exists between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state. For siddhas of the past, if in the beginning they were meditating in a mountain hermitage, and then practiced until they could successfully blend sessions and between-session periods, then, whether they were teaching disciples or wandering about in the town, it made no difference, for they had achieved stability within. If you practice gradually and reach a high level, then this will happen.

[02:25:18] At the beginning you should not meditate with your eyes closed, nor should they be wide open, but partially open, looking out in front of you. If you familiarize yourself like that, in the future you will be able to achieve clairvoyance, the “deva eye,” and “eye of wisdom” and so forth. If you meditate with your eyes closed, for a while it seems better, but later you will fall towards sleep, because your meditation will not have attained stability. When you achieve quite a good degree of stability, then you will be just like Milarepa, who said:

When I cover my head with my shawl,  
I see with the distant eye.

I can clearly see all the worlds.

ང་མགོ་བོ་བདུམས་ནས་རྒྱང་མིག་མཐོང་། །

འཛིག་རྟེན་ཐམས་ཅད་ས་ལེར་མཐོང་། །

When you have taken hold of the eternal kingdom with undistracted mindfulness, then it won't make any difference whether your eyes are open or closed. But for us right now, keeping our eyes closed is not the way to practice śamatha for now.

[02:27:23] Now that we have participated in teaching, listening, and practicing meditation, let us dedicate whatever roots of virtue we may have gained so that all sentient beings may achieve enlightenment simultaneously, as one.

It is written in the old textbooks that siddhas of the past have said that if you can maintain the stability of your mind, or samādhi, through the practice of śamatha, for as long as it takes for a louse to crawl from the top of your head to the tip of your nose, that is, for a few minutes, you will be able to purify instantly the negative karma accumulated over 80,000 eons. This was declared by the Buddha himself. That's an analogy. The siddhas in the old days had a lot of lice, but now we can say this refers to a few minutes.

Translated by Khenpo Namchak Dorji, B. Alan Wallace, Khenpo Sonam, and Eva Natanya