

8-week Retreat at Lama Tsongkhapa Institute Pomaia, Italy, April-May 2016

B. Alan Wallace

Synopses



Spring 8-Week retreat on Shamatha, Vipashyana, and Mahamudra, based upon two texts: Panchen Lozang Chökyi Gyaltsen's Highway of the Jinās: A Root Text on the Precious Geluk-Kagyü Mahamudra Tradition, and Karma Chagmé's Naked Awareness: Practical Teachings on the Union.

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Tuesday 20160329

AM

01 Setting out on the 8-week Voyage

Alan begins the retreat by thanking all the staff at ILTK, starting from the Director Filippo, his wife and everyone else who has been helping to offer such a wonderfully conducive environment. We will have teachings from the Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra – Alan has received the oral transmission of this text from Geshe Rabten. Alan also received the oral transmission of the other text he will be teaching on from Gyatrul Rinpoche, which highlights the union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen (Naked Awareness). Alan also said that he will show how the various traditions are complementary. Before the meditation, Alan then gives some brief instructions about the retreat structure.

The meditation is on Settling the Body, Speech and Mind in their natural states.

Meditation starts at 31:00

After the meditation, Alan touches on the differences between practicing Dharma and reaching an irreversible path. When we reach the path, we have set out in such a way that we will never fall back.

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Wednesday 20160330

AM

02 Asanga's Method of Meditation on Mindfulness of Breathing

Alan says that for each morning session we will proceed directly to meditation practice on the basis that each of us have individually undertaken our daily preliminary practices and prayers of Refuge, Bodhicitta etc.

Alan describes Asanga's powerful method of meditation focussed on the breath whereby one lets the body settle naturally without mental forcing and, following the Buddha's instructions, one closely observes the in and out breath with repeated letting go of any thought. This allows the breathing to become relaxed, shallower and calmer. With practice, one's sensations become subtler with the aim to withdraw all sensory perception and rest in the substrate consciousness, being then aware only of the rhythm of the breath. Alan says that Asanga's method has proven to be one of the most effective meditation practices and that we should even adopt this stance outside of formal practice as a baseline or default mode of mind in our everyday activities.

Meditation is on Mindfulness of Breathing.

After the Meditation Alan indicates that his notes including references will be posted daily on the SBI website. He also encouraged us to practice in the supine position as a means to develop full body relaxation with care not to lose mental clarity.

The meditation starts at 1:30

[Keywords: Asanga, Mindfulness of Breathing]

PM

03 Meditation on the Vision Quest and Commencement of Teaching on the “Lamp So Bright” text

Alan begins by stating the only suitable focus of our motivation as Mahamudra practitioners is on Bodhicitta as it is integral to the Mahayana path. However the Bodhicitta vow is like a promissory pledge and not realistically meaningful unless it is accompanied by a plan or strategy for taking the path. Alan invites us to develop our vision to enter the path and incorporate it into our shamatha practice initially with self-directed loving kindness and then expanding our motivation outwards by considering the 8-week retreat as part of an ongoing flow. In doing this we need to be cognisant of the big picture of the continuity of consciousness, of confidence in our practice that comes from taking Refuge, and of the practice of virtue in all our activities with the motivation of Bodhicitta.

Meditation is on the four questions of the vision quest.

After the Meditation Alan introduces the translation and explanation by Roger Jackson of the Mahamudra root text “Lamp So Bright”, noting that this has been generously provided only for the purposes of this retreat prior to its formal publication and therefore should not be made available to others outside of the retreat. Hence those listening by podcast will need to note carefully the oral transmission. However another translation by Glen Svensson will be made available on the SBI website as a pdf to assist understanding. Alan explains the opening homage and the preface to the composition in stanzas 1 & 2 and further elucidates some of the English words as translated by Jackson in relation to their original use, context and meaning in Tibetan.

The meditation starts at 10:33.

[Keywords: Mahamudra, Motivation, Shamatha Practice]

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Thursday 20160331

AM

04 Stillness and Motion in Asanga's Method of Meditation on Mindfulness of Breathing

Alan explains that the theme of "Stillness and Motion" contains a simultaneous awareness of the stillness of the awareness and the movements of everything else.

According to the vision of the shravakayana, the nirvana that an arhat experiences is still, so here "stillness meets stillness".

Ordinary sentient beings experience moving awareness that is aware of moving events, so here "motion meets motion".

In contrast a Buddha realizes "non abiding nirvana" and is neither immersed in samsara nor in nirvana. He rather is resting in the stillness of nirvana while simultaneously being aware of the myriad activities and movements of samsara.

Meditation is on Mindfulness of Breathing combined with the theme of stillness and motion.

After the Meditation Alan emphasizes the importance of the continuity of the practice, especially for shamatha. In between sessions, he encourages us to keep our awareness grounded in the body and being conscious of the flow of the breath. It is also important to develop a healthy breathing habit with a relaxed belly that expands freely.

The meditation starts at 7:37

[Keywords: Mindfulness of Breathing, Stillness and Motion]

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Thursday 20160331

PM

05 Welcome to the Mahayana Vows of Refuge

Alan began by sharing with the group a question from a student, regarding how can we actually develop Bodhicitta. He replied by saying we should start where we feel comfortable, in something that makes sense for us, which in the case of Bodhicitta, for most of us, can be the cultivation of the Four Immeasurables.

The meditation is on loving-kindness, and includes Alan reading the Buddha's own words on the meaning of developing loving-kindness.

After the meditation we returned briefly to the Mahamudra root text "Lamp So Bright", and after that, Alan began the commentary on the retreat's main text (Naked Awareness) beginning section, on taking refuge. Alan then leads the group on actually taking refuge vows, and then elaborated on the significance of such decision, as well on its true meaning. He reflected on how easily we can take refuge outside of Dharma, and how beneficial it is to take refuge in

Dharma, which goes behind appearances. He finished with the idea that taking refuge is really about having trust in the Buddha, in his teachings and in the Sangha that continues to bring those teachings to life. When we do have this trust, then we've actually taken refuge in the Dharma.

The meditation starts at 9:19.

[Keywords: Bodhicitta, Loving-Kindness, Refuge, Trust]

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Friday 20160401

AM

06 Existential Relaxation - Asanga's practice of Mindfulness of Breathing

Alan starts highlighting the deep similarities between the approach to Mindfulness of Breathing taught by Asanga and a practice many of us are familiar with, Settling the Mind in its Natural State. We will do this practice later in a few days, but briefly, in this practice, we single-pointedly focus our attention on the space of the mind and sustain the flow of mindfulness "without distraction and without grasping". Yangthang Rinpoche, great master and great adept, explained this phrase: "without distraction" refers to not getting distracted by any external appearances, away from the meditative object; "without grasping" refers to not identifying with any subjective processes like thinking, imagining, desiring and so on. For that, we first have to be relaxed down to the core – existentially relaxed. Then, enhancing stability and clarity, imbued with loving kindness, we watch our minds heal.

Alan realized vividly that, in this Asanga practice of Mindfulness of Breathing, the same is happening in the body. We bring the same quality of awareness – without distraction, without grasping – cultivating the simultaneity of stillness of awareness and motion - fluctuations of prana in the body. The body balances itself, from breath to breath, from coarse breath to subtle breath, coarse tuning to fine tuning. And if we sustain this practice enough, when we achieve shamatha, then we finally upgrade the whole system.

The meditation is on Mindfulness of Breathing combined with the theme of stillness and motion.

In this practice we cultivate the simultaneity of stillness and motion: the awareness of stillness of your awareness and the motion of the fluctuations of prana within your body, from breath to breath. Same quality of awareness, different field.

Meditation starts at 13:45

[Keywords:]

Friday 20160401

PM

07 Compassion, Refuge & Bodhicitta

Alan invites us to move day by day through each of the Four Immeasurables in sequence and we've already started with Loving Kindness. Alan's interpretation is that this is a good place to start, especially nowadays, when religion is completely gone from popular media, as if the secular world is the only reality. It is very easy to lose sight of what could be, of possibilities, and this may be very depressing. But reality is comprised of actuality and also of possibilities. Loving Kindness acknowledges what is already taking place but the aspiration here is for what could be for oneself, for others, for all sentient beings. But as we envision greater well-being, freedom from all suffering for all sentient beings, we may start to love this practice too much, become unbalanced and addicted to this "metta narcotic". We can even lose grounding, lose touch with actuality. Then compassion brings us back - we start paying close attention to the suffering which is already actual, everywhere. The meditation on compassion starts toward ourselves and then we let the aspiration flow outwards. We can practice toward anyone that comes to mind, look into their eyes in our meditation and say "may you be free from mental afflictions you're suffering from".

Alan returns to the chapter on Mahayana Refuge and bodhicitta. But before that, he started recalling a story about Khunu Lama Rinpoche, one of the great beings of 20th century whose primary practice was the cultivation of bodhicitta. In a public setting, when the Dalai Lama first saw him and knowing who he was, he walked up to him and offered three prostrations. So on the one hand, we cultivate compassion, Karuna Bhavana, from the perspective of a sentient being's mind. But on the other hand, from the perspective of primordial consciousness, there is nothing to be cultivated. As Dödjom Lingpa said, when you tap into rigpa, that is ultimate bodhicitta – don't look elsewhere for relative bodhicitta. We cultivate it to unveil the inner resources of compassion that were already there.

Regarding refuge, if one takes the vows to heart, offering their meals, all possessions, all to Dharma, until enlightenment, releasing all attachment, that can be revolutionary.

Alan discussed the eight benefits of going for refuge and then we finally moved to the generation of Mahayana. He first explained that Hinayana and Mahayana aspirations for enlightenment are not related to a specific school but to the motivation. If your intention is all about you becoming free, this will obstruct the emergence of an aspiration that embraces all sentient beings into your motivation and it prevents you from achieving ultimate enlightenment. So if you want to become a buddha, you will have to generate the Mahayana aspiration.

These first chapter on Refuge and Bodhicitta is maybe the most important to all of us, since cultivating Bodhicitta is a way of really transform our lives into Dharma.

Meditation is on the cultivation of Compassion.

Meditation starts at: 27:47

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Saturday 20160402

AM

08 Insight into impermanence, dukkha and emptiness by way of Settling the Mind in its Natural State.

Alan starts with an announcement regarding the practice on Sundays which has no schedule. There will be a shift of the day off from Sunday to Saturday, starting next week, to allow us to do some shopping in the village nearby.

Settling the mind in its natural state is taught as a practice to take the mind as the path until it dissolves into the substrate consciousness. Thanks to this profound practice, insight may arise into the nature of the mind. The practitioner may note that all phenomena are like pulses; all is fizzing, changing from moment to moment, nothing is static. When the mind dissolves into the substrate consciousness the three qualities of shamatha arise: bliss, luminosity and non conceptuality. They arise from our awareness with no external stimulus. Alan then explains the three dimensions of suffering: the “suffering of suffering”, the “suffering of change” and the existential suffering. He then explains the three marks of existence: impermanence, dukkha and non self.

As we go deeper and deeper into the practice of Settling the Mind in its Natural State with discerning awareness, as emotions, aversion and anger come up, insofar as we can rest there we see that none of these nasty stuff are “mine”, they are just events arising in the space of awareness which is also not “mine”. And by being present when all these upheavals come up we allow the mind to heal itself. By remaining there with that quality of awareness, they will release themselves and you may have insight into impermanence, dukkha and non self.

The meditation is on Mindfulness of Breathing, combined with the theme of stillness and motion.

Meditation starts at 26:00

[Keywords: Impermanence, Dukkha, No Self, Settling the Mind in its Natural State]

Saturday 20160402

PM

09 Balancing the Four Immeasurables, Meditation on Empathetic Joy and the Stages of Bodhicitta

Alan continues on the topic of the four immeasurables, now turning to the third one, Empathetic Joy. He explains that each of the four immeasurables serves as an antidote when another of the four immeasurables goes astray.

First, loving-kindness turns into an antibody to empathetic joy, in case the latter becomes hedonic fixation. Alan adds that hedonia never turns well, it is all about acquiring, whereas loving kindness is all about a vision, a vision of what would truly makes us happy.

Second, compassion becomes an antidote when equanimity goes aloof. This happens for example, when we see all the suffering surrounding us and we become dispirited. So, compassion is the antidote for the apathy of cold indifference.

Third, empathetic joy is the antidote when compassion goes astray and falls into despair. We may think: "I'm so ordinary, what can I do?" Alan traces a parallel of one's achieving shamatha, as it may look so out of our reach at first. But then, if we only achieve stage two, it is already worth it. He explains that is not about turning low self esteem into high self esteem, we should instead see that there is a lot to take satisfaction and reflect upon the good things we brought to the world. Alan then recalls Tsong Khapa, which says that the easiest way for us to accrue merit is to rejoice in our own virtue. We can then extend this to other people's virtue, for example that of the Dalai Lama and other great beings who brought so much goodness to the world.

Meditation is on Empathetic Joy.

After meditation, Alan returns to the text (page 26 of Naked Awareness) and gives comment on the "Generation of the Mahayana Aspiration". He elaborates on the first two of the twenty-two stages of bodhicitta and the importance of having a sane mind, achieved by way of shamatha, as a basis for that. He finishes expanding on the three types of bodhicitta, that differ on whether one achieves liberation before liberating others, together with all sentient beings or after all sentient beings have achieved awakening – the highest one.

Meditation starts at 23:47

[Keywords: Four Immeasurables, Empathetic Joy, Bodhicitta, Rejoice, Mahayana]

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Monday 20160404

AM

10 Why Go Through Unpleasant Meditative Experiences (Nyam)?

This morning, Alan returns to the theme of parallels between the practice of settling the mind in its natural state and the mindfulness of breathing as taught by Asanga. He begins by making a crucial point: when the practice is going well, it is never smooth. Unpleasant bodily and mental sensations (nyam) are bound to arise. In fact, in the book "Stilling the Mind" (containing the shamatha part of Dudjom Lingpa's Vajra Essence) there is a two-page long shortlist of the nyams. Even though some are truly awful (like paranoia), if they arise during authentic practice,

they are actually signs of progress. However, one may ask why we have to go through all these meditative experiences. In response Alan reads a passage from “Stilling the Mind” where it is explained that even if people identify rigpa but do not continue practicing, they will succumb to spiritual sloth. In short: shamatha is indispensable for entering the path.

Back to the topic of parallels between mindfulness of breathing and settling the mind in its natural state, Alan underlines the importance of the body (here: of the prana) which is often overlooked, but needs to be incorporated into the practice. In the method we follow, Asanga clearly indicates that the object of awareness is the prana (not the air, for example) circling from the nostrils down to the navel chakra. Some traditions recommend becoming one with the breath, fusing with it, but this is not the practice we follow. Alan stresses that in this tradition the awareness rests in stillness and does not fuse with the object of meditation. Alan draws a parallel with the substrate consciousness which illuminates the appearances but does not enter into them. So as in settling the mind in its natural state the mind attends to appearances but does not go after them, likewise in the practice of mindfulness of breathing we simply attend to the sensations in the somatic field without grasping at them (without cognitive fusion, without noting “this is my body, I’m breathing etc.”). Here Alan reminds us of the Buddha’s instructions: “In the mentally perceived let there just be the mentally perceived”. And accordingly: “In the felt let there just be the felt” etc.

Going back to the topic of nyam, Alan stresses that if all we do is experience them, then we are back to our old habits. Instead, when resting in the stillness of our awareness, whatever comes up in the field of the body, we ought to try to attend to it without preference, without aversion, hope or expectation. In this way, we let the body take care of these sensations and heal itself.

The meditation is on Mindfulness of Breathing as taught by Asanga.

The meditation starts at 28:30

[Keywords: Nyam, Meditative Experiences, Mindfulness of Breathing, Asanga, Settling the Mind in Its Natural State, Dudjom Lingpa, Vajra Essence]

Monday 20160404
PM

11 Equanimity and Taking the Bodhisattva vows

This afternoon we finish the cycle of four immeasurables by meditating on equanimity. Alan says that this is the grand finale, the indispensable basis for bodhicitta. Equanimity has different meanings in different contexts but in the context of our practice it means the even-heartedness when attending to other people, other sentient beings. As long as we attend to people as objects, some appear agreeable and others disagreeable. The point of this practice is to place ourselves in the position of others, in their shoes, to see things from their perspective. If we do so, it appears that we all act out of a wish to be free from suffering and to find happiness. The motivation is the same, while the behaviour is different. And the difference is the degree to

which one is subject to mental afflictions. As we seek to develop this even sense of caring, equanimity arises, and the heart opens equally to all sentient beings. If one can attend to the whole spectrum of beings - from those who seem to come from hell realms to those who act like sources of pure land - this is immeasurable equanimity.

Alan introduces the meditation by explaining that in the preceding practices we were sending out the light of loving kindness and compassionately taking in the suffering of others. In the practice of equanimity we shall combine the two - sending out and taking in - in one practice known in Tibetan as tonglen.

The meditation is on Equanimity.

After the meditation, Alan briefly comments on how the four immeasurables act as remedies when one of them goes astray. So when loving kindness descends into self-centred attachment the remedy is equanimity.

Then we return to Karma Chagme's text "Naked Awareness" page 28. Alan explains that when the first ground (bhumi) is reached and the ultimate bodhicitta arises it means that the arya bodhisattva has the first unmediated realisation of emptiness. This is the Sutrayana Mahayana interpretation. In Dzogchen (and Mahamudra) view relative bodhicitta is the same but ultimate bodhicitta means the direct realisation of rigpa (i.e. primordial consciousness), not of emptiness. In Dzogchen ultimate bodhicitta is equated with rigpa. When resting in rigpa relative bodhicitta arises, so there is no alternating between relative and ultimate bodhicitta, because they are non-dual.

Further in the text Alan comments on the aspirational and engaged bodhicitta and explains the two lineages of taking the bodhisattva vows. He also points out that while monastic vows are valid for one life only and can be given back, the bodhisattva precepts are taken until enlightenment. However, this also means that by taking them one is in a way "hooked" to the path for all future rebirths, because one has "unfinished business". Commenting on giving away one's wealth before taking the precepts, Alan explains that the important thing is to give away all attachments. As an example, he tells the story of Milarepa and his lame goat.

Subsequently, Alan provides a more detailed commentary on the ritual of purification and accumulation of merit described in "Naked Awareness" (page 29). He underlines that the purification of obscurations and the accumulation of merit never ends until one is perfectly enlightened, and therefore the preliminary practices should not be treated as something that can be done and finished with, but have to be practiced continuously.

As a culmination of today's teachings, Alan guides the group into taking the bodhisattva vows. After that, to conclude, he discusses the trainings and actions of a bodhisattva and he reads the passage from The Advice to a King Sutra. Alan says that we all are kings in our jobs, families etc. and therefore we should remember that the most important thing is to always have the underlying motivation of bodhicitta. If this motivation is present in all our activities, then even the most simple things like taking a walk, resting or making a tea can mean accumulating merit.

The meditation starts at 12:12

[Keywords: Four Immeasurables, Equanimity, Tonglen, Relative Bodhicitta, Ultimate Bodhicitta, Emptiness, Rigpa, Bodhisattva Vows]

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Tuesday 20160405

AM

12 Q&A session on Asanga's method of Mindfulness of Breathing

The meditation starts immediately and it is silent. The practice is the full-body awareness of mindfulness of breathing.

Questions:

- (1) Is there a written account of Asanga's specific technique of Mindfulness of Breathing?
- (2) A clarification of the meditation object in this specific practice of Mindfulness of Breathing
- (3) Since I've started the retreat, I've been experiencing lots of mental chatter & physical discomfort. I've shifted my practice to "Taking the Mind as the Path" now, is that a good approach for that?

[Keywords: Asanga, Mindfulness of Breathing, Questions]

Tuesday 20160405

PM

13 Great Compassion, Refuge and Bodhicitta

Alan begins with a commentary on the four immeasurables that ended yesterday with the meditative cultivation of equanimity, and explains how we are now left on an even open field which is in many ways the culmination of the monastic ideal. One has now stepped out of the realm of likes and dislikes and into the realm of evenly distributed warmth, kindness and compassion. This serves as the basis for crossing the threshold into the Mahayana, where this equality extends into the equality of self and other. Here we venture into what Alan calls "the Four Greats", starting with maha karuna - Great Compassion. When we move from the four "Immeasurables" to the four "Greats", we move from aspiration to intention.

Alan starts with maha karuna because this practice is very much emphasised in the Mahayana tradition, and when someone is suffering this is where we start. First we relieve the suffering, and then we can look to the vision of happiness. Maha karuna, if logically followed, can only lead to Bodhicitta. Before the meditation Alan unpacks the four-fold maha karuna liturgy.

1. Why couldn't all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering?
2. May it be so. May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
3. I shall free all beings from suffering and the causes of suffering.

4. May the guru and the divine (Buddhas) grant the blessings to enable me to do so.

Meditation is on Great Compassion following the four-fold liturgy.

After the meditation Alan starts with a quote from St. Thomas Aquinas. "The whole point of the political life is the contemplative life." He expounds on this briefly as meaning broadly that the whole purpose of the hedonia is for eudaimonia. Then he returns to the chapter on Refuge and Bodhicitta at the top of page 33. He then proceeds through to the rest of the chapter with explanations. Among other things, he highlights the fact that Bodhicitta is the most powerful way to accrue merit, and he also quotes the Vajra Essence which affirms that when you've identified rigpa, it doesn't matter how extremely bad or good you've been in the past: now you have an unmediated realisation of rigpa and that is what matters from that point on. Finishing the chapter, Alan leaves us with the fact that Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche told one of his students that if one isn't inclined to do the preliminary practices of 100,000 prostrations and so forth, he recommends to practice shamatha, the four applications of mindfulness and the four immeasurables.

The meditation starts at 32:52

[Keywords: Great Compassion, Maha Karuna, Refuge, Bodhicitta, Four Immeasurables]

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Wednesday 20160406

AM

14 Alan's Advice on Addressing Obstacles in the Practice of Mindfulness of Breathing

Alan says that the aspiration for Awakening and Bodhicitta takes us out of the present with a goal that has great significance and provides direction in our lives – the path of Dharma. One understanding of Dharma is as a way of viewing reality that brings forth a sustained well-being. This eudaimonia is genuine well-being that arises independently of pleasure or stimulation as occurs for hedonia which is ephemeral, thin or just a fleeting memory. Alan amusingly suggests that the practice of Mindfulness of Breathing is not exactly hedonic, is it? Boredom can set in, along with withdrawal symptoms from the all too constant world of hedonic stimulation. However, we should not try to "jazz up" our practice. Peace is the way in shamatha, and we should get through any habitual need for stimulation by giving peace a chance - relax! We should weather any boredom or desire for stimulation by releasing and relaxing and being careful to ward off dullness. The Buddha's instructions clearly shows that this practice will bring first a peaceful mental state, then a sublime one and afterwards also an ambrosial state of mind. In doing so, we enhance the psychological immune system so that when any of the mental hindrances or obscurations arise, e.g. attachment to hedonia, we do not become infected. The practice of Mindfulness of Breathing opens the door to overcoming the variety of obscurations as they arise. Then Alan recalls a question from a student in Spain, where he was asked if there

is any way to bypass the nyams (desires, memories, all sorts of mental afflictions, etc.), specifically as they arise when practicing “Settling the Mind in its Natural State”. Alan says there are two types of responses, each valid. By disposition, some people have devotion, faith, worship and reverence, and all of these come very naturally. For such people, if they generate an image of the Buddha with a rich understanding of the life, the teachings, the blessings, the lineage of the Buddha etc, it is quite sublime. With that type of devotion, people find that this sustains them by giving the juice to go deeper and deeper in the practice of shamatha. Since you are looking at the object of your Refuge, this brings tremendous joy. If the person is also gifted at visualisation, together with the devotion this can be a winning package. That can be very powerful and can bring a person all the way to achieving shamatha. The dredging will also take place, bringing up stuff, but it will be like background noise because you are not attending to it (it’s outside the focus of your attention, like the rock quarry noise here in Tuscany). So that’s one bypass. Another type of bypass is by practicing awareness of awareness. This is for people fascinated by the nature of awareness and want a direct track to Mahamudra & Dzogchen. By resting in awareness of awareness, whatever somatic experiences and psychological stuff (memories, desires, emotions, etc.) arise they are there in the periphery, you don’t give them any attention at all. To conclude, why then practicing Settling the Mind in Its Natural State at all? The reason for it is insight.

The meditation is silent (not recorded).

[Keywords: Dharma, Eudaimonia, Shamatha Practice]

Wednesday 20160406
PM

15 Great Loving-Kindness for All Sentient Beings Without Exception

Alan says he was advised that he inadvertently overlooked part of the oral transmission of Karma Chagme’s Naked Awareness text so he now delivers it for completeness (page 18 beginning “You are the protector of all sentient beings without exception...”). This afternoon’s topic is on the second of the Greats – Great Loving-Kindness (Maha Maitri). As with all the Greats, we require a fundamental shift from aspiration to intention whereby the intention in this case requires taking responsibility for the care of all sentient beings. Alan comments that in Western tradition the focus is human-oriented (and mostly only men at that) whereas this is not even considered in Tibetan Buddhism where the focus is on all sentient beings. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama was asked what the fundamental drive in humans was, he replied “caring”. At the very least we care about ourselves, and almost everyone else cares about someone else in addition to themselves. The Bodhisattva ideal however is to take responsibility for caring for all sentient beings. The ground for beginning the Bodhisattva path is cultivating immeasurable equanimity. However when you calculate the number of sentient beings in all worlds, this can be overwhelming. The practical advice Alan received from one of his teachers,

Gen Losang Gyatso, was to focus on caring for everyone (including every animal) that comes to mind. This is not only everyone we've met but also the broader spectrum when we consider our exposure to all people and animals via study of history and the media. However the practical importance of this is that it pretty much covers beings of all the six realms from the most sublime to the most diabolical. The practice then is to care for each and all these beings without exception by recognising their fundamental Buddha-nature. The third part of the Bodhisattva liturgy startles us in that it requires us to resolve that "I will bring all sentient beings to happiness and its causes". So how are we to understand the personal pronoun "I"? The only way is that the referent "I" has to be from the viewpoint of Dharmakaya or Buddha-nature. Then Alan asks: "Why do we need more Buddhas? Why do we need another copy of the Buddha? Isn't that covered? Aren't there enough Buddhas already?"

The meditation is on Great Loving-kindness

Following meditation practice, Alan returns to Chokyi Gyeltsen's root text - stanzas 3-5. Alan comments on the nature of the accumulation of merit, the purification of afflictive and cognitive obscurations, and the way to view our root and lineage gurus.

The meditation starts at 43:45

[Keywords: Great Loving-Kindness, Maha Maitri, Bodhisattva Vows]

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Thursday 20160407

AM

16 Balancing Faith, Intelligence, Enthusiasm, Samadhi and Mindfulness

Alan starts explaining that balance is a crucial theme in shamatha training where we cultivate relaxation without losing clarity, stability of attention without losing relaxation and vividness without losing stability. The balance of these three qualities can be applied to every activity in daily life, however there is no guarantee that it is meaningful. During the development of shamatha the faculties of mindfulness and introspection, which we already have, are refined through training and turned into powers. Alan then turns to the more general theme of Buddha Dharma. Within the 37 aspects of enlightenment, there are five faculties, which can be turned into five powers through training and refinement. These five faculties are faith, intelligence, enthusiasm, samadhi and mindfulness. Alan groups them into pairs of balance. Faith can be balanced with intelligence, enthusiasm can be balanced with samadhi and mindfulness will balance out all the other four.

Enthusiasm, in Sanskrit *Vīrya*, is not just effort or diligence but rather carries the meaning of taking delight in virtue. Alan illustrates the meaning of diligence with the examples of filling out a tax form or beating a donkey to go uphill. Enthusiasm in contrast, is likened to water flowing downhill. He then explains that *Vīrya* is balanced with samadhi, meaning a focused, composed,

not fragmented quality of one's attention. Alan defines the fifth faculty, mindfulness, as bearing something in mind without forgetfulness and without distraction. Mindfulness enables us to balance the other four. Alan then turns to the faculty of Faith, and explains how it is of three types: appreciation, aspiration and belief. Faith has to be in balance with intelligence. If there is too much faith and too little intelligence one can wind up being dogmatic, stupid, rigid and close-minded. And if there is too much intelligence and too little faith, one can be very smart and clever, but will not achieve anything. Alan continues explaining how enthusiasm is balanced with samadhi. Instead of just meditating for 11 hours a day he prefers to balance this with theory. By reflecting on the teachings, joy, inspiration and eagerness to devote oneself to practice is increased. He emphasizes that practice brings life to the theory and the theory brings meaning to the practice. However, enthusiasm and samadhi should not be mixed. While in-between sessions we should arouse enthusiasm, during the meditation we should just focus on samadhi. Alan then says that these five faculties can be turned into powers through training and refinement. This fivefold grid is also very useful if applied to other fields like business, mental health, education, athletics etc. Alan then introduces the "Shower of Blessings practice" as the meditation for today. The text will be available on the podcast website, in the section "Supplementary Resources".

The meditation is the oral transmission of the "Shower of Blessings" practice.

After the meditation Alan says that he sometimes gets impatient with the request of teaching secular Dharma without any references to Buddhism. On the other hand, the Dalai Lama has now written two books on secular ethics and supports the secular approach with the motivation of helping all people, which Alan admires a lot.

Meditation starts at 29:00

[Keywords: Faith, Intelligence, Enthusiasm, Samadhi, Mindfulness, Balance]

Thursday 20160407
PM

17 The Third of the "Four Greats": Great Joy

We begin by exploring the third in the sequence of "Four Greats", which is Great Joy or *Maha Mudita*. For Great Joy, as for the other great qualities we've analyzed so far (Great Compassion and Great Loving Kindness), we start with one question, "*Why couldn't all sentient beings never be parted from sublime happiness, free of suffering?*" Alan explores the underlying assumption in this line of the liturgy, which is that it is only because we all already have a Buddha nature, that the question even makes sense. And if that is the case, then we continue with the aspiration: "May we never be parted from that sublime happiness", generate the corresponding intention, and finally do the supplication, that allows us to carry through with our intention.

All four questions are explored in the meditation, which is on Great Joy.

After the meditation, we return to the the Mahamudra root text “Lamp So Bright”, and Alan continues the oral transmission and commentary for the Preparation section (stanzas 3-5), which elaborates on this theme from the perspective of great beings like Sakya Pandita, Dampa Sangyé, Shantideva, Atisha and Milarepa.

Alan finishes the session making the reference that, due to time restrictions, we won't analyze Chapter's 2 and 3 of Naked Awareness. These chapters deal, respectively, with narratives around karma (Chapter 2), and also an exploration of the laws and intricacies of karma (Chapter 3). He ends the session with the reference that, for such complex topics, there's a distinction between the most common perspective of practitioners like ourselves, that understand this topic only through knowledge-based inferences, and that of the great adepts, for whom some of these very subtle realities of karma, are seen through direct perception.

The meditation starts at 14:04.

[Keywords: Great Joy, Buddha nature, Refuge, Bodhicitta]

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Friday 20160408

AM

18 Balancing the five faculties and putting a pin in the valve of your tire - and let's achieve shamatha in the homeland of Galileo

Alan returns to the balance of the five faculties, starting with the different modalities of faith - appreciation, aspiration and belief - and the relation of belief with karma. The belief in karma depends much on the culture, but a confidence in Buddha and other great adepts who replicated his discoveries also may arise due to study, reflection, and meditation.

Regarding the balance between intelligence and faith, including belief, Alan quotes William James:

"Where preferences are powerless to modify or produce things, faith is totally inappropriate, but for the class of facts that depend on personal preference, trust, or loyalty for actualization, "faith is not only licit and pertinent, but essential and indispensable. The truths cannot become true till our faith has made them so.""

As a comment, Alan said, for instance, that it doesn't matter what you think about gravity and, in his perspective, the same goes for the continuity of consciousness beyond death. What matters is that your beliefs will have a big impact on you. Beliefs have no influence on what is true. And that is where intelligence comes in - if something is true, the more deeply you investigate it, the truer it should appear; that's a basic buddhist principle.

But there are some things that can be true if and only if people believe it. Looking in Israel and Palestine conflict, could be possible that somehow, maybe with a long term strategy, they find peace and coexist without hatred, without violence? If you're sure it's not possible, you're right. If you think it might be possible, you're probably right. But it will not happen unless Israelis and Palestinians do believe it's possible.

Can you or people like you achieve shamatha? If you're quite sure not, you're quite certainly right. And if you think you could, you might be right. As His Holiness said, "the situation becomes hopeless only when you lose hope." Alan asked Yangthang Rinpoche whether it was possible to "moderners" (more than Westerners or Easterners) to achieve shamatha and thereby gain direct knowing of past lives memories and so forth. And his answer was, "you'll have to see".

And Alan gave us another quote from William James: "In what manner do we espouse and hold fast to visions? By thinking a conception might be true somewhere, it may be true even here and now; it is fit to be true and it ought to be true; it must be true; it shall be true for me."

So, maybe it's true that there are individuals nowadays who will achieve shamatha in Tibet, India, maybe Brazil, Germany, whatever, it might be true! And it could happen here and now!

And then we have the balance of enthusiasm and samadhi. In Tibetan Buddhism, we have a great emphasis on prayers of supplication, arousing motivation of renunciation, and bodhicitta, taking refuge, reflect upon the benefits of achieving shamatha, realization of emptiness and bodhicitta and so for, guru yoga, receiving the four empowerments and imagining your guru as the Buddha coming and indivisibly merging with your own body and mind - all to arouse your motivation, enthusiasm, to receive blessings, and to arouse faith as well. Gyatrul Rinpoche advised Alan a long time ago, when he was in a very intense 6 month retreat, "do all of these just before you enter into the practice, and then drop it, go into the practice, and leave even your desire behind". Because desire by nature is the desire of something you don't have yet and it will take you out of the present. But there is a balance of practice and desire. You call for blessings and then you go into the practice and you just do it - that is samadhi - not doing anything else. And then you come out and dedicate merit. But don't conflate the preparation with the main body of your practice.

And then, focusing on shamatha, Alan remembered a comment that Lobsang Rapgay made some years ago. Lobsang Rapgay is a very dear friend of Alan, - he was trained as a monk with Alan, then he studied Tibetan Medicine, then he got a PhD in Psychology and now he is a researcher in UCLA - and he said to Americans, but it fits for all "moderners", in a very gentle way: "you're all suffering from "lung" disorders, nervous imbalances, and considering how sick you are, you are coping very well." We indeed are driven, we are overstimulated in every way with entertainment, with the pace of life, internet and everything else. For us, living in modernity, if we were tires, we're all overinflated, ready to pop, or in the best case scenario, it's a rough ride. So, for most of us, the first agenda is to put a pin in the valve, and "pssss". Otherwise, if we

get ourselves always pumped up, we'll never achieve shamatha. The first thing is just relax and then keep on relaxing and breathing out, and releasing. That is the pin in the valve of your tire - psssss. And then, during the inbreath, if you're losing clarity, when the breath flows in, gently arouse, uplift your awareness, quietly, non-conceptually for a short time, and then relax more deeply. Then you discover stillness that is left over, which will become your base camp, your default mode when you're sitting, walking, standing, when there's nothing to think or talk about.

Meditation starts at 26:46, first taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta, making every breath meaningful, and then moving to shamatha with emphasis on relaxation.

Alan commented that the onramp to enter the freeway of enlightenment is shamatha - the mind has to be superbly serviceable to sustain that level of bodhicitta, of insight and so forth. But this is so often overlooked. And then we raise the issue, is it possible for people like us, conditioned by modernity to achieve shamatha in this lifetime? For this to be realistic, the outer and inner causes and conditions need to be there. Alan has been orienting around 30 students all over the world who are fully dedicated mainly to shamatha and none of them have a really conducive environment. But the place is not the only issue - it is so important to have the support, the group energy of fellow contemplatives. When Alan was receiving Geshe Rabten's life story, especially about his very demanding, astonishing 4 years Madhyamaka training, much more intense than medical training in the West, he asked "how could you keep this pace up?" And Geshe Rabten said "well, everybody else was doing that".

None of Alan's students have a place like a contemplative observatory, with a conducive landscape, companions, a teacher and an experienced guide. The viable place for that seems to be 5km from Tsongkhapa Institute - Castellina Marittima - blessed by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Khandro Ia. Decades ago, when Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa were looking for a place to start Tsongkhapa Institute, Lama Yeshe looked right to Castellina Marittima and said - "that would be good!" But it was not for sale. But now it can happen. We can purchase it as soon as we get the permit. And that is the missing piece. And also the scientists from Pisa for example, very close to Castellina Marittima, are open minded, interested and they would really love to come and collaborate. It seems quite ripe! So, as you dedicate merit, bring forth this aspiration "may it happen" as Claudio said, "in the homeland of Galileo".

Friday 20160408
PM

19 Great Equanimity & the Paths of Mahayana and Dzogchen

Alan begins the lecture by presenting the fourth of the Greats: Great Equanimity. Then Alan introduces Martin Buber's explanation of an "I-you" relationship as opposed to an "I-it" relationship. In the latter case, if someone gives me pleasure then I like you, otherwise I don't, as if the sentient being is no more sentient than a cellphone. To treat a sentient being as an "it" is utterly tragic, it's dehumanising. This also happened towards animals. Descartes believed that animals had no consciousness, no emotions, and this had quite an impact on the trajectory the

world took. This is a massive cognitive deficit disorder. Then Alan briefly mentions the consequences of holding a materialistic worldview. After that, Alan underlines the importance of developing equanimity as a basis for bodhicitta. Immeasurable equanimity is foundational for Great Compassion and the other greats, so that they can come to full fruition. Finally before the meditation Alan offers a wonderful way of mapping the Four Greats onto the five Mahayana paths and the path of Dzogchen, which is embedded in the Mahayana.

The meditation is on Great Equanimity.

After meditation, Alan resumes the oral transmission and commentary of the Panchen Lama's text "Lamp So Bright". During the commentary, Alan emphasises the point of practicing Dharma, and poses the question whether one's Dharma practice is arising as the path. Is it going to the path or is it just an array of nice practices? Are you reaching the path? This is beyond the mere step of practicing Dharma. As you are on the path, is it really working? Are you irreversibly on a path of full healing? Among other points, Alan comments on the lines in the text which highlight the importance of doing Vajrasattva practice for purification (it is recommended to do at least 20 repetitions a day).

Meditation starts at 26:36

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Sunday 20160410

AM

20 The Buddha's Discourse to Bahya - Shamatha & Vipashyana

Alan explains that as we go deeper into the practice of shamatha, it appears more clearly that the three qualities of relaxation, stability and vividness are not only sequential, but they also reinforce each other in a reciprocal manner. In a similar fashion we have also the three higher trainings of ethics, samadhi and wisdom and among them ethics is the foundation: you can develop samadhi and wisdom, but if you do not have ethics you have nothing. The Buddha clearly said that the stronger your samadhi is, then the more powerful your wisdom can be, but if your samadhi is weak then your wisdom can be very sporadic, it cannot be sustained. The stronger your ethical foundation, the stronger your samadhi and the stronger the wisdom that can arise.

If the Buddha gave us just one interview, he may offer the instructions he gave to Bahya, which allowed him to achieve arhathood right after he listened to this: "Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in reference to the heard, only the sensed in reference to the sensed, only the cognized in reference to the cognized, then, Bahiya, there is no you in

terms of that. When there is no you in terms of that, there is no you there. When there is no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This, just this, is the end of suffering.”

If I attend to another person, and while I do that my awareness is still, clear, bright, discerning and attentive to the person coming in, If I can sustain that quality of stillness, which is intelligent but still, then I might actually see and hear that person from the heart. You can sense them at a deeper level. The practice is simple: we settle body, speech and mind in their natural state to the point of stillness, and then we direct our awareness to a nonconceptual space, where there is no conversation within the somatic field (there are no thoughts, no mental images there) and then we simply attend to what is arising there. We sustain the stillness in the midst of the fluctuations of the coming and going of the breath. And then when we come off the cushion, we sustain that stillness as we go about all our tasks, and in the seen let there be just the seen, in the heard just the heard, in the tactilely sensed just the tactilely sensed, in the mentally perceived or cognised just being aware of what is coming up. And we might drop a question: in all these appearances, am I anywhere to be found, including the appearances of what is up close and personal (thoughts, images, desires, memories, emotions)? When I observe them, do I observe them as something that is me? The awareness that is observing them, is that me? Am I to be found anywhere among these appearances and the awareness of the appearances?

The meditation is on shamatha as a support for vipashyana (silent, not recorded).

Sunday 20160410
PM

21 Beyond the Four Greats: An Extraordinary Resolve to Free All Sentient Beings

Alan now goes beyond the sequence of The Four Greats (Great Compassion, Great Loving-kindness, Great Joy and Great Equanimity), to the Extraordinary Thought (tib. Lhag Sam), which expands on the momentum coming from these. It means "a resolve to free all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to their fulfilment". He points out that this is actually not yet bodhicitta, because the aspiration to achieve enlightenment is missing.

Recalling Padmasambhava, he reminds us the importance of combining the View and Way of Life. Nevertheless, we should not let one overwhelm the other. View here means viewing reality from the perspective of rigpa, and conduct relates to what needs to be done. Our conduct should be in accord with our highest view. He highlights that this brings a tension, but a sacred one, to this reality.

Alan then addresses the point that the process of engaging with people will always be by way of our own appearances. In this way we are like artists or novelists, painting reality with the colours of our own mind. Here, as long as there is aversion or attachment, our heart will not be at ease. He recalls the words of the Buddha that, “So long as these five obscurations are not

abandoned, one considers himself as indebted, sick, in bonds, enslaved and lost in a desert track" (Sāmaññaphala Sutta). This relates to the point that, in the Dzogchen view, we are the all-creating monarchs in our own mandala. If we can then attend to everyone with this extraordinary thought to free all sentient beings, we bring that unconditional benevolence. This process is very healing, and at the same time, until all sentient beings are free, you are not at rest.

Meditation is on Developing the Resolve to Free all Sentient Beings.

After meditation, Alan returns to the text "Lamp so Bright" (page 6), and gives oral transmission and brief commentary to the section 2.2 - the main practice (of Mahamudra).

Meditation starts at 20:00

[Keywords: Four Greats, Lhag Sam, Extraordinary Thought, Conduct, Lamp so Bright]

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Monday 20160411

AM

22 Between Sessions View Reality Like a Dream

Alan addresses the theme of continuity which is essential for the path. In our shamatha practice we may often wonder if we are doing the practice right. Alan points out that the answer lies in whether we are staying in the ongoing flow of cognisance. As we move from coarse mind to subtle mind it is crucial not to lose cognisance (which is what happens when we fall asleep) but to sustain the flow of knowing and not infuse it with a conceptual framework. This is continuity in the formal practice. When doing shamatha we are seeking to put both the body and the coarse mind to sleep. This is similar to falling asleep. The difference is sustaining the flow of cognisance. Next, Alan explains that the tactile sensations are not taking place in the physical space. Likewise, the visual appearances are not out there, in the molecules or in the air. The colours and shapes are not out there and not inside the brain either. Photons do not come in colour. Alan stresses especially that the *qualia*, the appearances are not inside the brain and not in any physical space. The same goes for tactile sensations which are what we attend to in the practice of mindfulness of breathing. They are present in the *dhatu*, the space of awareness. Alan explains that the point of continuity in our practice is taking appearances and awareness as the path. Specifically appearances that arise in the mind. Alan remarks that the majority of us still spend most of the time outside formal meditation. In order to help us maintain continuity between the sessions, Alan introduces a shift in the way of viewing reality. In-between sessions we should bear in mind that all appearances that we are seeing arise in the space of our own awareness. In this way, Alan invites us to see the reality as illusion-like, i.e. to maintain an ongoing view of all appearances perceived by the six senses as arising in the space of our own awareness. These appearances are dream-like, because just like in a dream they seem to be

really out there whereas in fact they arise in the space of awareness. Alan stresses at this point that we are of course not negating the existence of real people etc. What is being challenged here is naive realism - the belief that things exist the way they appear to us. For example when we view someone as kind, intelligent etc. we should be aware that this is only our perception of this person, not the way this person exists in reality. To conclude, Alan observes that we are now venturing into the field of dream yoga. During formal sessions we cut off outer perceptions, we go into retreat, as if trying to fall into a lucid deep sleep. Between sessions, on the other hand, we are open to appearances arising but view them as dream-like, which he likens to practicing daytime dream yoga.

After the meditation, in conclusion, Alan uses the symbolism of yin and yang to describe the two elements - dark and light - that should complement each other in our practice. Sessions which seem very quiet (dark) need to be complemented by the light of awareness whereas during sessions in which our mind is agitated we need stillness. Similarly, outside the formal sessions, when many appearances arise we need to maintain stillness. Thus we go into the dark with the light of awareness and stay in the light with the dark of stillness.

[Keywords: Continuity of Practice, Mindfulness of Breathing, Qualia, Dhatu, Dream Yoga, Lucid Dreaming, Yin Yang]

Monday 20160411
PM

23 It Is Never Too Soon To Cultivate Bodhicitta

This afternoon we come to the culmination of the series of discursive meditations which started with the four vision quest and the four immeasurables - bodhicitta. The definition of bodhicitta may seem religious, esoteric, abstract. Therefore, in today's teaching Alan intends to bring it down to its roots. He begins by describing the state we often find ourselves in: we are suffering and we want it to go away. When the suffering eventually passes, there is breath of relief, but soon after a nagging thought arises: "maybe it will come back". And so there is dissatisfaction, one is ill at ease, one knows one's own vulnerability. Then there is pleasure - physical or mental. But again there is dissatisfaction, another nagging thought: "I'll lose it. How can I keep it?" We cannot really be happy and at ease until we know that happiness will last. But then we want to be happier... This is primal. Because we care. His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls caring one of the primal forces. It is the definition of "sentient" as in sentient being. Humanity's many achievements - in arts, engineering, science etc. - can be traced back to this drive.

Alan then turns to the topic of science. He mentions Francis Bacon who envisioned that the natural sciences would one day alleviate suffering by understanding nature. But he of course meant hedonic happiness. For the eudaemonia, in Bacon's times, there was religion.

Nowadays, science is still considered an important tool to secure wellbeing. But when we go back to our basic wish to be free from suffering and to achieve happiness - science cannot explain it. Alan raises a number of important questions: Why do we have this aspiration? Why

this lust for life? Why the will to survive? Why the drive to procreate? Why do we wish to perpetuate? Where did the desire to be happy come from? What do we need feelings for? Why do we have to be conscious? In Alan's view science, and evolution and biology in particular, do not give adequate answers to any of these questions. They provide no satisfying explanation for human intelligence, creativity or virtue. Alan repeats the fundamental question: Why do we care? And he formulates a hypothesis, gives an answer: it is our buddha nature, the primordial consciousness. It is the only source of caring that makes sense. Of course, all sentient beings have it, but we, humans, are in a particular position having been endowed with this precious human life in which we can realise our potential and grow - from generation to generation and from lifetime to lifetime. But we are not alone - continues Alan. It is normal for human beings to care for others. Parents naturally care for their children. People care for their families, loved ones. There is a sense of kinship, a sense of identifying with a village, a religion etc. According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama there is a biological imperative to care about our close ones and our possessions. But there is a point where biology stops. There is the other side - the other people - who may pose a threat. The Dharma comes in precisely when we take this natural flow of caring and break down all the barriers until everything and everybody is on our side. This is when immeasurable loving kindness comes in. And we ought to realise that if we truly want to satisfy our desire to end suffering and achieve true happiness - the barriers must come down. Coming back to bodhicitta, Alan points out that this is what Tsongkhapa had in mind when speaking of eternal longing. To fulfil the eternal longing. This is bodhi - awakening. Since there is no duality, if I want to be free there is no sense to pursue it for myself alone. Everyone, literally everyone has to be included. To achieve freedom from suffering and true happiness for our own sake we need to realise dharmakaya. But knowing that the boundaries must be destroyed, that this caring has no limit, it extends everywhere and includes everyone - this comes at the realisation of sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. This way, before tonight's meditation, Alan laid out the notion of a universal, truly cosmic bodhicitta. To conclude, he recalled the advice of his teacher Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey that it is never too soon to cultivate bodhicitta. It is the only way out of samsara - adds Alan.

The meditation is on bodhicitta.

After the meditation Alan continues the oral transmission of the First Panchen Lama's commentary "Lamp So Bright" to his root text on Mahamudra. Today we finish reading the part dedicated to the tantra (Vajrayana) practice of Mahamudra. Alan makes corrections to the translation and explains a few passages in more detail. In particular he comments that there is some difference of opinion as to whether ordinary sentient beings experience the clear light of death (this is the view stated in Panchen Lama's text) or not. Alan resolves the issue by saying that in any case some degree of realisation is needed to recognise it, so even if all beings experience the clear light of death they may not be aware of it. Alan also explains the notion of "simultaneist" or "simultaneous individual", giving the example of Bahya who after receiving the Buddha's teachings simultaneously achieved arhatship. There have been many individuals in history who upon hearing the teachings or due to some other catalyst achieved nirvana, became vidyadharas etc. Last but not least: even though the chapter on tantra is very difficult, among

the passages read today there have been some quite amusing bits, so do not miss Alan's commentary on them!

The meditation starts at 35:40

[Keywords: Bodhicitta, Caring, Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, Nirmanakaya, Mahamudra, Tantra]

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Tuesday 20160412
AM

24 Taking Appearances and Awareness as the Path, Both During and Between Session

The Dharma talks have been so good so far that a bird found us in the field as we were walking over to the meditation hall. He followed us over and hung around outside the hall before the session thinking about coming in to join us. This morning's session was no less inspiring. Alan continues his strategy of addressing Ultimate Bodhicitta in the morning and Relative Bodhicitta in the afternoons. He discusses the hypothesis from all of Buddha Dharma that the nature of reality has been discovered, that this discovery has been replicated many times, and that this discovery can bring freedom and the fulfillment of our innermost desires. He contrasts this with the most prevalent system of scientific discovery which proves a wealth of knowledge to promote hedonic well-being, yet embraces scientific materialism which leads some of the great minds of our time to draw the conclusions that the mind, consciousness, appearances, and introspection don't exist. He then gives us the fastest refutations of scientific materialism. (If you don't get the first two, you are a gradualist and should practice shamatha and vipashyana.)

We are invited to investigate both cognitive deficits (which deny the existence of the mind, appearances, and the like) and cognitive hyperactivity (where we mentally impute onto appearances) and start investigating the indubitable - taking appearances and awareness as the path. Both during sessions and especially between sessions, we are invited to notice the tendency towards cognitive hyperactivity and imputation. He then talks a bit about the connate cognitive hyperactivity that causes us to deny the three marks of existence, where, among other things, he talks about LaSalle and tells us how samsara ends (Spoiler alert: It sucks. It turns out badly.)

The meditation is silent (not recorded) and is at the end of the session.

[Keywords: Relative Bodhicitta, Ultimate Bodhicitta, Taking Appearances and Awareness as the Path, Taking the Impure Mind as the Path, Settling the Mind in Its Natural State, Scientific Materialism, Impermanence, Suffering, Dukkha, Non-Self]

Tuesday 20160412
PM

25 Bodhicitta & Vipashyana: What is Your Signal to Noise Ratio?

After two weeks in which we have seen a crescendo that culminated in aspirational and engaged bodhicitta, everything else now may seem an anticlimax. Actually this is the beginning. We arouse bodhicitta until it arises spontaneously. Within the framework of the Buddhist teachings on the primary mind & mental factors, bodhicitta is considered primary mind, it is core (the primary mind becomes bodhicitta). It is the motivation that can satisfy our eternal longing, it is the core meeting the core. When your mind becomes bodhicitta, that is the undercurrent even while you are resting, you are walking, when you are doing all sorts of activities. Sometimes it is obscured by mental afflictions that come and go, but once you have entered this flow of bodhicitta, even when resting you accumulate merit, according to Shantideva. When it is uncontrived, the slightest event will immediately trigger the bodhicitta, thereby becoming manifest. At this level you are a bodhisattva. The first stage is called earth-like bodhicitta on the Mahayana path of accumulation. Now, how do you make this bodhicitta irreversible? We need wisdom that will protect your bodhicitta. Specifically it is the kind of wisdom explicitly referenced in The Ornament of Clear Realization (Abhisamayālaṅkāra), by Maitreya. In order to get to the second stage of the Mahayana path of accumulation we need the four close applications of mindfulness.

In order to be effective in our cultivation of bodhicitta, we begin where it's easier, with loving kindness for ourselves, and then we move on to a very dear one, a more casual friend and then to people we have more difficulties with. Alan states that we can find a similar strategy in the teachings of Natural Liberation revealed by Padmasambhava, with regards to shamatha. There we begin by looking at an object like a pebble or a stick and then we move on till doing awareness of awareness. So it is from coarse to subtle.

When it comes to cultivating vipashyana, there are good reasons to go back to the four close applications of mindfulness, especially emphasised in the Theravada tradition. In this way we start where we live, and this strategy can make an impact on our mental afflictions. Also here we can see that the approach is from coarse to subtle. In this way we can start to cultivate insight (wisdom) which can protect, guard our bodhicitta, as if we were crossing from the small to the medium stage of the Mahayana path of accumulation.

The meditation is on the close application of mindfulness to the body.

After meditation, Alan expands on the importance of realizing not only the identitylessness of persons, but also the identitylessness of all phenomena. The latter is the indispensable basis for an effective practice of Vajrayana, together with renunciation and bodhicitta. Then he continues the oral transmission of the Panchen Lama's text - we are now venturing into the section on sutra mahamudra.

Meditation starts at 23:00

[Keywords: Bodhicitta, Uncontrived Bodhicitta, Wisdom, Mahayana]

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Wednesday 20160413

AM

26 Cultivating Sustainable Peace of Mind by Resting in Awareness

For the morning sessions, Alan says we will continue to focus on cultivating our shamatha practice, where a loose translation of shamatha is 'peace of mind' or, in Jackson's translation of the Panchen Lama's text, serenity. The surrounding peaceful Tuscan environment of ILTK and the graceful, kind and courteous staff are certainly conducive to practicing Dharma. Alan says that it brings him great satisfaction to obtain feedback from the ILTK Director that all participants are doing just that in their daily interactions. Yet how do we bring deep peace of mind, equilibrium, balance, stillness, clarity and the benevolence of an open heart – all aspects of eudaimonia – to every interaction, particularly outside of our formal practice or the retreat environment? Of course we start where it's easy on retreat. However we need to cultivate sustainable peace of mind so that when we meet or interact with otherwise difficult people and situations we do not become caught up in or cognitively fused with our own or others' mental afflictions. The key is the peace that awareness brings - this is the Dzogchen approach. The developmental approach is shaping the mind like Shantideva suggests, very effective. The other way is resting in awareness and not getting caught up in our own dramas that arise and in other people's mental afflictions. This is the discovery approach: resting in awareness without cognitive fusion with the mental afflictions, resting there in the natural stillness, clarity and purity of our own awareness, observing the dramas, the upheavals arising and passing of their own accord with no ownership, and watch the mind heal itself. Prior to the meditation practice, Alan reads and comments on the ideas of the Stanford University cosmologist Andre Linde on the role of consciousness in science's current understanding and investigation on the nature of reality.

The meditation is initially guided on taking appearances and awareness as the path.

After the meditation practice, Alan says that for us to continue to practice Dharma for the rest of the day, the starting place is to continually rest in the immediacy of Awareness and Appearances in our mental and sensory perceptions. We should bring an element of Vipashyana practice to this method by examining what we are superimposing on these perceptions. This is Dudjom Lingpa's method of taking Awareness and Appearances as the path. It is to start every moment with the reality we have immediate access to.

The meditation starts at 19:55

[Keywords: Shamatha, Awareness, Appearances, Continuity of Practice]

Wednesday 20160413
PM

27 Resting in Awareness and Appearances on the Path to Convergence on Rigpa

Alan begins by commenting that all teachings and sequences of practice have the goal of converging on realising the ultimate nature of mind, rigpa. This includes cultivating loving-kindness up to relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta, which in Dzogchen practice is no different from rigpa. The practices of shamatha and the four applications of mindfulness and so on, are directed towards realising the empty nature of our own mind and then converging on realising rigpa. Alan comments that the method of application of mindfulness to the body by firstly closely attending to one's own body internally, then externally, then both internally and externally so that it encompasses a whole system, is the method taught by Tsongkhapa for applying mindfulness to the whole of reality by way initially of the five physical senses. This requires resting in stillness with clarity and discernment and attending to appearances in the space of awareness. All appearances have momentary existence, are all fresh, unprecedented, in constant flux, and directly perceived. By contrast, the conceptual projections (words, ideas) that we superimpose on appearances are static, like a snapshot. Our internal self-concept is also static in this sense. The practice is to rest in stillness, observe what appearances arise from that stillness and note the change in them and the nature of the projections we superimpose on them.

The meditation is initially guided on settling the mind by counting the breath twenty-one times and then from stillness partially opening our eyes to investigate the nature of appearances and our mental superimpositions on them.

After the meditation practice, Alan resumes the transmission of the Panchen Lama's text, and comments on provisional and definitive views, and on examples of the different approaches of seeking meditation as the basis of the view (e.g. Padmasambhava's Natural Liberation practice of first achieving shamatha) versus seeking the view as a basis for meditation (as in the Geshe training).

Alan says for the next few days we will make an excursion away from the Panchen Lama's text and he will, for the first time, offer the oral transmission of a chapter on shamatha from one of Karma Chagme's treatises. He received the oral transmission of this chapter from Gyatrul Rinpoche in 1990. He then translated it, but it has never been published. The printed copy (20 pages) will be distributed to those on retreat in Tuscany and those people listening by podcast who would like to obtain a copy should individually send a message to Sangay at SBI, requesting it on the basis that it is for personal use, and must not be put on any website as Alan is still considering its formal publication.

The meditation starts at 13:25

[Keywords: Rigpa, Shamatha, Awareness, Appearances]

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Thursday 20160414
AM

28 Shamatha and the Close Application of Mindfulness to the Body and Feelings

This morning Alan moves on to the four close applications of mindfulness, focusing on the body and feelings. The Pali word “Vedanā” refers to primal feelings like pleasure, displeasure and neutral. Feelings are not included into the mental factors of the close application of mindfulness to the mind. Instead they are examined separately, since these are the ones we care about most. We don’t want pain and we want pleasure. In the first of the four noble truths, the Buddha recommends to understand these feelings. Alan emphasizes that we normally don’t want to understand the feelings about pain, but rather just get rid of them. In modernity we have been very successful to get rid of the unpleasant feelings and pain by means of anesthesia, work, and entertainment. Analyzing the feelings in the way the Buddha taught in the Pāli canon is immensely important because it gives insight into the factors of origination and dissolution of feelings. Alan continues explaining that the five sensory consciousnesses (visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile) have their own separate and non-overlapping domain of experience. In contrast to these five, mental awareness has its exclusive domain of experience and moreover can poach into the sensory fields of awareness. Mental awareness piggybacks on the other five awarenesses. Alan emphasizes that during developing samadhi by attending to the body, tactile consciousness is the carrier whereas the the real work is done in the mental domain.

Returning to feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral), Alan states that they are always present in any experience. Its crucial to note that tactile sensation are always unpleasant if they are too intensive. Too much of the earth, wind, fire and air element is experienced as painful, like too hot or too cold or too much earth like bumping into things. Often we attribute feelings to the object: in the example of the fruit durian, there are people that experience smelling and eating this fruit as disgusting while others like it. This clearly shows that the feeling is not an attribute of the fruit.

Feelings also exist in the mental domain. Alan elaborates that the mental awareness fuses with the various modes of sensual perceptions and in so doing can easily override the sensual feeling. Alan exemplifies this with a football player who painfully collides with an opponent while scoring a point on the touchdown line. Here the physical pain is overridden by a feeling of joy. This ability is the basis for “Lojong” practices like taking

suffering, illness or death as the path. The mental experience can override the physical experience and even alter the somatic effects.

For the meditation Alan invites us to take Mindfulness of Breathing as the baseline and then piggybacked on the somatic sensations, observe and analyze feelings. Are we able to modify the way we apprehend the object?

The meditation is on the Close Application of Mindfulness to Feelings.

[Keywords: Feelings, Vedanā, Close Application of Mindfulness to Feelings, Domains of Experience, Vipashyana]

Thursday 20160414
PM

29 The Central Role of Shamatha on the Buddhist Path

We begin the session with a review of a central practice in shamatha, mindfulness of breathing. Despite being so simple, mindfulness of breathing has its profundity validated, for instance, by being the practice the Buddha did both on the night of his awakening, and also at the time he entered his parinirvana. Alan went on to emphasize the importance of relaxation, namely in the body, with some comments about the key role that exploring, and developing the capacity to practice in shavasana, can have on the shamatha path. He then proceeded to explore the relationship, and feedback loop, existing between the key qualities developed in shamatha: relaxation, stability and vividness.

The meditation, on mindfulness of breathing, was not guided.

After the meditation, we began analyzing a new text: chapter fifteen of Karma Chagmé's "Great Commentary to Buddhahood in the Palm of Your Hand", which is on shamatha. This was the first text that Gyatrul Rinpoche taught back in the beginning of the 90's, for which Alan served as his interpreter. We explored the initial section of the text, that sums up authoritative views (Shantideva, Atisha, Nagarjuna, the Buddha) on the importance of shamatha on the Buddhist path.

(A note for those listening by podcast: this text has not yet been published, so if you're interested in getting a copy to follow the discussions on the retreat, please contact the Santa Barbara Institute).

The session ends with a passionate critique by Alan on the relatively low importance given to shamatha by many modern “teachers”, especially in the vipassana movement, and the critical consequences that such misleading approach can have for those seeking a genuine path to liberation.

The meditation is silent (not recorded).

[Keywords: Shamatha, Vipashyana, Mindfulness of Breathing, Shavasana]

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Friday 20160415

AM

30 Using our Full Intelligence to Dispel the Suffering of Ignorance

In order to explore the differences between shamatha and vipashyana, Alan begins explaining the meaning of the term bare attention coined by the great German scholar and practitioner named Nyanaponika Thera, the primary teacher of Bhikkhu Bodhi, one of the finest scholars and translators of Theravada Buddhism and the Pali Canon. Alan and Bhikkhu Bodhi never met but they have a long correspondence on the nature of mindfulness and its relationship to vipashyana. Bhikkhu Bodhi wrote to Alan:

"Nyanaponika himself did not regard “bare attention” as capturing the complete significance of satipaṭṭhāna, but as representing only one phase, the initial phase, in the meditative development of right mindfulness. He held that in the proper practice of right mindfulness, sati (mindfulness) has to be integrated with sampajañña, clear comprehension, and it is only when these two work together that right mindfulness can fulfill its intended purpose."

So bare attention is not a placebo; it's the first stage, baby steps, prior to shamatha and vipashyana, and if it's presented as that it's very beneficial, very good for stress reduction. But the misinformation comes from equating it to mindfulness, to vipashyana, states that are not dhyana to dhyana, experiences that are not stream-entry to stream-entry. This is counterproductive and undermines the integrity of Buddhist tradition. Mindfulness has become big business as yoga already is, secularized, commoditized, consumer-driven, devoid of any relation with ethics or any path of liberation. But there are very authentic yoga teachers and there are vipashyana teachers who teach with integrity, knowledge and with context. So Alan did not make a generalization; he is just cutting misinformation away.

The problem was summarized in The Economist in a much better way than Alan ever saw in Buddhist journals: "The biggest problem with mindfulness is that it is becoming part of the self-help movement—and hence part of the disease that it is supposed to cure. Gurus talk about "the competitive advantage of meditation". Pupils come to see it as a way to get ahead in life. And the point of the whole exercise is lost. What has parading around in pricey Lululemon outfits got to do with the Buddhist ethic of non-attachment to material goods? And what has staring at a computer-generated dot got to do with the ancient art of meditation? Western capitalism seems to be doing rather more to change eastern religion than eastern religion is doing to change Western capitalism."

Ref:

[http://www.economist.com/news/business/21589841-western-capitalism-looking-inspiration-eastern-mysticism-mindfulness-business'](http://www.economist.com/news/business/21589841-western-capitalism-looking-inspiration-eastern-mysticism-mindfulness-business)

Alan has also quoted an explanation made by Sujato Bhikkhu: "Just as if, Nandaka, there was a four-legged animal with one leg stunted and short, it would thus be unfulfilled in that factor; so too, a monk who is faithful and virtuous but does not gain samatha of the heart within himself is unfulfilled in that factor. That factor should be fulfilled by him.... A monk who has these three but no vipassana into principles pertaining to higher understanding is unfulfilled in that factor. That factor should be fulfilled by him. The description of vipassanā mentions the seeing, exploring and discerning of activities(saṅkhārā). The mention of 'activities' here implies the three characteristics—impermanence, suffering, not-self—of phenomena, conditioned according to dependent origination. The meditative discernment of the nature of conditioned reality is the core meaning of vipassanā. While this definition may be too narrow for some contexts, still vipassanā is commonly used in this sense in the Suttas and in the present day. Samatha is the steadying, settling, and unifying of the mind.... Vipassanā refers to the wisdom qualities such as understanding, discrimination, discernment. Samatha soothes the emotional defilements such as greed and anger, while vipassanā pierces with understanding the darkness of delusion."

Ref:

http://santifm.org/santipada/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/A_History_of_Mindfulness_Bhikkhu_Sujato.pdf

Alan says he slightly disagrees from Bhikkhu Bodhi: sati (mindfulness) and sampajañña (clear comprehension; Alan translates it as introspection) are enough for shamatha but not for vipashyana. If you want to go beyond shamatha into vipashyana, you'll need prajña - intelligence, wisdom, and discernment. As Buddha said, in each of these four applications of mindfulness, contemplate the factors of origination and the factors of

dissolution. In a secular way, in a very good psychoanalysis, we also investigate where a troubling emotion or memory came from - factors of origination - and how can we heal it - factors of dissolution. In contrast, psycho-pharmaceutical drugs only suppress the symptoms and make more livable to live with a dysfunctional mind; this anesthesia may become a tragedy. It is the opposite of what Buddha said in The Four Noble Truths.

Moving to the discussion about vipashyana practice, Alan says we start from awareness and appearances for the six senses, including our feelings about them, and then we ask, "Where do they come from?" Of course, modern science has made physical questions, using physical instruments to make physical measurements, and has got a picture of a physical universe, where there is no place for consciousness. So when we make questions about the non-physical - appearances and awareness - scientists have no clue. But here we are, 2016, we're conscious, appearances are happening, none of us was here 100 years ago, so there was some point when the first moment of awareness and appearances arose for each of us. Is there any example in the universe of non-physical arising from physical? No, there is no evidence at all! So, as consciousness may not arise from nothing (as anything else) nor from physical, maybe the truth is that latter configurations of appearances and awareness emerge from earlier configurations of appearances and awareness. And also, when we're dead, consciousness does not turn into nothing - configurations of human consciousness transform into bardo consciousness, and bardo appearances, and continues to get reconfigured.

All of this is contemplation, not bare attention. So, we should not miss the chance to use this intelligence we have, and only for a short time. Alan closes this talk citing the scientific research, including data from Shamatha Project, showing that meditation may ward off senile dementia, reduce cortical thinning, increase neurogenesis, and so on.

Meditation is on vipashyana and starts at 33:03.

[Keywords: Shamatha, Vipashyana, Mindfulness]

Friday 20160415
PM

31 Does Buddha look more like Galileo or Moses?

We return to the radically empirical observation of that we're immediately aware of - appearances and the awareness of them. To understand the Dzogchen interpretation of

where these appearances are coming from, we can start from scratch. Imagine you're in a lucid dreamless sleep, resting in the substrate -alaya- and you're aware of it, with the substrate consciousness, which is not even human. Then somebody wakes you up, and suddenly all these appearances arise - the person, your room, tactile sensations, mental appearances, and so forth. Where did all these appearances and your human mind come from? In Dzogchen, straight from Düdjom Lingpa, these appearances arise from the substrate, this pregnant vacuity, filled with potentiality; and your human mind with all its configurations, which was dormant when you were in the dreamless sleep, emerges from the substrate consciousness. When you fall asleep again, all appearances withdraw into the mental domain and all the configurations of your human mind withdraw into the substrate consciousness. As Padmasambhava said, 'all appearances do not exist outside the space of your own awareness'. They are all in your own substrate, illuminated by your own mind - we're all in our own bubble, a very large one, and yet, individual space. But people outside seems to be more than mere appearances. What is really outside of our bubbles? Galileo, Descartes, and other Christians, tried to understand God's vision of the absolute reality, of what was really there, outside our skin. So that was the trajectory for Modern Science for the last 400 years - from God's eye perspective to a purely objective perspective to what Thomas Nagel calls a "view from nowhere". Alan quotes David Gross, Nobel laureate, "nature speaks in only one language, and that is the language of mathematics." They are all seeking reality outwards, whereas all contemplatives are seeking reality inwards. The Buddhist way of getting out the bubble, out of the Alano-centric view, out of the eachoneofus-centric view, is not by leaping outside to non-human concepts or to third person observations. Buddhists didn't make any contribution to society in terms of technology - no iPhones, no telescopes, no chronometers and so forth; but they've contributed a lot in terms of technology for refining attention and metacognitive skills. Alan ends with this first part of his talk with this question: is there a way of transcending the bubble to see reality beyond the scope of our limited anthropocentric perspective? Yes! Shamatha. Let's practice!

After meditation we return to Karma Chagmé's text on Shamatha, page 3.

Alan starts comparing mental perception with visual perception - just like the eyes are only able to see within the "visible spectrum", the mind also operates within a limited bandwidth. We can transcend the limitations of human bandwidth of mental perception through the one technology of shamatha practice, achieving up to the fourth dhyana and displaying many siddhis although still tainted by delusion. When shamatha is imbued with vipashyana, these paranormal abilities become untainted.

After commenting on Śatasahasrikāprajñāpāramitā, Alan presents Buddha's description of how, with the achievement of the fourth dhyāna, he recollected the specific

circumstances of many thousands of his own former lives over the course of many ages of world contraction and expansion.

Alan elaborates on the issue: is Buddhism a religion, considering the Eurocentric point of view? Where does Buddha fit? He is not a prophet, he never claimed to be the son of God, nor unique! Why do we call Buddhism a religion? Or, as people can't stand religion, for some good reasons, why don't we take all religious elements out and come up with a secular Buddhism? Alan says that, when he travels for teachings, he is told again and again: don't mention religion, give a secular approach. And he wants to say: "Buddhism was not a religion in the first place! What part do you want me to leave out?" So who was Buddha? Does Buddha look more like Moses or Galileo? For Moses, his power came from God, he didn't achieve it. Buddha didn't say that he has been divinely inspired. He said, "No, I actually took this pre-existing technology called samadhi, refined, and used it in an unprecedented way and corroborated discoveries that earlier contemplatives had made." He sounds more like Galileo, than like Moses or Jesus. Alan then comments on the Chapter 12 on "Supernormal Powers" in Buddhaghosa's classic Visuddhimagga - The Path of Purification - as being pure and the most sophisticated science (Please refer to Alan's notes - Friday 15th).

Alan ends citing Arthur C. Clarke's Three Laws. Clarke's first law: "When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong. Clarke's second law: The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible. Clarke's third law: Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

The four dhyanas and the powers coming out of them are magic, if you don't understand them. But for those following Buddha's path, there is no magic. Let's discover our minds and blow our minds.

Shamatha meditation starts at 21:08.

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Sunday 20160417

AM

32 From Shravakayana to Dzogchen, Earth & Sky

The topic of this 8-week retreat covers the broad bandwidth from shamatha to vipashyana, to Mahamudra and Dzogchen because the text Naked Awareness is the Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. Alan is drawing repeatedly from the most

foundational teachings of the Buddha, as presented for example in the Pali Canon. The Shravakayana is infact the grounding, the foundation on which you can build a skyscraper touching the sky. And the sky is Dzogchen.

In the midst of this whole range of teachings it's very important for those who are really intuitively drawn to Dzogchen to see that all the teachings are nested within the view of Dzogchen. Dzogchen completely encompasses all the other yanas, or vehicles, including that of the Shravakas, the non Buddhists, the Hindus, the yogis, the Bonpos, the shamans and so on. It's a perspective from which all of these other spiritual paths make sense. According to the Vajrayana approach as explained by Panchen Rinpoche, a practitioner realizes emptiness with the primordial mind of clear light once he has fully accomplished stage of generation and completion. So when you are almost finished you put in a drop of Mahamudra. This method may sound quite inaccessible to us and we might feel frustrated. It's easy to feel discouraged because we keep on suffering from amnesia. We keep on forgetting that we are already buddhas.

Alan then reads a quote from the Vajra Essence: the words of Padmasambhava, by way of Dudjom Lingpa, explain how to ascertain our ultimate nature, the nature of the ground Samantabhadra.

For this there are two methods, the first of which is by directly identifying it in your own being realizing the view by way of pointing out instructions; the second is identifying it in dependence upon the expedient path of the stage of generation and completion.

Through the Dzogchen practice you finally come upon the nature of great all-pervasive openness and this is called meditation free of the intellect and devoid of activity. The powerful presentation of Dzogchen meditation by Dudjom Lingpa is quintessential in Dzogchen. It's based on viewing reality from the perspective of dharmakaya, of rigpa. And in this presentation there is no reference whatsoever to having first achieved stage of generation or completion. That is the Dzogchen path. Finally Alan quotes a comment by H.H. the Dalai Lama on the different approaches of the Gelug, Sakya and Nyingma schools, which can help clear many misunderstandings: "As is said in an oral transmission by the great lama Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, when the great Nyingmapa adept Longchen Rabjam gives a presentation of the ground, path, and fruit, he does so mainly from the perspective of the enlightened state of a Buddha, whereas the Sakyapa presentation is mainly from the perspective of the spiritual experience of a yogi on the path, and the Gelukpa presentation is mainly from the perspective of how phenomena appear to ordinary sentient beings. His statement appears to be worthy of considerable reflection; through it many misunderstandings can be removed."

The meditation is on Settling the Mind in its Natural State.

Meditation starts at 21:00

Sunday 20160417
PM

33 Overcoming the Problem of Subjectivity

Alan opens the afternoon session quoting professor [Paul Davies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Davies) and the emphasis that is commonly given in science to search for meaning outside ourselves:

<blockquote>

"Whatever strategy is used, searching for ET is still a huge shot in the dark. There may be no intelligent life out there, or even life of any sort. But to not even try would be hugely disappointing. Part of what makes us human is our sense of curiosity and adventure, and even the act of looking is a valuable exercise. As Frank Drake, the astronomer who began SETI on a shoestring budget in 1960, expresses it, SETI is really a search for ourselves, who we are and how we fit into the great cosmic scheme of things." – <http://time.com/3969378/search-for-extraterrestrial-intelligence/>

Time Magazine, July 23, 2015

</blockquote>

Inspired by our retreat environment, he reminds us that we should do more like Galileo: if we want to understand a phenomena, then we should look the phenomena itself, and not outside it. That was the approach taken by William James and his emphasis on introspection. Unfortunately, as he points out, the introspection movement died and one of the reasons for it is that people had no means of training attention or introspection. Besides that, even the scientists themselves did not practice.

After a short commentary about dealing with impediments in the Shamatha practice, he returns to the topic of objectivity – as of being free of subjective bias – in science. He recalls that this is as important in Buddhism as in science. As in the example above from the SETI project, the point here is that we would need to know (phenomena) objectively, independent of the system of measurement. As far as the study of the mind is concerned from the Buddhist perspective, there is no way to do this objectively, because there is no mind there objectively. Alan explores this topic further in the book [The Taboo of Subjectivity](http://amzn.com/B000QJMC92).

To overcome the problems related to understanding the nature mind, Alan starts drawing on a vision and common practices used for example in the Shamatha Project, like developing a common vocabulary, common observations to then arrive at a "consensual body of Insight", a similar approach to that used by mathematicians. This would be a way to overcome the problem of the subjectivity.

Meditation is on Settling the Mind in the Natural State.

After meditation, Alan returns to the text by Karma Chagme on shamatha (page 3) and moves back on to explore again the section on the development of paranormal abilities or *siddhis* by way of shamatha – presented yesterday. Many of these abilities, he states, can be similarly explored in the dream state, the perfect lab for the mind he says.

He finishes further exploring the topic of making objective observations about the mind and recalling that all these *siddhis* described in the text are a form of "technology" (of the *dhyānas*), and not to be seen as something "supernatural". He adds that this is greatly described in the works of Buddhaghosa.

The Podcast ends with a brief celebration for Alan's birthday. □

Meditation starts at 27:50.

[Keywords: Shamatha, Karma Chagme, Dhyanas, SETI, Subjectivity]

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Monday 20160418

AM

34 Special Theory of Ontological Relativity

Alan begins by reminding us that in yesterday's afternoon session we took a roundabout approach of settling the mind in its natural state by first concentrating on the visual, then the auditory and the tactile domains before venturing into the domain of the sixth sense, the space of the mind. Today we will again "walk around the block", as Alan says, however, not empirically but conceptually. Alan begins by referring once again to the passage of Karma Chagme's text on shamatha, listing the various extrasensory abilities that can be acquired by a person who has achieved the fourth dhyana, even without realising emptiness. How is it possible that a person who is a metaphysical realist can develop such *siddhis*? - asks Alan. If, as materialists contend, all is physical, then the

account of Karma Chagme is not true. But if one takes the materialist assumption then the so called “placebo effect” (which is in fact a mental effect, the effect of the mind) should not be possible, either. It should be just as impossible as the siddhis. Materialists have no explanation for it whatsoever. Alan calls people who hold such views “flat-minded”. But you can be a metaphysical realist and not be flat-minded - he remarks.

To explain how siddhis are possible, Alan turns to two famous Western thinkers: Carl Jung (psychoanalyst) and Wolfgang Pauli (physicist). In their correspondence they explored the mind and body relationship and sought to explain how the mind (which is not physical) interacts with the physical domain. The hypothesis they posited is one of “unus mundus” - an underlying unitary domain of archetypes from which everything emerges. So what we experience - both mental and physical - are displays of this archetypal domain. Alan notes that Wolfgang Pauli was actually so apprehensive of the opinion of his fellow physicists that he allowed for the publication of his correspondence with Carl Jung only after his death.

But the theory they proposed was not new. In fact, in Western philosophy, it goes as far back as Pythagoras who also posited the existence of an underlying reality - expressed in mathematical terms - from which the known reality emerges. Pythagoras - Alan reminds us - himself displayed various siddhis and claimed to remember 20 past lives. It is very plausible that Pythagoras learned samadhi from Hindu yogis during his travel to Egypt. Alan hypothesizes that Pythagoras could have reached higher states of samadhi and in this way accessed the form realm which he then described in mathematical terms. The idea of an underlying mathematical reality was also embraced by Plato and passed on through many lineages.

The problem for Jung and Pauli was that they had no way of testing their hypothesis. But the Buddhists do. In Buddhism the desire realm arises from the form realm which in turn emerges from the formless realm and one may explore these realms empirically. Alan mentions the concept of “nimittas” which are “signs”, archetypal quintessences existing in the form realm, which one can access through samadhi. There are also the ten “kasinas” (earth, water, fire, air, four colours and space and light) which are objects of advanced dhyana practices described in detail by Buddhaghosa. If one learns how to master these kasinas one may, for example, superimpose the archetype of earth element from the form realm on the water element in our desire realm and in this way walk on water. Hence, by mastering the power of samadhi one can superimpose the archetypes in the form realm on this world to perform the siddhis described in Karma Chagme’s text. This is the explanation. Everything in this world is a projection of the form realm. This is what Alan calls “special theory of ontological relativity”.

However, Alan asks an important question: If all elements have archetypal forms - what about the mind? What is the sign of the mind? It is that out of which our mind emerges

and manifests itself in the desire realm: the substrate consciousness. All appearances are displays of the substrate consciousness. And one can access it by achieving shamatha. Alan now quotes the Buddha, saying that all phenomena are preceded by the mind. By comprehending the mind all phenomena can be comprehended. When the mind is under control, everything is under control. This sounds like the basis for developing siddhis - comments Alan. And concludes: it is good to learn to master all the kasinas, to undergo all those difficult and time-consuming practices described by Buddhaghosa. But there is a faster way. Dzogchen. So before the meditation Alan appeals: Don't get distracted - achieve shamatha and realise substrate consciousness! Don't get distracted - cut through! Don't get distracted - become a Buddha in this lifetime!

The meditation is on Settling the Mind in its Natural State.

After the meditation Alan reminds us of the central importance of maintaining continuity of stillness in post-meditation. Avoid cognitive fusion with whatever arises. Avoid the projection of "I" and "mine". We are seeking to become lucid in our waking state. In a dream, if one is lucid, it is obvious that everything emerges and dissolves back into the substrate consciousness. This can be empirically tested. In an analogous way, all appearances in the waking reality arise from the substrate. So in-between sessions we should maintain this way of viewing reality. Especially in our encounters with other people it is important to keep in mind that whatever we perceive is not separate from us - it is always a "you-me" version, never the person as he or she really is.

The meditation starts at 27:20

[Keywords: Siddhis, Placebo Effect, Carl Jung, Wolfgang Pauli, Pythagoras, Plato, Archetypes, Nimittas, Kasinas, Desire Realm, Form Realm, Formless Realm]

Monday 20160418
PM

35 How To Stroke The Sun And The Moon With Your Hand

The session starts with meditation focused on the mind. Alan instructs us to discern the origin of mental events, to observe where those mental events arise and manifest, and to determine where they dissolve. After the meditation we return to the theme of siddhis.

Based on this morning's teachings, some of the siddhis seem plausible - if one masters the nimittas and if the hypothesis put forward by Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli is right. But there is still a nagging thought - says Alan. How to caress the sun? How to stroke the moon? How are these siddhis possible? Before launching into a series of quotations from various sources, Alan reminds us of the conclusion of this morning's session: that among all the archetypal "signs" the one that is primary is the "sign" of the mind. Comprehend the mind and you comprehend all phenomena.

The first passage Alan reads is from Dudjom Lingpa's "The Foolish Dharma of an Idiot Clothed in Mud and Feathers" which describes a practice similar to the one we did at the beginning of the session. Dudjom Lingpa instructs the readers to "identify the primacy of the mind". One should then carefully investigate "the so-called mind" in terms of its place of origin. Here Alan explains that the point of the practice is to identify the referent of the word "mind" in our own language - what we call "mind", what we understand by "mind". He also notes that all one needs is one thought, one mental event. It is not necessary to see, to investigate the whole mind, just one of its many facets. Continuing the quote from Dudjom Lingpa, one should then investigate the mind's location and its final destination. Next, "investigate the mind as the agent". The mind is an agent, the mind does many things - stresses Alan. It conjures thoughts, it causes the "mind-effect" misleadingly called "placebo effect". Further instructions from Dudjom Lingpa are: seek out the mind's shape, its form, beginning and end, whether it really exists or its existence cannot be established. When you have determined with confidence that it cannot be established in any of these categories - you have entered the path! This practice is quintessential Dzogchen - remarks Alan. It is the sky, so now we turn to the earth: the Pali canon. Here Alan reads the story of bhikkhuni Vajira from the Samyutta Nikaya. While meditating she was assaulted by Mara who asked: By whom has this being been created? Where is the maker of the being? Where has the being arisen? Where does the being cease? Vajira recognised him as Mara and counterattacked, saying that "being" is a mere heap of constructions, where no "being" can be found. Just as with an assemblage of parts the name "chariot" is used by convention. [Note: this and all the other quotations will be made available in "Retreat Notes" on the SBI website]. Mara is a personification of afflictive uncertainty - explains Alan. Vajira's response refers to the notion of skandhas which are empty of self. However, in bhikkhuni Vajira's story an example of chariot is used as well which appears in more details also in another Pali text - the dialogue between arhat Nagasena and king Milinda. There Nagasena demonstrates that the chariot is none of its individual parts and it is not the assembly of all its parts and it is not another thing. So where is the chariot? When does a chariot arise and when does it dissolve? The interpretation of the Pali canon is limited to the selflessness of persons, not of all phenomena. But Nagasena's story goes further to conclude that the "chariot" is a mere convention.

Obviously this must be true for any other phenomena. This is a Madhyamaka view. A criticism of metaphysical realism.

From the classical Buddhist texts Alan moves to modern thinkers, starting with Hilary Putnam. He reads a passage which constitutes a criticism of metaphysical realism, as well as of subjectivism. Putnam identifies the extremes - substantialism and nihilism - and rejects them both, proposing instead a view which he calls "internal" or "pragmatic" realism. He writes among others: "elements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent' is fatally compromised from the very start". This is classic Madhyamika - comments Alan. But Putnam's sources were exclusively Western, including Kant, William James and Wittgenstein.

Next, Alan continues with a quotation from Werner Heisenberg, including among others the statement that "what we observe is not nature herself but nature exposed to our method of questioning" and "let us not attribute existence to that which is unknowable in principle". So the crucial point is this: we have been educated to believe that there is a reality out there and science offers the only valid interpretation of this reality. There is only one story: from the Big Bang to the present. And there is only matter. But the quantum mechanics destroyed this view. There is no reality out there independent of the methods by which it is observed and the conceptual designations by which it is conceived. In fact everything arises in dependence of the questions we ask and the methods of observation and measurement we use. Hence, the universe appears physical because all our questions and methods of measurement concern only the physical. Now, relativity theory and quantum mechanics shook this worldview. Alan reminds us of Descartes' primary qualities, including size, shape, weight and movement. From the point of view of relativity theory these are no longer stable but dependent on the frame of reference. There is no objective reality out there, and all we perceive arises in dependence of the observer and the methods of observation. As further support Alan quotes the Austrian physicist Anton Zeilinger saying among others that: "it is obvious that any property or feature of reality 'out there' can only be based on information we receive". Alan refers also to the notion of "strange loop" by John A. Wheeler, namely that physics gave rise to observers and observers give rise to at least part of physics. If this is so, then both are empty - concludes Alan. Similarly the triad: information, that about which there is information (the informata) and someone who is informed. If any of these elements are missing the other two vanish. So these, too, are empty of inherent nature. According to metaphysical realism matter gives rise to information. But according to quantum view matter is a category derivative of information - it has no existence independent of information. Alan concludes today's session by quoting another great contemporary thinker - Stephen Hawking. According

to his latest view, every possible version of the universe exists in a quantum superposition state. There is no single true past. We choose the past by choosing what questions to ask. The past, the reality rises relative to our methods of observation. And what about stroking the sun and the moon? Alan gave us 24 hours to ponder on today's teachings and promised to give an explanation tomorrow. So stay tuned!

The meditation is on vipashyana focused on the origin, location and destination of the mind.

The meditation starts at 1:00

[Keywords: Siddhis, Placebo Effect, Skandhas, Madhyamaka, Metaphysical Realism, Relativity Theory, Quantum Mechanics, Information Theory, Hilary Putnam, Heisenberg, Zeilinger, Wheeler, Hawking]

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Tuesday 20160419

AM

36 Introspection and the Lab of the Mind

Alan starts off this morning's session with a story about a delightful interaction between physicist Anton Zeilinger and His Holiness the Dalai Lama that took place at the 1997 Mind and Life Conference. The story culminates a year later with discussion of physics and philosophy and a visit to Anton Zeilinger's lab, so that Anton could discuss his empirical evidence and show His Holiness how he made his discoveries. Aside from the fact that Alan likes telling stories, Alan loves the fact that Anton took them to his lab and His Holiness lept at the opportunity. Alan would have loved to have had His Holiness be able to say "Anton, would you like to come to our lab, and I'll show you the yogis... Would you like to see what's our research? What are our methodologies by which we've come to these conclusions..."

Alan then goes through a list of some of the objections and scientific reservations about including introspection in the scientific study of the mind and shows how they are not insurmountable problems, especially with the appropriate mental training.

The meditation is taking the impure mind as the path.

With some guidance regarding making introspection a viable tool for discovery about the mind, we practice observing the mind (thoughts, images, emotions, desires, etc.) from the stillness of awareness, without distraction and without grasping.

After the meditation Alan draws a parallel between this practice, where we are becoming lucid with respect to our minds during the waking state, and sustaining a lucid dream. During a lucid dream one wants to relax, maintain the stability - maintaining lucidity and the continuity of the dream, and eventually enhance the clarity, resolution, vividness and precision of the explorations of the dream reality. In a similar fashion, as we now go into non-formal practice, our practice off the cushion, experiences will arise that may cause excitement, agitation, craving, desire, etc. We should try to maintain the continuity of ease and relaxation without grasping. We should also try to maintain, with clarity and engagement, the flow of cognisance - the awareness of appearances as appearances, and not conflating them with an outside independent reality. So, now we have a full-time job...

Meditation starts at 36:00

[Keywords: Taking Appearances and Awareness as the Path, Taking the Impure Mind as the Path, Settling the Mind in Its Natural State, Introspection]

Tuesday 20160419
PM

37 Shift your Perspective, Shift your System of Measurement and you See a Different Reality

We begin the session by returning to the practice of Taking the Mind as the Path. In the introductory comments to the meditation, Alan mentions the two-fold division of Buddha-nature (1. the naturally abiding Buddha-nature and 2. the evolving Buddha-nature). One is already present, while the other is evolving, transforming (the latter is a deliberate evolution or transformation towards enlightenment, this is the path). With this practice of taking the mind as the path, we rest in awareness, always luminous and cognisant, our closest approximation to resting in and being fully cognisant of our naturally abiding Buddha-nature. But we are observing our own mind, and we see that from month to month, from year to year, our mind is changing, is becoming saner, more gentle, compassionate thanks to diligent, continuous and intelligent practice. We can transform the mind with effort (through lojong training, lam-rim, stage of generation & completion) to make it a Buddha's mind. And then we have the effortless approach of

resting in rigpa (Dzogchen) and watching it happen by itself (stay home and watch the show, it turns out well!).

The meditation is on Taking the Mind as the Path (silent, not recorded).

After meditation, we go back to the astonishing statements of the Prajñāpāramitā sutra in hundred thousand verses. Is it possible to stroke the sun and the moon? Or is it just a joke? In the western, eurocentric world we have a common story coming from science (the universe started 13.8 billion years ago with the big bang etc.), but also in the US there are many people who are creationists. If we have been educated in science, basically we have been given one story, but there is also one story coming from the Abrahamic traditions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). The creationist story is deeply rooted in metaphysical realism, and was believed without question by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. Darwin instead could not reconcile his Christian faith with what he discovered about evolution. It was a big schism. However, Darwin candidly said that he had no theory about the origin of life, and he acknowledged that God might have done it. Now we leap forward to Maxwell, who was also a very devout Christian. Then Einstein believed in a higher intelligence that created the entire universe, Spinoza's God, and he spoke very respectfully of religion. Then in the same trajectory we arrive at Georges Henri Joseph Édouard Lemaître (1894 – 1966): Belgian priest, astronomer, and professor of physics at the Catholic University of Leuven, proposed the theory of the expansion of the universe, and he also proposed what became known as the Big Bang theory of the origin of the Universe, which he called his "hypothesis of the primeval atom" or the "Cosmic Egg." Alan comments that basically all the history of science since Copernicus to Lemaître is judeo-christian science, rooted in a worldview where God started it, it was already there, it is absolutely real, and scientists are "representing" or approximating a God's eye view. The point is that, if one is Christian or Muslim etc., God created this universe, God imbued the universe with meaning. The universe is meaningful because God made it meaningful. God is a source of eudaimonia, there is hedonia, and there is a path to salvation.

But what happens if we take God out of the equation? To explain this, among others Alan quotes Stephen Hawking (1990): "The human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies. We are so insignificant that I can't believe the whole universe exists for our benefit. That would be like saying that you would disappear if I closed my eyes."

However, modern science, to this day, has no answers nor a scientific testable theory to the questions about the origin of the universe, the origin of life on earth and the origin of consciousness. But scientific materialists give the public the impression that they already know that the universe originated from purely physical causes, as did life and consciousness in the universe. They don't know this, they simply assume it and falsely claim their metaphysical beliefs to be scientific truths. This is a charade. You pretend to know something that you don't know.

We finally arrive at what Alan calls "The General Theory of Ontological Relativity": it pertains not just to the relation between the desire realm (including the physical universe) and the form realm, but rather points to the relativity of all phenomena in relation to the methods of inquiry and the role of conceptual designation. Whether you live as an animal, a hell-being, a preta, a human or a deva, whether you live in the form or formless realms you are making measurements, and the reality that rises to you is relative to your observations. This applies everywhere, and this gives rise to the Madhyamaka constant—the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena—which is invariable across all cognitive frames of reference. The conclusion is that there is no one definitive description of the universe anywhere (not in Modern Science, not in Kalachakra, not in Abhidhamma, not in Dzogchen, not in Hinduism or Christianity, not in string theory or quantum theory). There is no one actually true, truly right, account of an objective universe out there, because there is no objective universe out there existing in and of itself. There is no one right story, and some stories are false - people make up stuff.

Then Alan returns to Buddhism, especially Buddhist cosmology. What to do with the Buddha's statements about Mount Meru and the four continents? Devas influencing the weather? The fact that previous Buddhas lived for thousands of years before Gautama came along? The Buddha states that what he said comes from his direct experience. If we take the perspective of metaphysical realism, we cannot have incompatible - and true - descriptions of the real objective universe.

Finally Alan quotes Yangthang Rinpoche, a great Vidyādhara, who gave teachings on Mount Meru, the four continents and multiple world-systems last year. In that occasion Alan asked this great master: "Who sees this? What realisation do you need to have to see this?" Rinpoche's response was "first dhyana." This is what you see if you are viewing from the form realm. Different set of questions, different measurement system - different reality that rises to meet you from that different set of questions and different measurement system. In the form realm you have purely mental consciousness, but you are seeing form. In the form realm there is a sun and a moon. In the form realm you can

see Mount Meru and all the four continents. The Buddha saw this from the perspective of achieving the dhyanas. He never said we can see this from an ordinary perspective. Other people can check this out by achieving the first dhyana and putting it to the test of experience. Shift your perspective, shift your system of measurement and you see a different reality. From the form realm you can reach out and touch the sun and moon.

Meditation is silent (not recorded).

CORRECTION in the recording: Alan said that the region of south Asia lies in the spatial region of the Southern Continent; North America corresponds to the space of the Northern Continent; Europe corresponds to the Eastern Continent, and the Pacific region to the Western continent. Instead Europe corresponds to the Western Continent, and the Pacific region to the Eastern continent.

[Keywords: Form Realm, Mount Meru, Science, Reality, Buddhist Cosmology]

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Wednesday 20160420
AM

38 The Benefits of Shamatha and its Potential Pitfalls

Following up his commentary in the last few days on the description of mastering the dhyanas and the resultant siddhis, Alan says that in all traditions there is no specific “meditation manual” on achieving the dhyana levels except in the academic literature. Alan explains however that each tradition have their own practice and developmental methods e.g. lam-rim, stage of generation and completion, six yogas etc. However, all traditions agree that access to the first dhyana (shamatha) is sufficient to be able to venture into all other practices with full effectiveness in reaching the path, proceeding along and completing the path. Following the gradual path of sutrayana (without Vajrayana), you will need to achieve all the dhyanas and it will take from three to seven aeons to achieve enlightenment. All schools and sub-schools of Tibetan Buddhism use the sutrayana as a launching pad into Vajrayana practice. All the siddhis mentioned in the dhyanas arise during the Vajrayana stage of generation and completion by-the-by. The practices for realizing emptiness, for guru-yoga, for visualisations and mantras can be viewed as high-tech meditation.

What are the benefits of achieving the access to the first dhyana (shamatha)? The five obscurations become dormant and the five dhyana factors are at one’s fingertips. At a

subtler level there is a fundamental energy shift in the whole body and a corresponding fine-tuning of the mind which becomes pliant, malleable, supple and ready to engage in more advanced practices (bodhicitta, emptiness, tong-len, etc.). This is the big deal of shamatha.

In achieving shamatha, Alan warns us that there is going to be an enormous temptation to get stuck in the experiences of bliss, luminosity and non-conceptuality. If one stops there, thinking these qualities are “as close to nirvana as I care about”, the great masters, including the Buddha, state that one has not moved one hair’s breadth towards the path to enlightenment. Alan says that we have to start being prepared now about this, by developing the skill of maintaining the stillness of our awareness in the midst of these spikes of effective practice (bliss, luminosity, non-conceptuality). When spikes come up, be at ease, loose, totally present with no preference. If you can’t do this for the small spikes that come in stage 1 to 4 of shamatha, then you’ll be sucked in when you will be up there in shamatha. Maintain the stillness, free of grasping, in the midst of the motions of bliss, luminosity and non-conceptuality. We need to break the habit of grasping to both pleasant (bliss, etc.) and unpleasant nyams (sadness, fear, depression, low self-esteem, etc.). It is ever so easy to fuse with the unpleasant nyam (I’m such a loser..., everyone else is doing well except me) and to identify with the pleasant nyam. We need this skill to keep on moving and reach the authentic path.

Meditation is silent (not recorded).

Alan answers a question about this meditation practice concerning what to do with non-virtuous thoughts. Do you apply any antidote? Alan’s response covers cognitive fusion, stillness of awareness, other practices (four applications of mindfulness, four immeasurables, lam-rim, lojong) and faith in the inner capacity of one’s own mind.

[Keywords: Dhyana, Shamatha, Pitfalls]

Wednesday 20160420
PM

39 The Four Aspects of Taking the Mind as the Path

Alan says we will now return to the central theme of balance, grounding our shamatha practice in relaxation and stability. We will later move to being aware of the sensations

and movements of the body but attending to them from the perspective of stillness. Subsequently we will apply this to the practice of taking the mind as the path. In this method, our practice of attending to the mind can energise or arouse leading to tightness, and therefore we need to maintain a sense of looseness in the practice by returning to relaxation. Alan then describes several aspects of this shamatha practice, from coarse to subtle. The essential instructions of this practice are the following: “Attend to the space of the mind and whatever arises within it, without distraction and without grasping”.

(1) The easiest thing to observe are the appearances that arise more objectively, which are primarily audio-visual to simplify a bit, like the face of your mother, a piece of fruit, discursive thoughts, etc. (like watching a movie in 3D, not flat-screen). If you are right there when they first arise, you rest in the stillness of your awareness, you are clear, you are still, and you are directed at the target such that if something comes up in that field you notice it immediately, in real-time. It is seeing a mental event as a mental event from the very beginning: in other words, when the mental event arises, in that moment you are lucid.

(2) Secondly, thoughts at time come from within, and as they arise in that first moment we cognitively fuse with them (e.g. we think about chocolate - we want chocolate). In that first arising (as a subjective impulse maybe by way of an image of chocolate for example) there is already cognitive fusion. It is like entering in the first moment of a non-lucid dream. In the first moment of a non-lucid thought, we are attending to the referent of the thought, e.g. chocolate. Then hopefully I return to the present moment, and then retrospectively I recognise with introspection “I was thinking about chocolate, I wasn’t here and now”. As soon as you see this, let your first response be: Relax. Then release the grasping, the cognitive fusion that captured your attention and directed it to chocolate. (You are not releasing the thought of chocolate, nor the desire for chocolate - they may remain, look at them). Finally return to the present moment from a perspective of stillness, and if there is a thought of chocolate and a lingering desire, that’s fine - observe them. They are not going to stay forever, sooner or later they are going to fade.

(3) Thirdly, during periods when there is no distinct content in the space of the mind, then the practice is sustaining the flow of cognisance - you are clearly knowing the space of the mind. (Alan says this is crucial and there will be more on this later in the retreat.)

(4) Finally Alan asks if we left anything out. Yes, there is awareness of awareness, which is also taking place in the space of the mind.

Meditation is silent (not recorded).

Following the meditation, Alan resumes the transmission of Karma Chagme's text "The Cultivation of Shamatha". Alan makes a range of comments in response to the text covering: experiential breakthroughs cannot be sustained without shamatha; avoiding being too rigid in our practice; one could realise emptiness and not realise rigpa; the importance of teaching the Dharma with a wholesome mind. At the end of the text's preamble, Alan says we should understand this part is designed to engender motivation, enthusiasm and inspiration. In the next section, "I. The Cultivation of Shamatha with Characteristics", Alan comments that the posture for meditation practice should be taken seriously but not dogmatically. For this reason Alan quotes the following passages:

·*Vimuttimaggā* (by Arhat Upatissa, 1st c. C.E.): The standing and walking postures are particularly suitable for lustful natured personalities, while sitting and reclining are more appropriate for anger-natured personalities. [Ehara, N.R.M. et al. tr., The Path of Freedom (*Vimuttimaggā*), Kandy: BPS, 1995, 61]

·Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (430 C.E.): Whichever posture is effective for developing concentration is the one to be adopted. (128)

Finally, as a foretaste of Dzogchen, he reads a quote from Dudjom Lingpa's Vajra Essence and Essence of Clear Meaning.

[Keywords: Shamatha, Awareness, Taking the Mind as the Path, Karma Chagme]

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Thursday 20160421

AM

40 Analyzing Simple and Complex Negations in the Practice of Taking the Mind as the Path

Alan explains that phenomena that arise to the mind can be affirmations or negations. The negations can be further divided into simple and complex negations. In the discourse of the Arhat Nagasena with the king, the discussion leads to the conclusion that a chariot is not to be found as an inherently existent object. This is an example of a simple negation. A treeless plane is an example of a complex negation: trees are negated but a plane is confirmed.

Alan emphasizes that the object of the practice "Taking the Mind as the Path" is the space of the mind and everything that arises in it. This meditation instruction has to be

very clear. Alan gives instructions for the meditations which was silent. During the session he wants us to closely apply attention to the interval between thoughts. Eventually he wants us to answer the question: Is the space of the mind a sheer absence of appearances? Or is the space of the mind something that has characteristics? What do you see?

The Meditation is on “Taking the mind as the path” while analyzing the intervals between thoughts.

A quick poll after the session revealed that no one is of the opinion that the space of the mind is a simple negation, meaning that it is a sheer absence of appearances. Everybody confirmed that it is instead a complex negation, with the space of the mind having its own attributes. When Alan asked about the attributes of this empty space, the participants were responding with simple negations only. One person mentions that it is clear, meaning having no color, no shape and no sound. Others mentioned the attributes boundlessness and unobstructedness which are still negative qualities.

Alan encourages us to answer his questions quickly, directly and precisely, regardless whether it is right or wrong. The discussion then will resemble debates in Tibetan monasteries, which are fresh, light, and frisky and wake the mind up.

Another attribute mentioned is potential, but here the subject, that is the observer, has a “sense of potential”. This is a quality of the observers’ discerning intelligence as he attends to the object. However, potential is not an attribute of the object but rather a conceptual imputation of the observer.

Alan asks us to check out the attributes of the space of the mind again, without imputing anything on it. In the mentally perceived let there be only the mentally perceived. Then we should report what we have seen.

[Keywords: Space of the Mind, Simple Negation, Complex Negation]

Thursday 20160421
PM

41 A Succinct Exploration of Shamatha

Alan begins the session by frontloading the silent meditation session, and in the follow up of the morning session, asked us to investigate the distinctive qualities of space and

awareness. To help us in that investigation, we brought forth the idea that space implies the quality of extension, unlike awareness. That being the case, these were the questions we were to contemplate: (i) is the space of the mind 2D or 3D?; (ii) has it got a colour, is it either black or transparent?; (iii) has it got a shape? Is it a sphere or a cube?; (iv) does the space of the mind has a center and/or a periphery?

He proposed the meditation session to be divided into 2 parts, with the first being mindfulness of breathing, in full body awareness mode, and only the second part of the session being dedicated to Settling the Mind, as outlined above. The reason for doing mindfulness of breathing in the first part of the session is that by paying attention to the somatic field of the body, we attend to a space that is by nature non-conceptual. There, the presence of only physical senses and feelings, that do not have a referent, help us quiet the mind. After that, we can more effectively attend to the space of the mind, and specifically to the spaces between thoughts, where we were to remain single-pointedly focused on the space of the mind.

After the meditation, we went back to chapter fifteen of Karma Chagmé's "Great Commentary to Buddhahood in the Palm of Your Hand", which is on shamatha. Alan continued the oral transmission, first on a section focused on The Cultivation of Shamatha With Characteristics, which included a succinct section on the path to shamatha (for more details, please see Alan's book: "The Attention Revolution"). He then proceeded to a section on The Cultivation of Shamatha Without Characteristics, a progression which is very typical in Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

The meditation is silent (not recorded).

[Keywords: Shamatha, Mindfulness of Breathing, Settling the Mind]

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Friday 20160422

AM

42 The Big Bang was not Accidental

Alan started by bringing back the theme of the ultimate nature of mind, citing some approaches: (1) recalling the foray we made into an ontological probe into the nature of

mind in terms of origin, location and destination - a classic vipashyana practice, especially in Kagyu (Mahamudra) and Nyingma (Dzogchen) traditions; (2) Karma Chagmé Chapter on Insight in "A Spacious Path to Freedom", that draws the conclusion that mental appearances emerge from emptiness, their location and destination are empty, referring to the emptiness of inherent nature of mental phenomena themselves as well as the emptiness of inherent nature of their origin and destination; (3) Nagarjuna (Madhyamaka) in his ontological analysis of causality, the tetralemma: phenomena do not arise from themselves, they do not truly arise from other, they do not truly arise from self and other, nor do they truly arise from neither self nor other.

So, this particular approach - origin, location and destination - is designed for people following the Mahamudra and Dzogchen path in which you first achieve shamatha in the nature of the mind, and then you rest in the substrate consciousness - the bhavanga, subtle continuum of mental consciousness - which is not configured as a human mind, it is like a stem consciousness - called conventional or relative nature of mind by Panchen Rinpoche, and essential nature of the mind by Dödjom Lingpa. And then we investigate whether this raw specimen truly originates, is truly located anywhere and truly goes anywhere; the conclusion is no, no, no and you've realized the emptiness of the mind. Karma Chagmé comments that once you've realized the emptiness of that by which you apprehend any object, the nature of these objects of the mind must also be empty, like a domino effect.

On the other hand, there is the phenomenological analysis of causality. In Buddhist philosophy it is stated that all conditioned phenomena arise from a substantial cause or something that transform into it, like a seed that loses its identity and transforms into a sprout, following the conservation principle. This transformation has to be enabled by cooperative conditions like water, sunlight, etc. in the case of the seed-sprout transformation.

And then Alan brings this to the mind, the central focus of Mahamudra, Dzogchen and this retreat. As we take the mind as the path, having already investigated the emptiness of its origin, location and destination, we take the space of the mind as the meditation object - like the interval between mental events - and we ask simple phenomenological questions: is it flat or tridimensional, black or transparent, does it have a center, shape, periphery, size, and so forth? We can also directly observe whether it is a dead space or it is more kind of "effervescent", not static, like a quantum soup, ready to erupt at any moment. Alan suggests then this hypothesis: is it the case that phenomenologically this formless space of the mind takes on the form of mental appearances and then they dissolve back into the space of the mind? Actually, when we phenomenologically analyze a thought, we don't have many options: does nothing transform into it? Impossible! Does physical matter like neurons transform into a nonphysical thought? Implausible! Neurons, synapses, electricity may certainly function as cooperative

conditions for mental states to emerge. So, by a process of elimination, mental events must be arising from something non-physical - the space of the mind is transforming into these mental events which then dissolve back into it. Is this something we can observe? That could be very interesting! Similarly, subjective mental impulses must arise from something non-physical - a propensity (vasana in sanskrit) gets catalyzed by some event and an emotion, for instance, arises.

When Alan was studying physics, he was very interested in the energy of empty space. Let's say, as a thought experiment, that we take a volume of space and take all matter and all energy out of it, including gravitational energy, everything. Now you examine theoretically and empirically: is there anything inside that volume? Yes: the energy of empty space. Space itself has its own energy - the zero point energy. And if you calculate the density of this energy, you will find that it is infinite. As an analogy, in this quantum field theory, energy is permeated by the space and there occur quantum fluctuations, and configurations of mass-energy will emerge and then dissolve back into it.

Many years ago, His Holiness engaged with world-class physicists debating the notion that space itself is not a smooth continuum, but it is composed of space particles, or quanta. The universe emerged from space particles. His Holiness related this to Kalachakra, where there is the view that space consists of particles; these particles of space take on form and the universe emerges from them and expands and then contracts back into them. And the cooperative condition is the karma of sentient beings that triggers these space particles to manifest in a world inhabitable for the sentient beings whose karma co-created it. The Big Bang was not accidental.

Before meditation starts, Alan commented that although cooperative conditions for waking and dream appearances are different, they are made of the same stuff; waking appearances are not more real or substantial than dream appearances. When we really are viewing reality this way, then things start to change.

Meditation is silent, not recorded.

Friday 20160422

PM

43 Unpacking Flawed and Flawless Shamatha. Intelligence: Use it or Lose it!

We're going to return to the practice of taking the mind as the path. When we are attending closely to the space of the mind, do we have a sense of just a sheer emptiness, nothing, and then something happens in it, or in that vacuity, is there

something happening? Isn't it more like a "background radiation", a fizz, a foaming, a shimmering in space itself that has a mood of dynamism, of pregnancy, of potential, ready to display as an appearance, a thought, or as a dream?

And, considering the practice as a whole, as we spend more hours practicing, and as overall we never know what is coming next, this ongoing novelty arouses the mind; so the nature of this practice is one of bracing. And it's fine to have more and more clarity, but the higher the pyramid, the stronger the base - we'll need to deepen the sense of relaxation, otherwise the pyramid is going to fall over.

So for this silent session, Alan recommends that we go back to settling the body in its natural state for maybe the first half of the meditation. And during this practice, we can pose simple questions like, can we perceive the space of the body? Does that have borders? What is like to be embodied from a first-person perspective? As it is said in the book "The Embodied Mind", by Francisco Varela, Eva Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, the body is the only physical entity in the universe that we can view from the inside out. So what is the space of the body? Does it have contours, color, is it black, transparent, does it have a shape? Of course we're not questioning the body, but the space.

Final point - observe the stillness of the space of the body itself and the motion of sensations and feelings arising in that space. And then, observe not only the stillness of awareness and the movement of appearances coming and going in the space of the mind, but the relative stillness of the space of the mind itself - relatively speaking, the space is stillness and the events are motion. And then, further down the road, when we take dharmata as the path, in the domain of the Heart Sutra, we'll see that emptiness is stillness, form is motion. And finally, in the deepest level, rigpa is timelessly beyond coming and going, rising and passing, beyond all conceptual frameworks, primordially still, and yet constantly manifesting in all manners of displays. Stillness and motion - big topic, all the way through.

After the meditation, we come back to Karma Chagmé presentation of shamatha, in which he strongly emphasizes that the role of shamatha is to enable us to transcend the configurations, the constructs of thought; it is the technology to enable us to get enough thrust to be able to cut through all conceptual designations, and penetrate the domain of reality beyond the scope of intellect - that's what we do with vipashyana, that can not be sustained without shamatha.

So Alan starts reading and commenting on the Aṣṭasahasrikāprajñāpāramitā excerpt onwards. After the Vairocanaḥisambodhi excerpt, Alan pauses to comment on the theme of transcendence. All people have, explicitly or implicitly, a yearning for transcendence and there are so many ways of trying to get beyond your skin - joining political parties, becoming Buddhists, becoming a monk, a yogi and so forth. Galileo, through very sophisticated measurements of appearances and using Mathematics, tried

to leap beyond the anthropocentricity and "think the thoughts of God". That is one strategy and it's being extremely productive for hedonic well being, technology and so forth. But as long as you're embedded in thoughts you do not transcend to the ultimate. The contemplative approach for this is not by looking outwards, but by transcending thoughts and subjective appearances of the five senses entirely; then you transcend the anthropocentric bubble and you tap into ultimate reality. This is a different and complementary strategy that leads to eudaimonia.

Then Alan continues reading and commenting on Karma Chagmé's text and when he gets to the sessions "Flawed Meditation" and "Flawless Meditation", he starts to unpack the text much more. He said his own comments, in the footnotes #63 and #64, are wrong; his latest interpretation of the first paragraph of this "Flawed Meditation" session is that Karma Chagmé is referring to the fourth mental state out of nine preceding access to the first dhyāna (the achievement of shamatha). At this point, the challenge is complacency, because you've reached a very peaceful, calm, stabilized state of mind and you may think you don't need introspection, and you get drowsier and drowsier... and go into a trance. You do not exercise intelligence, expressed as introspection. Intelligence: use it or lose it! You may get into stupor and that is an unclear state of mind. This is flawed.

We move to "Flawless Meditation" and Alan says emphatically that this is interesting if and only if one is really interested in reaching and proceeding along the path to enlightenment. Alan states that in the footnote #65, he does not reject only the first phrase, which is from Gyatrul Rinpoche: "Whereas in the flawed meditation the senses are totally withdrawn, in flawless meditation sensory objects do appear to the senses, but they are not apprehended." The crucial point here is that in flawed meditation, the senses are withdrawn because you're so dull, halfway asleep. But when you've achieved shamatha and you rest in self-illuminating mindfulness, there is nothing unclear about that.

And then, Alan pauses before the second paragraph of this session with a question: when Karma Chagmé says shamatha, as he states that the eight collections of consciousness do not cease, is he referring to the access to the first dhyāna or to something less, like the eighth stage? Now please refer to Alan's notes, Friday 22 April 2016, where he gathered many quotes to help us clarify this issue, by clearly defining what both access to and full achievement of the first dhyāna mean. Based on all these authors, including the Buddha himself, Alan concludes that when Karma Chagmé says shamatha, he is actually referring to the eighth stage (single-pointed attention) and not to the access to the first dhyāna. Alan's interpretation is that what all these great Kagyu masters are saying is that you can achieve the eighth stage of shamatha, apply this superbly stable mind to vipashyana practice and then, sooner or later, achieve shamatha focused on emptiness.

As a final comment, Alan said that Gen Lamrimpa, great yogi who meditated from 5AM to 1AM (not from 1AM to 5AM!), said: within straight shamatha, achieve just the stage five; at that point, you're free of coarse excitation and coarse laxity. Then you go to the stage of generation; and then, if you really proceed along the path, you will achieve shamatha within the stage of generation. Or, from this fifth stage of shamatha, you can proceed and achieve shamatha within vipashyana, or Mahamudra, or Dzogchen. These are techniques, but none of them says - just skip shamatha!

Meditation is silent (not recorded).

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Sunday 20160424

AM

44 The Defining Characteristics of Consciousness

Alan begins by unpacking the distinctive characteristics of consciousness, which help us identify it vs. anything else that is not. Its characteristics are luminosity and cognisance. It's very important to know experientially what we are talking about, and find the referent for each of these terms. There are two legitimate meanings to define the luminous nature of consciousness, the first of which is to be clear of any materiality, that is consciousness has no physical attributes whatsoever - no mass, no charge, no momentum, no location. The second meaning is its capacity to make appearances manifest: it illuminates them and enables them to become manifest. It's consciousness alone that can do that, not neurons nor anything else.

Alan invite us to imagine being in a sensory deprivation tank: it's pitch black, it's sound-proof and we are floating in it, there is no signal from any of the 5 senses, no sounds, no sight, but also let's imagine that magically your mind has gone totally silent, no chit chat. There is no signal from any of the six fields of experience. However your mind is very bright, there is no laxity, no dullness at all and you are vividly awake. Now what are you aware of? You know that you are not dead because your mind is bright but you see how your mind is fading away and you experience a facsimile of dying, but you are dying lucidly. And you are aware of something similar to the substrate but at the same time you are not non-existent. You are conscious, no question of being non-existent. Now all you are experiencing is luminosity without any appearances being illuminated, you are experiencing cognisance since you are not in a coma, so now what is the referent of the word luminosity? What is being illuminated now? The referent of the word luminosity is cognisance itself. And what are you cognisant of? The referent of cognisance now is that you know you are conscious, you know that you are knowing.

Alan invites us to clearly find out the referent of that stripped-down, bare nuclear cognisance and luminosity, to withdraw awareness from all the noise, from conceptualisation, and clearly identify the referent of the terms luminosity and cognisance in the following guided meditation session.

Meditation starts at 10:50, and it is on Awareness of Awareness (the identification of the characteristics of consciousness, cognisance and luminosity), followed by Settling the Mind in its Natural State.

After the meditation session, Alan invites us to evenly elevate the quality of awareness, both in terms of the heart with the Four Immeasurables and cognitively as well, especially in the time between sessions when our mind is more prone to mind wandering and rumination. But even worse than that, is the subtle and old habit to reify everything we experience - the surrounding people, the environment, our thoughts, our body and so on. And there is a good reason for doing that, because phenomena appear to us as if they were existing from their own side, having distinct characteristics - the impression is that our awareness of phenomena is completely passive. We didn't do anything and what we are seeing is right there, really out there and moreover we project upon them whatever preconceptions, whatever opinion we have about the person or phenomenon. And that is delusional at multiple levels. That happens because appearances lie, they totally mislead, they obscure. This relative, conventional domain of reality obscures ultimate reality which is emptiness, dharmadhatu. They obscure a liberating reality, and keep us indefinitely in samsara. That is something that won't go away for a very long time. According to the Buddhist teachings, appearances will continue to appear in this misleading fashion until we are an 8th-stage arya Bodhisattva. It takes a long time because this is a cognitive obscuration: there are afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, and an arhat is free of all afflictive obscurations (all mental afflictions), but he or she is not free of cognitive obscurations. Only a Buddha is free of those. But we are not obliged to grasp onto them as such. We can actually stop insofar as we have been able to truly understand the Madhyamaka view, insofar as we heard such teachings, we understood, contemplated and reflected upon them. In this way another level of understanding can arise, and it can become our actual way of viewing reality.

To help us break our tendency to reify everything, Alan recalls a teaching given by Gyatrul Rinpoche, in which he invites us to relate to the world as Dudjom Rinpoche used to do while performing ordinary daily activities (like going to a shopping mall): Maintain the awareness of space all the time. While attending to persons, things and objects, be simultaneously aware of the visual space in which these appearances are

arising. By doing so, space is continuously apprehended by us, and it appears as real as anything else. This is a great help to start sabotaging our tendency for reification.

Meditation starts at 10:50

Sunday 20160424
PM

45 Conclusion of Karma Chagmé's Text on Shamatha and Conditions that Give Rise to Serenity

Alan begins the session with a brief introduction to meditation that will follow, instructing us to meditate on the Shamatha method that we find most useful, and not to be worried if the method is advanced or not. We then move to a silent meditation.

After meditation, Alan concludes the commentary and the oral transmission of the text 'The Cultivation of Śamatha', by Karma Chagmé (page 23). This section explores the highest stages of Shamatha, including the Form realm and the Formless realm. Alan adds that for a long time, the Indians thought this more rarefied states were the pinnacle, the irreversible freedom. But then came Gautama Buddha and discovered that these high levels of Samadhi were not enough, you were still left in samsara.

Later on Alan again warns about the perils of people thinking that they have achieved dhyana, having being told by their "teachers", without even showing the basic signs and characteristics of each level of dhyana. Alan thinks that this is like giving false medicine and leads people to not move forward on the path.

He further comments on Buddhadharma becoming global and not falling on the view of being in a degenerate era that nobody can achieve shamatha or liberation anymore. Those who think that way will naturally be poised not to move in the high stages of the path and, on the other hand, the only people who will reach the path are those who believe that it is possible.

On the last ten minutes of the session, we move back to Panchen Rinpoche Text (page 19), on the serenity (shamatha) section. Alan also gives a short comment on the role of beauty in Dharma and being in a pleasant environment and finishes listing the Six Preparatory Practices and conditions that give rise to serenity (available as supplementary resource and listed below).

Meditation is silent and not recorded.

Note: Six Preparatory Practices

- Sweep and clean the room and arrange the altar.
- Make offerings on the altar, e.g., light, food, incense, water bowls, etc.
- Sit in a comfortable position and examine your mind. Do breathing meditation - to calm your mind. Then establish a good motivation. After that, take refuge - and generate the altruistic intention by reciting the appropriate prayers.
- Visualize the merit field with the spiritual mentors, buddhas, bodhisattvas, and so forth. If this is too difficult, visualize Shakyamuni Buddha and consider him the embodiment of all Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha.
- Offer the seven-limb prayer and the mandala by reciting those prayers.
- Make requests to the lineage spiritual mentors for inspiration by reciting the requesting prayers.

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Monday 20160425

AM

46 Balancing on One Leg on a Telephone Pole

Alan shares with us an image that came to him this morning, originating probably from a martial arts film. In this image a trainee in martial arts is told to stand one-legged on the top of a telephone pole. And to just stay there... Our practice is much more challenging - says Alan. If your shamatha is flaky your vipashyana will be flaky, too - he warns us. But what is the foundation of shamatha? To answer this, Alan refers to Padmasambhava. Prior to practicing shamatha one should settle the body in its natural state. Then the speech - by settling the respiration in its natural rhythm. To stop the mental chatter is not so easy, but as long as there is mental activity it will prevent the respiration to settle in its natural state. It is especially important to maintain a very silent mind at the end of the out-breath to enable the in-breath to flow in effortlessly. One needs to maintain the continuity of attention without losing relaxation. Finally, one settles the mind in its natural state. And here Alan refers again to the image of a person balancing on the pole. Do not fall forward or backward, to the left or to the right - do not fall into excitation or laxity, do not grasp onto thoughts of the past or future. Stay balanced on the pole. Be "maharishi" (Sanskrit) - totally straight. The more deeply the body is relaxed and the respiration is settled in its natural rhythm, the better the mind will be able to practice shamatha.

The meditation is on settling body, speech and mind in their natural states and on resting in the stillness of awareness.

After the meditation Alan advises us to maintain the continuity of stillness between the sessions. If this stillness is maintained throughout the course of the day, we will be able to stay lucid and fully present, yet not caught up in whatever arises in the field of our senses and awareness.

The meditation starts at 6:16

[Keywords: Settling Body, Speech and Mind in Their Natural States, Maharishi, Stillness of Awareness]

Monday 20160425
PM

47 Balancing Earth and Wind

Alan introduces the afternoon meditation by making a few comments about space. Our most primal space is the substrate. In dreamless non-lucid sleep, in anaesthesia and at the point of dying the substrate consciousness dissolves into the substrate. Even at this point, however, a sentient being still has consciousness, as opposed to e.g. a glass of water. The essential nature of the substrate is 'avidya' - 'not knowing'. The substrate is obscuring the deeper reality, i.e. dharmadhatu. It does not mean that dharmadhatu is somewhere else than the substrate. Right where the substrate is there is dharmadhatu - explains Alan. As if hidden in plain sight. When the karmic seeds stir the substrate, consciousness emerges from it. And from the substrate consciousness there arises mentation. First the subtle 'manas', subtle mentation is catalysed. The sense of 'me here' as opposed to 'object there'. Then coarse mentation arises. Alan explains that in a manner of speaking the mentation "refracts" the primal space of substrate into six spaces: the mental space and the five domains of physical senses. Similarly, the substrate consciousness gets "refracted" into six consciousnesses: the mental one and the five physical ones. In the process of falling asleep the same is happening in reverse order.

After this introduction, Alan "front-loads" the meditation. He instructs us to focus for the first half of the session on the space of the body by directing the mental consciousness onto the somatic field. In this way the two spaces - relative dharmadhatu (mental space) and the field of tactile sensations operate together, are superimposed. Let the dharmadhatu merge with the space of the body - advises Alan. Let the space of the

mind be filled with non-conceptual sensations of the somatic field in order to empty the mind of conceptual thinking, of chatter. Then, in the second part of the session, direct your attention to the space of the mind. In this way you have better chances not to get caught up in the “waterfall” of thoughts, images, memories etc. Alan calls this meditation “Balancing Earth and Wind”.

The meditation is on observing first the space of the body and then the space of the mind, and it is silent.

After the meditation, we return to the text of Panchen Lama, starting from verse 15 of the root text. It describes the preliminary practices one should undertake before launching into the main practice. Alan notes that the shamatha practice itself (e.g. awareness of awareness) is ethically neutral and may even be used for negative, unwholesome purposes. That’s why we need to precede the practice by taking refuge and generating the motivation of bodhicitta. When practicing shamatha one ventures into unknown territory. Contemplatives are often surprised by what comes up. Sometimes there are demons in there. So go there with a sense of security - advises Alan. That’s what refuge is for. Refuge and bodhicitta make the mind spacious. Further in the same verse there is mention of making hundreds of supplications to one’s guru. Why hundreds of supplications? - asks Alan. Surely not because the Buddha or Guru Rinpoche or our own guru cannot hear us. It is actually for us. Because we have many desires coming up. So, if the desire to practice shamatha is only one of many, it may easily get lost. Therefore hundreds of supplications are made in order to crowd out the other desires. As we know, one of the prerequisites of practicing shamatha is having few desires.

Next, Alan comments on the line “Your guru dissolves into you”, explaining that in order for this practice to be effective one needs to release reification of oneself and of the guru. The mindstream of every sentient being is already saturated with dharmakaya. So where you are there is your guru. Your identity is not replaced by the guru but you are indivisible from your guru. Alan also explains how helpful it is to adopt the perspective of the guru when your mind seems very small, when you are overwhelmed by what comes up in the practice. Try to view it from the perspective of the guru, of the Buddha. How would these thoughts be viewed by the guru, by the Buddha?

Commenting on verse 16, Alan reminds us that the practice of settling the mind in its natural state does not entail modification of anything. One does not take the developmental approach adopted in many other practices but instead releases whatever appearances arise and lets the mind heal itself.

Verse 17 of the root text gives a very succinct Mahamudra description of the practice of awareness of awareness. The object of the practice is consciousness itself, identified by

its two defining characteristics: luminosity and cognisance. Alan notes that many of us have doubts about doing this practice correctly. He suggests to ask the following questions: Do you still know? Are you continually aware that you are conscious? Are you continually aware of consciousness? Next, Alan presents Tsongkhapa's descriptions of this practice - one found in "Medium Lam-rim" (the quote is available in Alan's translation in his book "Balancing the Mind") and another one in the "Great Exposition". Alan notes that most of us, while doing the practice, in the background have the sense of ego, of "I" meditating: "I'm watching my awareness". Hence there is a clear sense of a subject and an object (even though the practice of awareness of awareness is considered shamatha without an object). Alan mentions that Tsoknyi Rinpoche, when asked about the difference between this shamatha practice and the Dzogchen meditation, answered that the difference was in grasping. The grasping to the sense of "I", the bifurcation of subject and object. We cannot simply turn it off - says Alan. But this shamatha practice is an important step on the path. So that when we cut through to rigpa we will be able to sustain it. For those who are supremely gifted it may be possible to go from shamatha straight to rigpa and from the perspective of rigpa realise the emptiness of the mind. But for those who are not so gifted the path is shamatha and then vipashyana on the nature of the mind. Only when one has realised the purely nominal status of "I am a sentient being" can one realise rigpa. But if you are convinced that you are a sentient being, rigpa remains only a potential and it will take three countless eons before your realisation - warns Alan.

The last passage from Panchen Lama's root text read today is verse 18 on taking mind as the path. Very briefly two methods are described here: one is simply observing thoughts and the other is cutting them off as soon as they arise. Again, Alan presents a possible early source of this presentation in a quote from Karma Chagme's text in the "Spacious Path to Freedom" where a description of the same two methods comes from mahasiddha Maitripa.

The meditation is silent, not recorded.

[Keywords: Mental Space, Dharmadhatu, Dharmakaya, Nirmanakaya, Awareness of Awareness, Settling the Mind in Its Natural State, Tsonkhapa, Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Maitripa, Karma Chagme]

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Tuesday 20160426

AM

48 Acquiring the Sign of the Mind: I see you.

Alan begins the session with a sutta from the Pali Canon - the Suda Sutta or cook discourse, which begins with a foolish cook who didn't take the king's preferences into account and highlights the importance of acquiring the sign of the mind. The foolish cook never acquired the "sign" of the king. Alan mentions the movie Avatar in which there was a touching scene with the line "I see you", and the phrase carries the meaning of understanding someone. In this way, the foolish cook did not "see" the king. He didn't understand him and see what he truly wanted. Alan interprets the sign of the mind as being that from which the mind as we experience it emerges, the bhavanga. It is this brightly shining mind that is the source of our motivation to seek a path and to seek liberation. That stem consciousness that is not yet human is bound to hold a more primal stem desire. Tapping into that, you can find out what really makes you happy, and going deeper you can ask rigpa, "What's your desire?" You can practice vipashyana without tapping into the depth of your soul, tapping into your heart's desire, and tapping into the deepest motivation that is already there, but if you haven't tapped into the innermost depths of what you truly want, the practice of vipashyana can easily be reduced to just another form of psychotherapy and have nothing to do with the path.

"Having acquired the sign of the mind, sensing the savor of solitude, practicing jhana, masterful, mindful, you obtain a pleasure that is not hedonic." This sounds very much like shamatha. Shamatha can help ensure that your vipashyana can be motivated by a truly authentic motivation.

Also, to see the variety of motivations displayed in the world, and to be able to cut through and be able to truly look at someone and be able to say "I see you" on a level where you can truly empathize - that would be something. How can we tap into that depth of another person if we haven't tapped into that depth of ourselves?

Alan then talks about two techniques to determine if you are doing the practice correctly and maintaining the flow of knowing or if you are just spacing out and cultivating stupor. The first test is for when you are settling the mind in its natural state during an interval between mental events. If, as you are attending there, an event arises, and as soon as the event arises, you're already there and you don't have to pull your attention back, then you were there before it happened. You were sustaining cognisance, and that's the indicator of it. If it takes a few seconds, then you were spacing out. The second test can be done when you are withdrawing from all appearances and attending to the sheer luminosity and cognisance of awareness. If as soon as a subjective impulse - a thought, a desire, an emotion, etc. - comes up, you get it, then you were on the mark. If you learn

about it only seconds later and you had to pull yourself back, then you were not on target.

The meditation is on shamatha without a sign.

After the meditation Alan talks about Galileo, mentioning, among other things, that history might have been a lot different if he had been allowed to stay in the monastery and had come to understand the sign of his own mind. The last four hundred years have yielded a tremendous growth of knowledge of the outside world, in medicine, and in hedonic well-being, yet have yielded little in terms of eudaimonia and knowledge into the nature of the mind. Major scientists are saying do not rely upon your first person experience, do not rely on introspection, and do not rely upon your own perception. They say that doing so is misleading and unreliable, but we don't have to follow that...

The meditation starts at 24:50

[Keywords: Suda Sutta, Acquiring the Sign of the Mind, Bhavanga, Brightly Shining Mind, Settling the Mind in Its Natural State, Shamatha Without a Sign, Awareness of Awareness, I See You]

Tuesday 20160426
PM

49 Pointing out the Relative Nature of the Mind

Alan begins by recalling that Panchen Rinpoche presented two methods for dealing with thoughts. One of the methods that Alan didn't cover yet in this retreat consists in cutting off thoughts as soon as they come up. Hovering in the immediacy of the present moment, as soon as a thought comes up, just deflect it. One moment and it is gone. And then you rest in silence, not waiting and not slacking off, resting in the awareness of being conscious.

The meditation is on Awareness of Awareness.

After meditation we return to the root text and autocommentary by the Panchen Lama. Alan gives the oral transmission and commentary on the text that explains the two methods of dealing with thoughts, namely: (1) Observe thoughts without blocking them and (2) Whatever thoughts come up, cut them off as soon as they arise. In the commentary Alan gives a succinct explanation of the five faults: (1) Spiritual sloth and (2) forgetting the practical instructions, (3) laxity and excitation, (4) non-intervention, and

(5) intervention—these are regarded as the five faults. Then Alan continues by explaining briefly the 8 interventions, the 6 powers and the 4 mental engagements (Alan has provided some notes on these that will be posted on the podcast page). Extensive explanations of the above can be found in the lam-rim literature.

Meditation starts at 9:33

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Wednesday 20160427

AM

50 Shamatha in the “Holy War” to Destroy Mental Afflictions

Alan says he is starting with a bang this morning and explains that an Arhat is a foe destroyer of mental afflictions (klesha) in that they have completely annihilated all mental afflictions and all their progeny – the vasana, or mental imprints or seeds. A Jina is beyond that of an Arhat in the next step towards becoming a Buddha because a Jina, (a conqueror or victorious one), has extinguished both mental and cognitive obscurations. The cognitive obscurations stand between an eighth stage Bodhisattva and a Buddha, so eliminating them is the final step. Alan says that in his various condemnations of materialism, misrepresentation of Buddhism, or of fundamentalism and dogmatism, it is important to take a clean shot and target the delusion of what is asserted, rather than target the person making the assertion, to ensure there is no collateral damage as people have Buddha nature and can change their view.

In this holy war, Alan says there is a tendency to first bring out the elite troops of vipashyana or other advanced practice methods (Zen, Vajrayana, Dzogchen, Mahamudra, etc.). However, this is bad strategy as the machine gunners of coarse conceptualisation just mow down these methods. In order to wipe out our obsessive, compulsive ideation it is necessary to cultivate shamatha as it is the military analogy of grunt troops using machine guns to wipe out the obsessive, compulsive ideation associated with mental affliction.

Panchen Rinpoche suggests the strategy of cutting the obsessive thoughts off as soon as they arise. For the meditation of this session, Alan offers an extremely useful insight coming from the Dzogchen tradition. We start with mindfulness of breathing, and then we invert awareness right in upon itself, which is like the mouth from which all thoughts, desires, etc. emerge. If we observe the manifest nature of the mental affliction of attachment-craving for example, we will find that we get entangled in the story - it has a

referent (we are craving something). While if we observe its essential nature, the hypothesis is that we may find pleasure, enjoyment (bliss). When actual anger arises, if we observe its essential nature we may find that it is bright, sharp (it is luminosity). When delusion, confusion, dullness, ignorance, stupor, bewilderment come up, if we cut through it we may find non conceptuality. These are the three qualities of the substrate consciousness, and in doing this coarse cutting-through, we de-toxify the mental afflictions. Note that unlike our everyday modes of knowing which are always embedded in concepts, non-conceptuality has to be imbued with cognizance, otherwise we fall back to misapprehension and delusion.

The Dharma taught by the Buddha - the Conqueror of all obscurations – provides a strategy that begins with ethics and then continues with cultivating samadhi. Once the five obscurations have been calmed thanks to shamatha practice, then we bring in the troops aimed at eradicating the reification of oneself and of all phenomena, thus realizing the identitylessness of both self and phenomena (the wisdom practices). Finally, thanks to the Dzogchen practices of cutting-through and direct crossing-over we rest in rigpa until we become fully-enlightened Buddhas.

The meditation is silent (not recorded).

[Keywords: Shamatha, Mental Afflictions, War, Samadhi]

Wednesday 20160427
PM

51 “Tightly Focused, Loosely Relaxed” - The Shamatha Practice of Awareness of Awareness

The theme for this session comes from the pith instructions that we’ve recently covered from the Panchen Rinpoche’s text (stanzas 16 to 23), which are prevalent in the Mahamudra lineage. Alan’s prelude to the meditation returns to the question concerning whether the space of the mind is either a sheer absence of appearances or whether it does have characteristics that can be ascertained i.e. it is transparent and 3-D. We will continue investigating the nature of consciousness through the practice of awareness of awareness, withdrawing from all appearances and then tightly focusing on the affirmative qualities of cognizance and clarity of awareness. Another element of consciousness that we are seeking to enter into or unveil is that which is free of conceptualisation. Alan therefore suggests that the quality of the awareness that we are seeking to access is a complex negation as there are two affirmative qualities

(cognisance, luminosity) and an absence of a quality (non-conceptuality). The tightly focused part of the practice is on the affirmative qualities and then the loosely relaxing part is releasing the awareness into non-conceptuality.

Alan also speaks briefly on his new interpretation of the phrase “taking the impure mind as the path”, and similar phrases, where a more literal translation from the Tibetan on his opinion could be “taking the mind as my ride on the path”.

The meditation is guided on awareness of awareness, oscillating the awareness from being tightly focused to loosely relaxed.

Following meditation, Alan resumes the Panchen Rinpoche’s text transmission including some comments that:

- what we are reading we are immediately integrating into our current practice;
- the achievement of shamatha leads to mental pliancy and physical well-being due to the shift of the whole subtle energy system; and
- the ultimate reality of the mind cannot be apprehended conceptually (i.e. as “this” – see stanza 25).

At the end of the session, Alan says he has received requests for instructions on dream yoga (night-time vipashyana) which he will occasionally provide. His first instruction is to commit to prospective memory: upon awakening from sleep anytime, (1) recognise that you are waking up without further conceptualisation and (2) stay still physically and mentally. Then direct the attention backwards in time, and check: what is the last image you recall? If it was the last image of a dream, pursue it, see if you can recall your dream. This is the first step in the practice of lucid dreaming, and in this way the dream recall will gradually increase.

Meditation starts at 12:35

[Keywords: Shamatha, Awareness of Awareness, Clarity, Luminosity, Non-Conceptuality]

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Thursday 20160428

AM

52 Pointing out the Nature of the Mind

Alan starts explaining that throughout times, lamas have given pointing-out instruction on the nature of the mind. With respect to this it is crucial not to conflate the different dimensions of consciousness. During the day we experience different states of mind, like sleeping, dreaming, waking, or being immersed in a conceptual or non-conceptual mind. In all these cases the common nominator of the mind is consciousness.

Alan explains that the defining characteristics of the mind are luminosity and cognizance. Furthermore, it has no material attributes. It is luminous in that it manifests all modes of appearances. It is cognizant like the in the Tibetan term “rigpa”, meaning being aware of something.

He distinguishes between the coarse and subtle mind. While the coarse mind is a mode of knowing, which is embedded in conceptuality, the subtle mind is non-conceptual, discerning, and imbued with the five jhana factors (single-pointedness, coarse investigation, subtle analysis, well-being and bliss).

Alan presents the pointing-out instruction for the essential nature of the mind from the Vajra Essence: While the substrate consciousness illuminates appearances, it does not enter into them. It is largely free of cognitive fusion.

An understanding of this is crucial for the instructions on the shamatha practices “awareness of awareness” and “settling the mind”. In “awareness of awareness” we do our best approximation of viewing awareness from the perspective of the substrate consciousness. And in “settling the mind” we try to best approximate viewing the appearances arising in the space of the mind from the perspective of substrate consciousness as well. In both cases we illuminate the objects without grasping and distraction, and without cognitively fusing with them, i.e. without entering into them.

Finally, Alan comes to the Dzogchen view of the nature of the mind. Here the pointing-out instructions refer to the synonym terms: primordial consciousness, rigpa, Dharmakaya, Buddha Nature and pristine awareness. These instructions are often nonverbal and symbolic in nature, but one classic way is giving teachings that draw sharp distinctions between mind and Dharmakaya or between substrate consciousness and rigpa. In addition to these three types of the nature of the mind, there exists a fourth one: emptiness of the inherent nature of the mind or the ultimate reality of the mind.

Alan then emphasizes that if it is true, that subtle continuum of consciousness is empty of inherent nature, it is a real “game changer”. This would mean that we are sentient beings, only relative to a conceptual framework - this changes the view on the entire universe.

Alan summarizes that under the umbrella of the nature of the mind we have (1) the conventional nature of mind, (2) the substrate consciousness, (3) the emptiness of inherent nature of mind and (4) rigpa. He emphasizes that rigpa is not the same as “the emptiness of inherent nature of mind”, but is Dharmakaya.

When we first experience the luminous and cognisant nature of the mind we realize the most superficial level of rigpa, like looking at the moon through three layers of clouds. First we peel away the layer of the human mind and arrive at the substrate consciousness. Then we get rid of grasping onto true existence and finally we release the identification with the conditioned consciousness. Thus we arrive at rigpa which is like seeing the moon with no clouds.

At the end, Alan recommends to keep an ongoing flow of the cognizance and luminosity of our own awareness throughout the day.

[Keywords: nature of mind, coarse mind, substrate consciousness, conditioned consciousness, Rigpa, emptiness of inherent nature]

Thursday 20160428
PM

53 Pointing out Instructions by Padmasambhava

Alan begins the session on a playful tone, saying he invited a guest speaker to lead this afternoon's meditation session. After a brief commentary, we then move on to the session, that consisted of Alan reading pointing out instructions to rigpa, by the Lake-Born Vajra, a speech emanation of Padmasambhava.

After the meditation, we return to the Panchen Rinpoche's text transmission, and begin the section on vipashyana, focused on identifying the ultimate nature of mind. Alan continues the oral transmission, commenting on passages from Saraha, Lingrepa and Shang Rinpoche.

The guided meditation session begins at 6:30

[Keywords: Rigpa, Vipashyana, Padmasambhava, Lake-Born Vajra]

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Friday 20160429
AM

54 There is Hope! Alan introduces Donald Hoffman

Alan starts remembering the pointing out instructions of Padmasambhava that he read yesterday. In the preface, Padmasambhava says he is pointing out to what he called by many different names: atman, middle way view, emptiness, tathagatagarbha, alaya, perfection of wisdom, and so forth. And then there are two phases: in the first he challenges us - "what do you mean ... Observe your mind!?" Just do it! In the second, he poses a hypothesis: "Is it that way or not? Observe your mind!" The first phase is shamatha, and the second, as he poses a question and we have to report what we see, that's vipashyana. And this instructions are so inviting because Padmasambhava also says he is pointing out to "ordinary mind", not something in a distant future. So, how deep we can penetrate? Can we see the luminous and cognisant aspects of consciousness, can we identify the relative nature of consciousness? That is where substrate consciousness is. Can we go deeper and penetrate our mind right to the substrate consciousness? The emptiness of our own awareness is there too. Can we realize it? And all of these is rigpa. Can we identify it? Very simple and very complete. But only for the simultaneous practitioners it is sufficient to see the ordinary mind, the substrate consciousness, the emptiness and rigpa only once. Why most of us cannot see rigpa, if we're looking right where rigpa is?

Alan talks then about the obscurations that prevent us to see rigpa. There are conative obscurations, related to desires: "I don't want to. I'm busy! I have to make money and this is not profitable. It's boring!" If we don't have the aspiration, we'll not dedicate ourselves twelve hours a day for months. It's not gonna happen. A conative passion, renunciation, bodhicitta are indispensable. The second type of obscurations is the obsessive compulsive ideation, a very noisy mind - attention obscurations. But even if you have real interest and refined attention skills, there are still conate (we're born with) and acquired cognitive obscurations - ignorance, delusion. Alan says he stands by this big generalization: the belief system of scientific materialism consists of acquired delusion. It's not innate, we get educated, introduced to it, and so if you love science you have to go with this belief system. One of the major points of this belief system is that the mind is just an epiphenomenon of the brain. As meditators do not know anything about the brain, they need neuroscientists to tell them what is going on in their meditation. Among the scientific community, most materialistic groups of scientists among all the fields are cognitive scientists, although they know the least about matter. And the least materialistic are the physicists, like Thomas Hertog, Stephen Hawking, Anton Zeilinger, John Wheeler, Andrei Linde, Paul Davis - they're casting off materialism and coming into adulthood. Meanwhile, the cognitive sciences are still in infancy, pretending they understand consciousness. Then Alan presents us Donald D. Hoffman - Professor of Cognitive Science, University of California, Irvine, PhD in MIT. But before proceeding, Alan cited this quote from "The Foolish Dharma of an Idiot Clothed in Mud and Feathers" where Döndjom Lingpa says that before you set out on the

path, among body, speech and mind you have to investigate and know which one is primary. Dūdjom Lingpa had a vision in a dream of a boy who said: "The body is like a paper bag blown by the wind", including your brain, of course! "Speech is like the sound of air passing through a pipe. This mind is the creator of both samsara and nirvana. Among these three, identify which is primary!" So, Donald Hoffman address this question: among matter and mind, which is primary. This is the link to his interview "The Case Against Reality":

<http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/04/the-illusion-of-reality/479559/>

And here is a link to a Hoffman TED Talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/donald_hoffman_do_we_see_reality_as_it_is?language=en

Alan highlights this point, saying that it gives him hope: "The central lesson of quantum physics is clear: There are no public objects sitting out there in some preexisting space. As the physicist John Wheeler put it, "Useful as it is under ordinary circumstances to say that the world exists 'out there' independent of us, that view can no longer be upheld."

Alan highlighted this paragraph too: "The mathematical physicist Chetan Prakash proved a theorem that I devised that says: According to evolution by natural selection, an organism that sees reality as it is will never be more fit than an organism of equal complexity that sees none of reality but is just tuned to fitness. Never."

If Hoffman findings are true, science has undermined its own credibility. Because natural selection which gave rise to scientists has nothing to do with knowing reality as it is. There is no reason to believe that science is accurate, since we did not evolve to know reality as it is - we evolved to make babies and survive - if evolution is the whole story. To keep its integrity following this mathematical theorem, scientific community has to add another variable: in addition to natural selection, there is something else going on that gives us a drive to know reality as it is. It has nothing to do with evolution and that's where credibility stands - the credibility of science stands outside of science.

Alan discussed some more points of this interview: "The idea that what we're doing is measuring publicly accessible objects, the idea that objectivity results from the fact that you and I can measure the same object in the exact same situation and get the same results — it's very clear from quantum mechanics that that idea has to go. Physics tells us that there are no public physical objects."

Then Amanda Geffer asks Hoffman: "It doesn't seem like many people in neuroscience or philosophy of mind are thinking about fundamental physics. Do you think that's been a stumbling block for those trying to understand consciousness?"

Hoffman: I think it has been. Not only are they ignoring the progress in fundamental physics, they are often explicit about it. They'll say openly that quantum physics is not relevant to the aspects of brain function that are causally involved in consciousness. They are certain that it's got to be classical properties of neural activity, which exist

independent of any observers—spiking rates, connection strengths at synapses, perhaps dynamical properties as well. These are all very classical notions under Newtonian physics, where time is absolute and objects exist absolutely. And then [neuroscientists] are mystified as to why they don't make progress. They don't avail themselves of the incredible insights and breakthroughs that physics has made. Those insights are out there for us to use, and yet my field says, "We'll stick with Newton, thank you. We'll stay 300 years behind in our physics."

One more: "I'm emphasizing the larger lesson of quantum mechanics: Neurons, brains, space ... these are just symbols we use, they're not real. It's not that there's a classical brain that does some quantum magic. It's that there's no brain!"

Last one: "As a conscious realist, I am postulating conscious experiences as ontological primitives, the most basic ingredients of the world. I'm claiming that experiences are the real coin of the realm. The experiences of everyday life—my real feeling of a headache, my real taste of chocolate—that really is the ultimate nature of reality."

Hoffman has just identified between mind and matter, which is primary. Consciousness is primary. Matter and brain don't even exist except as symbols.

Now, back to Dūdjom Lingpa. He wrote Vajra Essence down during the heyday of mind eradicating scientific materialism with their brain washing. So, Dūdjom Lingpa prophesizes: "This is for the future. This will flourish in the cities of the West."

Dūdjom Lingpa says "this mind is the all creator sovereign". Now, the question is: does the mind really exist, or mind is just one more symbol, one more name? Is mind real, does it originate from some place, is it located some place, does it really go some place? Where, where, where? Nada, nada, nada!

The meditation is on probing into the nature of the agent who is meditating, taught by Padmasambhava.

Alan quoted Einstein: "It is in fact the theory that determines what we can observe".

What can you observe and what you can not observe because of the belief you already have? Dūdjom Lingpa's strategy is introducing us to the view of middle way, of emptiness and dependent arising. So we hear it, we think about it and then we view reality with the middle way view. Then once we deconstruct the reification of mind and all appearances to the mind, then we're introduced to the Dzogchen view. When we view reality this way, the practice becomes very simple: we dispense with all activities that we embrace as a sentient being - recitations, prostration, mind wandering and so forth. These are all incompatible with the perspective of Dharmakaya in which there is nothing to achieve. We just get familiar with this view and then we're ready for open presence. Then we view reality not from a marmot's perspective but from Dharmakaya's perspective. Nothing to do! But until then... let's go back to motivation and let's practice!

Meditation starts at 41:04

Friday 20160429

PM

55 Taking Vipashyana as Hot Chili, Just Enough to Spice our Shamatha Practice a Bit

Alan starts by giving us a suggestion: for our whole life, from now until our enlightenment, we should evaluate our practice in a eudaimonic way - based on what we brought to the practice, on how we responded, and not based on what happened to us during the practice. An important point is that shamatha and vipashyana practices can be very dry, not sweet, not warm; so the more we can sweeten our practice with devotion, with four immeasurables the more balanced our practice will become. We have to bring the heart, the moisture, the warmth to our practice, anyway we can. It's really important.

The teachings from Karma Chagmé, Panchen Rinpoche and Padmasambhava on vipashyana that Alan is presenting are intended for people who have achieved shamatha. In Natural Liberation, when Padmasambhava taught shamatha without a sign, he said: do this until your mind has settled in its natural state. And if you're introduced to rigpa prematurely, it may become an object of intellectual understanding and there is the danger of one may succumb to dogmatism. So, for people in full time retreat, what Alan suggests is continue to emphasize shamatha - keep on laying the foundation. The deeper the relaxation, the more sustainable will be the stability. Then we can start to cultivate vividness, for which there is no upper limit.

The practice we've done this morning is not quite a vipashyana practice. We're not asking questions about or analyzing what we are seeing. It is a practice of shamatha without a sign. Next week, we'll study classic Gelugpa methods but rooted in Indian Buddhism on Panchen Rinpoche text where he cites Shantideva: if you don't see the target you don't know where to shoot the arrow. Based on this, when we're looking for a negation in our vipashyana practice, we should identify what is it that doesn't exist. Tsongkhapa says: identify that which is to be refuted. This morning we took a step in that direction following Padmasambhava; in Alan's words: "as you're inverting your awareness in upon your experience of being the agent, don't tell me what you don't see - the question is, what do you see?" Is there an agent? Sure there is an agent. What does come to mind? Then we can ask questions like - is that me? Is it an image of me? Is it a portrait of me?

The meditation is a pointing out instruction of Padmasambhava, from Natural Liberation. But before meditation, Alan affirms: we don't postpone vipashyana because we haven't fully achieved shamatha. He gives us a meaningful parallel. Many years ago, when Alan was first learning of bodhicitta, he was daunted by it - aspire to become a perfect enlightened Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings throughout time and space? Then Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, his beloved teacher, gently said: "you're wrong! It's never too soon to start developing bodhicitta. Don't let your life slip by, you can die at any time." In a very similar way, in Dūdjom Lingpa strategy, we examine the origin, location and destination of the mind, even before we start shamatha - we already sow the seeds for vipashyana. So we're sowing the seeds of vipashyana and bodhicitta from the beginning, and then we get back to the step by step work.

The practice is not going to be easy. But we should take vipashyana as hot chili, just enough to spice our shamatha practice up a little bit.

After the practice, Alan comments on it, emphasizing that we have to be able to identify what we are seeing when we direct our attention to our mind and who is directing the attention to the mind. Who is training the mind? Is there one mind or there are two minds? Is there one mind that trains and another one who is trained? Why don't we simply discard the trainee and keep the trainer? That would be the Buddha, right? Maybe there's only one mind. But when you say 'my mind is agitated', are you agitated too? So, is the mind one or more than one? Which answer to this question makes you feel more uncomfortable? Where are we getting here? The mind is not existent and not really non-existent; the mind is not one nor many; it doesn't really arise and it doesn't really cease; and it doesn't really come and it doesn't really go - Padmasambhava is trying to bring us to an awareness of the mind that transcends the extremes of conceptual constructs, viewing the mind from the perspective of rigpa and seeing the mind as empty of all extremes.

Then, Alan goes back to Padmasambhava's later incarnation - Panchen Rinpoche - reading and commenting on the five 'ways to meditate by cutting through a basis or root to the mind' (*The Main Path of the Victors* page 8). Then he proceeds to the session 'Presenting having extracted the essence of those instructions', up to *The King of Concentration Sutra* excerpt.

Meditation starts at 29:40, extracted from *Natural Liberation - Engaging in the Search for the Mind* (p.116).

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Sunday 20160501

AM

56 Engaging in the Search for the Mind

Alan reminds us the pointing instructions of Padmasambhava when he repeatedly said “observe your mind, observe your mind”. For some people that may be sufficient, for others perhaps just observing the mind is sufficient, but for most of us while we observe this ordinary consciousness of the present, that is what he is referring to, saying this is the same as the Buddha nature, rigpa, this is your ordinary consciousness of the present moment. At the same time it’s perfectly true that we can be aware of being conscious in the present moment and not have realized rigpa, our Buddha Nature. While our Buddha nature is hidden in plain sight, it’s right there where we are looking, because you do not have to look anywhere else, we don’t have to believe anything, we don’t have to add something to it, nevertheless it is hidden in plain sight and then we can ask “what is it that hides it, what is that veils it?” As Alan mentioned before there are cognitive obscurations.

Last week Alan referred to cognitive obscurations as the acquired or speculative delusion or ignorance of thinking that only the things that scientists can measure exist, and that’s exactly what materialists believe: that the only things that exist are material phenomena and their emergent properties because that’s exactly what scientists can observe. But then beyond that there is of course conate ignorance, that which we were born with - grasping onto the true existence of everything that we see, everything that we experience, myself, my mind, my body, other people, the environment and everything else, because phenomena appear to us as if they were inherently existent, and then we trust these appearances. Why would reality lie, why wouldn’t it exist that way? Coming back to our own perception, why haven’t we yet realized our own rigpa, our own pristine awareness, really cut through to the ground pristine awareness?

First of all it’s by reifying ourselves. That I am the subject, I’m really in here, I am really someone and then I look outwards upon anything else and everything else, including my mental afflictions, other people, my own body, everything appears as if it’s truly existent and therefore we grasp onto that. We reify subject, we reify object and out of the reification of subject and object then the two appear and are grasped as being entirely separate, inherently separate, each one inherently existent. That’s conate ignorance and we cannot blame anyone for that, we were just simply born with that. And so, in the strategy suggested by Padmasambhava, he takes us through the very coarse, to medium, to subtle objects of meditation within shamatha culminating in shamatha without a sign, resting in awareness itself, inverting, enhancing awareness of awareness, releasing, enhancing, releasing, oscillating, and then we see that as we are controlling the attention, we are doing something, we are not just being, we are doing

something, and that is this focusing, this inversion, accentuation of the attention in upon itself and then this release out into space and then seeing that “nobody is making me do this, I chose to do this, I’m continuing to choose to do this, I’m doing it again and again and again, and so I’m the agent, someone is doing that and it’s me.

I do have a sense that I’m doing it and I’m not a robot, and so since we have that, the practice is entirely phenomenological, is not ideology driven, not aimed at getting the right answer, and that is as you are oscillating your attention in that way just look carefully, as you invert, invert more deeply, and see just what is your experience of being that agent. Because that is what is reified, that is where the natural reification comes in, the conate reification comes in: I’m doing this. And this happens of course not only when you are sitting quietly in meditation but also when you are doing anything else. I did that! And what comes to mind when you say, “I did that?” “I did a wonderful job, thank you for congratulating me, I’m so proud. Whenever we say I, I, I, we are taking it very seriously and it is reification. But as long as we are operating within the context of reifying ourselves as the subject we will naturally reify everything else which means we will be always in dualistic grasping and that completely obscures rigpa, because rigpa completely transcends any type of reification, any type of dualistic grasping. There is only one subject that realizes rigpa and that’s rigpa. Nothing else can realize rigpa. Rigpa can realize rigpa but you cannot get it inferentially, or intellectually, you cannot see it with your eyeballs, rigpa only sees rigpa. But the very nature of rigpa transcends dualistic grasping, and so as long as we are enmeshed in dualistic grasping then rigpa cannot see itself from our perspective. Because our perspective is in the clouds and rigpa is in the sun. Following Padmasambhava’s instructions in Natural Liberation, Alan takes one step further in his teachings on shamatha without a sign and that is we are not always doing something, at least not deliberately or consciously, voluntarily, sometimes we are just “being there” we are just quietly observing. We can do that like in the lovely Dzogchen metaphor of “the shepherd watching his flock spread on the plain, seeing them from afar”, or the one in the Mahamudra tradition of “an old man watching other people’s children play”. There is no sense of possessiveness; it’s just a sense of pleasant, serene and totally relaxed presence of an old man watching and enjoying seeing other people’s children play. We are emulating that quality of awareness, of just being present, just observing, when we practice settling the mind in its natural state, but then when we are doing that and we are just quietly resting and watching what is coming up, not reacting, not judging, not modifying, not doing anything, do you then have a sense of being the one who is watching? Do you have the sense as if the thoughts were over yonder when you are watching them, as if from afar, as we are encouraged to do? Do you have the sense of being the one over here, the quiet observer? That’s where Alan will take us in the next session of guided meditation. And

when we are just resting there, without doing anything, not even doing the oscillation of the attention, just when you invert your awareness in upon itself see what comes to mind. And the crucial point here is don't look for what doesn't come to mind, don't think you are so clever and come out with the right answer "Oh I looked for myself, I didn't find it! Was it right?" No, you were not right at all, because that was not the question. The question wasn't "do you exist as an observer?" Of course you are an observer! As I'm talking, I'm listening, you are listening, and you are an observer. But Alan is not asking that question, is not asking if you are or not a person. Of course you are a person. We are assuming that you are an observer and that's a meaningful statement, but now when you sense yourself, when you experience yourself as an observer, as you do that what comes to mind? What is your sense of being the observer?

In the guided meditation Alan invites us to Look for the Observer.

After meditation Alan reminds us that in between teaching sessions we have a rich array of practices to avail ourselves of, from the Four Immeasurables, to the Guru Yoga, Bodhicitta, we have an array of shamatha methods and he invites us also to introduce in our practice whatever understanding we have of emptiness, the illusory nature, the dream like nature of phenomena. Alan is like a music teacher and is giving us a broader and broader repertoire of pieces - sometimes jazz, sometimes classical, sometimes heavy metal if you are up to it, which is "cut them off". Alan then explains a nice parallel between the shamatha methods and the four classical modes of a bodhisattva's enlightened activities.

Meditation starts at 12:52

Sunday 20160501
PM

57 Padmasambhava's Instructions that point out Rigpa

Alan begins by recalling Padmasambhava's pointing out instructions presented earlier, stating that if one is extremely gifted, ripe, that could be sufficient to cut all the way through to rigpa, primordial consciousness. We are now going deep into vipashyana

territory. Alan then comments on the practice we did earlier, which engages in the search of the mind with questions.

For the meditation Alan reads Padmasambhava's Pointing Out instructions from Natural Liberation to identify awareness (rigpa).

After meditation, Alan gives a brief recap of Panchen Rinpoche's text. We are now about to venture in the vipashyana methods as taught by the Gelug tradition, after having presented the insight practices found in Mahamudra. In the second part of his talk, Alan quotes a text he translated recently with the encouragement of HH the Dalai Lama, showing the interface between Mahamudra, Dzogchen and Madhyamaka which will be posted on the Retreat notes for today - the anthology will be published in the near future by Wisdom Publications.

Meditation starts at 33:08

[Awareness, Rigpa, Eight Extremes of Conceptual Elaboration, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Madhyamaka]

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Monday 20160502

AM

58 Non-Duality of Luminosity and Emptiness

In this morning's teaching Alan elaborates on the notion that rigpa is right where we are looking when observing the mind. But do we see it? We are looking right at it but not seeing it clearly due to the thick layers of obscurations. However, one crucial theme that pervades all levels of observing the mind, from the coarse to the most subtle, is the non-duality of luminosity and emptiness (seltong in Tibetan). Alan explains that we can see it already at our level of practice. As we observe our mind carefully we can see that it is clear (clarity and luminosity being synonymous) in the sense of being clear of materiality. Alan remarks that this is also corroborated by the fact that consciousness cannot be measured by any scientific means. In our practice we can also see the second facet of consciousness: cognisance. Being aware, knowing - this is something we experience more indubitably than anything in our practice. So in this context, at this level of practice, clarity means empty of materiality while cognisance corresponds to knowing, seeing clearly. Now imagine - says Alan - that you have come to the culmination of the practice of shamatha and you are resting in the substrate

consciousness. What you experience is the fourth type of mindfulness - self-illuminating mindfulness. Now you can really experience luminosity! At the same time you are aware of the sheer vacuity of the substrate and of the luminosity of the substrate consciousness. Then - continues Alan - imagine that you take dharmata as your vehicle onto the path, you become an arya bodhisattva and you have an unmediated non-conceptual realisation of shunyata, of emptiness. Now that's emptiness! But you are still aware of something else, too. You are also aware of being aware - of awareness itself. Hence, you are simultaneously experiencing emptiness and luminosity of your awareness and these are non-dual. Finally, imagine that you take rigpa onto the path and with pointing out instructions you cut through conditioned consciousness. Now you lucidly apprehend the emptiness of all phenomena. You realise dharmadhatu from the perspective of rigpa, of dharmakaya. It is the same emptiness you saw as arya bodhisattva, but instead of realising it with a subtle mind which is still conditioned, you realise it with rigpa which is unconditioned and primordial. That's the true union of luminosity and emptiness. Having taken us through the entire sequence, Alan once again emphasises that although now our minds are obscured we can still see both luminosity and emptiness, but as if looking through three layers of clouds. Alan concludes this part of the session by citing the famous line from the Heart Sutra "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" (explaining that in this context form corresponds to luminosity).

The meditation is on shamatha without a sign (awareness of awareness, directing awareness into space). It is a guided meditation with Padmasambhava's instructions from the book "Natural Liberation".

The meditation starts at XX:XX

[Keywords: Rigpa, Luminosity, Emptiness, Substrate Consciousness, Arya Bodhisattva, Dharmata, Dharmadhatu, Dharmakaya, Shunyata]

Monday 20160502
PM

59 Vulnerable Spot of the Death Star

Before the meditation, Alan comments on the uniqueness of the contemplative practice. He refers again to Kurt Danziger's article ([link available in Retreat Notes](#)), explaining why introspection was largely abandoned by 20th century psychology. According to

Alan, eliminating introspection is comparable to astronomers no longer wanting to look at the sky. One of the reasons introspection was considered a failure was the so called “leading the witness” bias. It was due to the fact that researchers did not perform introspection themselves but left it to untrained subjects who were prone to be influenced in their reports by what the researchers wanted to hear. Alan points out that in vipashyana meditation we often know what the “right” answer is. We are given the object of negation and then seek to see if it really exists. It may be considered “leading the witness”. However, just knowing the answer does not liberate the mind.

Contemplative practice does.

Here Alan speaks of his mission to promote contemplative inquiry and his hope to see the first revolution of the mind sciences. Also: a revival of contemplative inquiry in other traditions, in Christianity, Taoism etc. Next, Alan remarks that there is no parallel to this kind of investigation in the West. He shows that contemplative inquiry is neither like religion nor like science. It does not fit into either category, although contains elements of both. In Christianity faith is crucial. One is given a set of truths to believe in and it is only in the afterlife that one may expect to ascertain them. In education (science) one is also presented with right answers. If students perform tests it is just to confirm what is already known. Only in cutting-edge research scientists look for hitherto unknown evidence. They have working hypotheses but their investigation needs to be objective and unbiased. But does this knowledge transform the knower? Does it liberate and purify the mind? - asks Alan. In this, contemplative inquiry is unique. It shifts the nature of the observer. All this information, all this transmission that we receive here is like a finger pointing to the moon, aiming at transforming the observer, leading him or her well beyond that finger. These teachings may be seen as “leading the witness” because they are helping us to see what others have seen in the past but their aim is to transform us, purify, awaken and liberate us. For this, faith is needed, but it should be faith balanced with intelligence.

Next, Alan gives us a “sneak preview” of the meditation. It is a guided meditation in which instructions are given by Samanthabhadra manifesting as Lake Born Vajra Padmasambhava (based on “The Enlightened View of Samanthabhadra” by Dudjom Lingpa). First, Padmasambhava invites us to identify the agent. We all carry a conate false sense of identity. This is why the place to start is to examine “how do I exist?”. Who is the person I conceive of as “me”? Who fell asleep last night and who woke up this morning? Was it the same person? That being - where did it come from, where is it now and where will it cease? Such investigation, such knowing transforms, awakens and liberates the knower - says Alan.

The meditation is on the emptiness of the mind.

After the meditation Alan comments briefly on the custom of greeting one another with folded hands and a bow. It comes from the Zen tradition and is very meaningful, because it signifies acknowledging the buddha nature of the other person or any sentient being. In the Indo-Tibetan tradition there is pure vision in which, similarly, one sees through the outer appearances to the inner purity of another being. Alan remarks that this is the way His Holiness the Dalai Lama views everybody and in this way is able to draw the best out of them.

Next, Alan continues reading the essay from the collection he translated recently (to be published in the near future by Wisdom Publications) in which the author seeks to make the practice methods from Nyingma Dzogchen and Kagyu Mahamudra compatible with and accessible to the Gelug school. One of the main points to which Alan draws our particular attention is the strategy to realise emptiness of all phenomena through realising the emptiness of the mind. First one needs to establish the mind as primary (the all-creating monarch), then see it as immaterial, and then realise it has no origin, no location and no destination. For a person of sharp faculties this may be enough to realise the emptiness of all phenomena. It is like the vulnerable spot of the Death Star - says Alan (who, as we may have guessed by now, is a Star Wars fan) - it may be enough to hit it with a dart...

In conclusion of today's session, Alan reflects on the often encountered phrase "person with superior faculties". He recalls how he has always waited for the instructions for "persons with dull faculties". But we may often feel we do not possess even the "dullest" faculties. So what shall we do? To encourage us, Alan quotes Dudjom Lingpa's "Vajra Essence" where it is said that only those who have accumulated sufficient merit will encounter the sublime teachings of Dzogchen. So if you are listening to these teachings and they resonate with you and you feel drawn to them, it is not by accident. It means that you already have a lot of momentum. Dudjom Lingpa lists six prerequisites for the practice: belief in Dharma and your guru, trust in the path, awareness of death & renunciation, contentment, insatiability for Dharma and integration of life and Dharma, without complaining. If you have these and you have strong faith and belief - you can realise rigpa in this lifetime. Enough with the afflictive uncertainty - says Alan - it is time to practice!

The meditation starts at 25:15

[Keywords: Introspection, Religion, Science, Contemplative Inquiry, Samanthabhadra, Lake-Born Vajra, Padmasambhava, Dudjom Lingpa, Emptiness]

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Tuesday 20160503

AM

60 Acquiring a Telescope and Merging the Mind with Space

Alan begins by talking about the fact that he would love to see a revitalization of contemplative inquiry, and he reiterates the idea emphasized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama that in Buddhism there is a science of the mind, not just a philosophical or religious tradition. Not everyone who reads science wants to become a scientist, and likewise, this retreat is not for everyone. It is intended for those seeking the path. For the scientific assertions within Buddhism and other traditions to be tested and intersubjectively validated to add to the pool of consensual knowledge about the mind, one needs a reliable tool for observation - a telescope for the mind, shamatha. Alan also reminds us that we don't want to be introduced to Rigpa too soon. As with Madhyamaka, you don't want it to go to your head; you want it to go to your heart.

The meditation is Padmasambhava's placement exam on merging the mind with space.

After the meditation Alan tells us that we will be returning to Panchen Rinpoche's text this afternoon and not to be overwhelmed, saying that outside of the teaching sessions we should focus on the practices that we find most helpful for the remainder of the retreat. And, if your mind is beating you up, release it. Then he tells us what Padmasambhava says we should do if we are of medium or dull faculties.

The meditation starts at 19:49

[Keywords: Contemplative Inquiry, Merging the Mind with Space, Padmasambhava's placement exam]

Tuesday 20160503

PM

61 The Sharp Sword of Intelligence - Identifying the Object of Negation

As we begin to venture into the next section of Panchen Rinpoche's text, in this session Alan starts the inquiry into the object of negation. The object of refutation is a self that exists prior to and independent of any conceptual designation. This is connate

ignorance, but with prajna, the sharp sword of intelligence, we can apprehend the absence of that self. This applies also to all phenomena. In order to expand the discussion of this topic, Alan brings in quantum physics, questions about how the sun, the moon, the earth exist - is the moon really there? Is the earth really spherical? Is Mount Meru existing from its own side? Is there only one approach to exploring reality? Alan highlights the need to bring in contemplative inquiry in the 21st century, as another avenue to understand reality. Before the meditation Alan illustrates Tsongkhapa's assertion that we apprehend reality in three ways:

(1) We attend to appearances (of ourselves, of others, of all phenomena), and all the appearances suggest that they appear as existing from their own side, and we grasp onto them as such, we reify them, we take them as face value. It is connate, it is a root delusion. Whenever any mental affliction operates, in the madhyamaka view, it is always operating from this basis of reifying whatever is the target of our craving, hostility, pride etc. Reified first, and then compounded with mental afflictions.

(2) Then there is the way of an arya bodhisattva who knows through incisive research that no phenomena exist by its own inherent nature. When he/she comes out of meditation, the bodhisattva apprehends appearances as being empty appearances. That's another way of viewing the same phenomena. The phenomena arise, but you see them as empty of inherent existence.

(3) Undifferentiated. The way we apprehend phenomena doesn't crystallize itself to affirm reification nor does it have the insight into seeing the emptiness. It kind of floats without drawing that distinction.

The meditation is on vipashyana.

After meditation, Alan proposes a very interesting thought experiment and then we return to Panchen Rinpoche's text.

Meditation starts at 36:00

[Vipashyana, Tsongkhapa, Reality, Object of Negation]

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Wednesday 20160504
AM

62 Taking Responsibility for Skilfully Addressing Obscurations

Alan reminds us of Padmasambhava's pith instruction that makes the path to enlightenment so easy - to observe one's mind. However, for most people this is not sufficient to progress as we have obscurations, particularly conative obscurations that are difficult to be rid of as we are all so busy, despite that for many of us our survival isn't dependent on such busyness. Alan reviews the operation of some of the types of obscurations including the conative; attentional including the categories of laxity and dullness and of excitation and anxiety; cognitive such as the acquired delusion of scientific materialism that prevents taking introspection seriously, and the conate delusions. In responding to the bias of modern science regarding these cognitive obscurations, Alan mentions some recent research that concludes insects are conscious and Alan congratulates New Zealand has passed a law or declaration that animals are sentient beings. These developments are welcome in that they represent an overturning of the hundreds of year's old mesmerising idea of Descartes that animals don't possess consciousness.

The last type of obscuration – a big one – that prevents our practice development is the emotional. If the emotional obscurations and imbalances can dominate during our wonderful retreat environment, then what will it be like when we return to our regular post-retreat lives? Alan illustrates the range of methods to address an obscuration involving depression. Good mindfulness-based researchers and therapists have discovered that for severe depression, meditation instruction is useless and only skilful psychiatry and use of antidepressant drugs can ameliorate the symptoms. Then once the symptoms are being well managed, the use of talk therapy such as cognitive behavioural therapy are effective. However subsequent to depressive symptoms being reduced there can be a remaining prevalence of general unhappiness and anxiety. So then for someone exposed to Dharma the teachings of Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) and Buddhaghosa's Four Immeasurables provide a profound set of skilful means for addressing emotional obscurations. However it must be recognised that other than for the initial stage of treatment for severe depression, the responsibility for overcoming the emotional obscurations increasingly depends on the individual's own development of skilful means. For the Dharma practitioner, the same approach to taking individual responsibility applies in taking adversity onto the path. Then with the practice of settling the mind in its natural state, one can simply rest in the stillness of one's own awareness and watch the mind heal itself. Alan says that vipashyana meditation can be exhausting and stressful with its demanding questions. In going deeper into the practice there is an increasing need to broaden our base of relaxation.

The meditation practice is initially guided on returning to the still point via the foundations of shamatha by directing the light of awareness on the body and mind, attending to the breath continuously, and mostly grounding the awareness in the tactile sensations. As the conceptual turbulence of the mind gently subsides, then gradually slide the emphasis into primarily being aware of awareness and peripherally noting awareness of the breath.

After meditation, Alan says that we each uniquely bring our body and mind to the retreat, which means that we each have our own strengths and limitations. Our new base camp or default mode post-retreat should be one of more detail of attentiveness and quality of awareness of people and situations as presented without getting caught up in the mental afflictions.

Meditation starts at 26:00

[Keywords: Obscurations, Conative, Attentional, Cognitive, Emotional, Shantideva, Bodhicaryavatara, Shamatha, Stillness]

Wednesday 20160504
PM

63 Reification Is the Root of All Mental Afflictions

Alan says we will return to vipashyana territory, based on the current theme of the Panchen Rinpoche's text on emptiness. Alan describes two technical terms central to Prasangika Madhyamika – the basis of designation (or imputation) and the designated (or imputed) object. He illustrates how each and any of our senses or mental activity can provide valid bases of designation (e.g. the body parts of someone), but that does not mean the designated object (e.g. a person named such and such) exists in the manner imputed. The foundational vipashyana practice of 'in the seeing let there be just the seen' is important to understanding that on the basis of the appearances we designate, impute or project upon the self or phenomena what wasn't there already e.g. imputing permanence or something as a source of happiness.

Alan frontloads the guided meditation first with a clarification on the difference in the practice of settling body, speech and mind for which the culmination is just coming to rest with no object, compared to the shamatha practice of settling the mind in its natural state, in which we attend to one of the six domains of experience (the mental domain) and then we take that all the way to the substrate. The forthcoming practice is to settle

body, speech and mind and then taking the mind as the path, including the appearances arising and subjective impulses such as emotions. Alan says the practice will be to use the sharp knife of discerning intelligence so that whenever a sense of “I” arises relative to appearances or subjective impulses in the mind, see if you can identify the basis of designation and the self that is designated upon that. Doing only this is not delusional, but then the deeply ingrained tendency is to reify that which we designated. This really strikes home when we make judgements about other people as in Alan’s amusing example from today’s news of the likely Republican Presidential candidate. The reification that we do is not just an abstract activity – it is the root of all 84,000 primary and secondary mental afflictions. All afflictions are launched and have power via the delusion of reification. The meditation practice is to shine a bright light on how we impute and reify self and phenomena.

Following meditation practice Alan relates the story of Milarepa and the 5 demons. We then resume the transmission and discussion of the Panchen Rinpoche’s text.

Meditation starts at 21:00

[Keywords: Bases of Designation, Designated Object, Imputation, Reification, Emptiness, Milarepa, Afflictive Uncertainty]

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Thursday 20160505

AM

64 What Do You Want?

Alan reminds us that we are now more than five weeks in retreat and during that time he taught a variety of methods for shamatha, vipashyana and mahamudra. All the teaching he is transmitting are responses to the questions: What do you want? What is your heart’s desire? What will truly bring you happiness?

These questions can initiate a dialog with our deepest dimension, our Buddha nature. From our conscious mind we may ask our heart what we truly desire.

The Meditation is about loving kindness for ourselves and the four vision quest.

Meditation starts at 4:45

[Keywords: What do you want, Buddha nature]

Thursday 20160505
PM

65 Examining our Manifest Nature

Alan begins the session by frontloading the meditation, indicating what sort of inquiry we will find later when we return to the Panchen Lama's text, by reflecting on three questions: (i) how do we exist?, (ii) how do we appear? and (iii) how do we apprehend ourselves? Before moving on to the actual meditation, Alan made some additional comments about the importance of, in our dharma path, actually gaining experiential realization in each section of the path, before moving on to the next one (as a way to prevent accumulating a lot of knowledge, but having no realization).

The guided meditation is on vipashyana, based on the three questions mentioned above.

After the meditation, Alan continues the oral transmission of the Panchen Lama text (Stanza 29), where we continue in vipashyana territory, exploring how do we actually exist.

Meditation starts at 27:40

[Keywords: Vipashyana, Manifest Nature, True Existence]

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Friday 20160506
AM

66 Caring is What Abides, the Lovable Quality

This morning, Alan integrated all theories and practices we've been doing during these last five weeks. He started by coming back to the pith instructions from Panchen Rinpoche yesterday: examine very closely the way of existing or the way of abiding, the

way you appear and the way you apprehend yourself. And then he explained that the way of abiding and the way of appearing are different things, giving two examples: (1) Robert de Niro, as a very gifted actor, appears in many different ways - a villain, a loving father, a father in law - but there is a certain way of his acting that abides as his trademark; (2) fire manifests in many ways - red, yellow, blue, torch, candle, supernova - and yet, it's always hot, burning. We ourselves appear in many different ways even in one lifetime, let alone in many lifetimes - some very agreeable, pleasant and others just repugnant. But in all cases, what is the common denominator? What is abiding, every single day, in all of our manifestations, from the most angelical to the most demonic? What is abiding in each of us individually? In a dream, there is nothing but the appearances of our own minds - what is the commonality?

And then, Alan related this to Loving Kindness. Like in a lucid dream, but in the waking state, when you're a vidyadhara, viewing all phenomena from rigpa, all sentient beings you see are you - all sentient beings, in the whole spectrum, from hell realms to pure lands, are creative expressions, effulgences of your own pristine awareness - all beings are seen with equal purity as displays of yourself.

Alan highlighted one element of Buddhaghosa's analysis of the Four Immeasurables as enormously important to anyone who wishes to more deeply and more broadly experience loving kindness - what is the proximate cause, what is that triggers, catalyses, arouses the sense of loving kindness? It is seeing the lovable quality, the lovableness, the endearing quality, the quality of the other that makes the person worthy of affection, of warmth, of love, of loving kindness. Alan says that we should memorize this for the rest of our lives. If we don't see that, we may go through the routine and we can behave altruistically without being altruistic. Shantideva highlighted that the six perfections are always an inside job, they are qualities of the mind, not qualities of behavior - what we see externally is only the manifestation of that.

Where is the lovable quality? What abides? If we point any of the greatest villains of history, they are never grotesque all the time - think of one of those people when he or she was 3 years old, and maybe falling in love, or tending a garden. Nobody can be that constant and nor can we. We can get in really bad moods but not all the time. So where is the lovable quality? If our loving kindness is going to be based upon the way of appearance, then it is going to be a fair-weather loving kindness. It will never be immeasurable loving kindness if it's responding to "how are you appearing today?" It can't be that way. It has to be something deeper - the way of abiding.

In the Mahayana tradition we have two routes - Maitreya / Asanga and Manjushri / Shantideva. Viewing all beings as our own mothers works very well for people who believes in reincarnation and also that all beings were our mothers in past lives, but in the West it may not work so well. Even if we accept, it can get very abstract. So there is this other route. Shantideva starts out arousing the sense of the equality of self and

other, proceeding to Tonglen and so forth. Then we come back to Panchen Rinpoche teachings, the wisdom track, examining close how you abide - what is constant from moments of your worst behavior and your most sublime behavior? Those are all appearances, come and go - what abides through the course of your life? His Holiness the Dalai Lama has pointed to it: our deepest impulse is caring. In the most sublime and worst moods you're doing what you're doing because you care, and that's hardwired, you can't change that. Our consciousness will still be caring even in the bardo, and it's a common ground. Sometimes the way we express our caring is very harmful, very biased. But caring is right down to the core of buddha nature. The Buddha achieved enlightenment, stood up from his seat in Bodhgaya and set out in his long walk because of caring. Europeans went to Africa in the XIX Century, enslaving, killing, torturing because they cared about their families, not about the Blacks, of course. But when we see a person expressing caring without being disfigured on the way out we say: look! This person is so caring! And when a person like this comes to mind, loving kindness comes, because it is a lovable quality. And then we see other behavior that is still driven by caring but it has got toxified and we find it horrendously evil. But it's coming from the same.

So Alan wrapped up. We can develop loving kindness in shamatha, achieve shamatha by way of loving kindness - it is a loving shamatha, we achieve shamatha in a subjective mode of viewing that is loving. Alan gave the example of a mother gazing at her child sleeping peacefully, and then love, warmth, caring flow effortlessly. She may just linger there. She doesn't need to think 'may you be happy, may you find the causes of happiness'! All techniques are really to bring forth what she's already got, she's already resting in shamatha in loving kindness, for some minutes. Then, she looks to another bed in the room and her child's best friend is there for sleep over. And this child is so similar to her child, equally precious, and naturally gazing to this child, loving kindness is there. Maybe she goes to the window and looks people walking up and down the street and loving kindness is flowing there. And then she sits quietly, with nobody in mind, and she can still dwell in loving kindness. Whoever should come to mind is already a recipient. She has really broken down the barriers - someone who has treated her harshly comes to mind and she sees right through the mode of appearance to the mode of existence. And this person too is worthy of loving kindness. It's a matter of depth. Caring is always the common ground and it is deeper than the outer displays, which are like the weather - they come and go. Loving kindness is rooted deeper in reality.

Now merging vipashyana with loving kindness: can we direct our awareness inwards and see someone who is worthy of loving kindness? Yes! We can penetrate through the myriad modes of appearances to the way we deeply abide, and we see it's just pure caring, and we are deeply caring persons, everyone is, and therefore lovable.

Robert de Niro, Buddhaghosa, Panchen Rinpoche - shamatha, vipashyana, loving kindness, bodhicitta - all the same story.

Meditation is on loving kindness towards what abides in ourselves and starts at 41:08

Friday 20160506
PM

67 Because Suffering has No Owner

We continue to follow the strategy presented by Panchen Rinpoche, examining carefully the way we abide, in contrast to the mode of appearances. As we all know, we appear in very different ways, ever changing - even from day to day, we don't look the same. But in contrast, when we think of our childhood, we think 'that was me when I was a child'. Or when someone says something about us when we were adolescents, we feel 'it's referring to me'. There is something that abides. What is it that bears that continuity? We've already examined that but it's worth coming back to it. It's very helpful not to be locked into this appearance or that appearance, but to have a sense that there is something that continues over time, in this lifetime, and in a bigger picture, from lifetime to lifetime. Alan recalled that once the Dalai Lama was asked by someone in the audience to talk about his actual realization as a way of inspiring people, and he said 'I can remember being with the Buddha'. So, even the Dalai Lama has this sense of continuity. We die every night and we're born every morning - what is this person that abides and appears, and how do we apprehend this person?

Padmasambhava, right after he's finished settling the mind in its natural state and he says 'do this until you're finished', he goes to the vipashyana chapter and the first stage is 'engaging in the search for the mind'. When you're stripped down to the substrate consciousness, to the flow of self-illuminating awareness, you can't remove the luminosity nor the cognisance, the same way you can't take out the heat of the fire. And then we go to the next meditation, we search for the mind and then he points out rigpa. We can't find the mind and then we identify what's left, pristine awareness. We identify what abides

The meditation is on vipashyana.

Alan returns to the text of Panchen Rinpoche, reading the verses of Shantideva on which our last meditation was based: "an individual is not earth, is not water, not fire, not air, not space, is not consciousness, is not all of them. Where then apart from these is the individual?" And then Shantideva suggests, as Padmasambhava and the Buddha

also suggested, that we examine empirically each one of the aggregates, searching for the I. We examine even the self that we hold in our memory, which is not a fiction at all. There is an essential nature of the mind and you identify that when you achieve shamatha; there is an essential nature of fire - it's hot and burning. And there is someone who does abide overtime: Can you find yourself? It's not an absence, it's a presence. Phenomenologically, you first identify it, and then, ontologically, you search for it. Is there anybody there to be found or is it all just appearances? A person has multiple basis of designation but these basis are never equal to the person. Panchen Rinpoche explains why it is not possible to equate a person with each one of the aggregates, individually or collectively, and also why a person cannot exist separate from the aggregates. And then, Alan comments that when we rest in the substrate consciousness and engage in the search for the meditator, we do not find - that was the last possibility of existing outside the manifold of appearances. Not to be found! When we first gain a realization, enabled by an idea - not to be found - this will be a conceptual insight; then we should stop further cogitation and rest in single-pointed equipoise. From within equipoise, examining as before, we maintain the mind in the space-like equipoise. When we come to the point of unfinding and seeing the unfindability, then there is just this openness, spaciousness, suddenly there is emptiness and that is called space-like meditative equipoise. If you're not familiar with the view, fear will arise; if you are, joy will arise. That's why one of the mahayana precepts is 'don't teach emptiness to those who are not ready'. Fear of annihilation can arise even with shamatha practice.

Alan ends by saying that by the power of seeing the emptiness of yourself, you see how you and the sentient beings arise in mutual interdependence. And that very insight into emptiness will enhance your compassion. The grasping to an independent self undermines empathy, compassion, bodhicitta - all other beings are on the other side of the fence. And this is very lonely. Ironically, by realizing the emptiness of yourself, manifesting in a myriad of ways, all interrelated with all beings - we're all intertwined, our very existence, our very being is one of interdependence - how can we not care for the other? Finally he cited Shantideva: "Do I really have to take on my shoulders the burden of the world?" He posed the question to himself and the answer was: "Yes, you do!" The question comes back: "Why?" And the answer is "because suffering has no owner".

Meditation starts at 13:03

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Sunday 20160508

AM

68 Two Routes to Liberation & the Power of Loving Kindness

This morning's session outlined that there are two routes to liberation – one of faith and one of contemplating enquiry. The route we are studying during this retreat is the latter. Alan explained that the near enemy (or false facsimile) of Loving Kindness is self-centred attachment. He guided us to look back and examine the multiple manifestations of ourselves that we perceive as we function in a socially engaged world – some we like, others we dislike, sometimes we are virtuous and sometimes not etc. As we deepen our practice we come to know that these are all mere appearances.

In modernity, it is sometimes said that we need to have courage to love – because pain is anticipated when the “object” of our love is lost. This is a manifestation of self-centred attachment and implies that love is not sustainable. This is not so with the authentic love experienced in Loving Kindness – it is not “lost” as it is not conditional on the object with which we become attached.

We are encouraged to practice and to know ourselves and others as being inherently lovable and worthy of being loved unconditionally and not based on false appearances – seeking something deeper than mere surface appearances on which modern conditional love is based. The authentic love of Loving Kindness cannot be based on attachment to mere appearances as it arises from Buddha nature itself.

Developing the ability to drop our self-centred attachments will establish a good foundation for practice and transformation that is not dependent on any religious belief or faith. We can develop this by coming to rest in Awareness of Awareness (our closest approximation that we can attain of resting in the equipoise of shamatha) and from this perspective turn inwards to examine our own way of being present, how “I” appear, How “I” exist (or apprehend “my” self).

Alan read a quote from the Buddha that describes Loving Kindness as a characteristic of citta (the brightly shining mind), which is already there waiting to be uncovered. He explained that rigpa is always present – as the sun is present even if the sky is cloudy – and that rigpa shines through the lens of the substrate consciousness to illuminate whatever is perceived. This light is not like a torch light being shone through the lens, it stems from our own indwelling mind of clear light, the ultimate ground, which is non-dual and transcendent.

Alan reminded us “Don't look for the Buddha outside yourself”.

Meditation on loving kindness starts at 55:12

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Sunday 20160508

PM

69 Further Investigation of Inherent Existence

We started the session by going directly to the Panchen Lama's text, as Alan revised an initial translation he had proposed for an earlier part of the text. After that update, we continued on that section of the text (stanza 29), which served as the basis for the meditation session, which was silent. The instructions were to rest initially in awareness of awareness, and then return to the investigation on the nature of our existence, using the 3 questions we had already posed: (i) how do we exist?, (ii) how do we appear? and (iii) how do we apprehend ourselves?

After the meditation, we returned to the later part of the text where we had left off, and Alan continued the oral transmission, now through stanzas 30 and 31ab. As previously discussed in this retreat, he added additional comments on (i) possible avenues of practice (contemplative vs philosophical / study routes) and (ii) different forms of investigation of the inherent nature of reality (namely the analysis of causes & conditions, components & parts and lastly, existence based upon conceptual designation).

Meditation is silent and not recorded.

[Keywords: Vipashyana, Inherent Existence]

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Monday 20160509

AM

70 Rewrite the History That Is Blocking Your Heart

"I'm in the mood for weaving" - with these words Alan begins the morning session. And he does weave together - loving kindness, Harry Potter, Stephen Hawking, Shakespeare, Shantideva and much more... Loving kindness stems from the primal

drive of caring. Insofar as the mind rests in its natural state, this flow of caring is unimpeded - says Alan. If we rest in this state and someone is in pain or experiences great joy - our heart is moved. We care even for beings that are not real - movie and book characters for example (here Harry Potter fans may be interested to learn that Alan was truly saddened by the death of professor Remus Lupin...). It would therefore seem that the prospects for immeasurable loving kindness, great loving kindness and bodhicitta are good. However, barriers come up that impede this natural impulse of caring. What creates those barriers? Of course: grasping. Attachment and aversion. Conflating the person or a group of people with what they are not - behaviour, attitude, appearance. Alan quotes Paul Ekman saying that one of the fundamental errors is to equate a person with the behaviour. But we do not need to develop loving kindness for behaviour or attitude. They are not sentient beings. Words, bodies, institutions, political parties etc. are not sentient beings. Loving kindness and caring is for sentient beings. There is always a story behind a blocked flow of caring - continues Alan. And we tend to have the sense that our version of the story, our take on a person is right. Alan quotes William James who pointed out that we are prone to see our conclusions as the only logical ones. Alan instructs us to see who comes up during meditation and what barriers arise. He draws our attention to the fact that these appearances are always painted by our mind, with our colours, they have no existence outside our mind. The same is true for the sublime beings, like HH the Dalai Lama or the Buddha, and for the people we have difficulties with. They all are painted with our colours, by our mind. So when we find resistance to the flow of caring, it is because we are reifying appearances that do not exist outside our minds. We grasp to our version of the story as the only true story. Here Alan weaves together our personal histories with cosmology and quotes Stephen Hawking and Thomas Hertog's paper on the "top-down" approach. According to Hawking and Hertog, bottom-up cosmology is possible only if we know all the initial conditions. But we don't. Instead, our approach is top-down, meaning that our assessment of the past is based on the present. The resulting histories (plural) of the universe depend on the questions asked and the methods of measurement. They depend on what is being observed. Every possible version of the past exists in a quantum superposition state. The same is true about our personal histories - claims Alan. We think we are reconstructing history while in fact we are constructing it, making it up. We should therefore throw out the idea that there is one single true story. Our past with any person is a construction, a story that grew over time. If this story blocks our heart we should rewrite it, come up with a new one - advises Alan. And to conclude he reads two famous quotations - one from Shakespeare ("All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts...") the other from Shantideva ("My enemies will not remain, nor will my friends remain. I shall not remain. Nothing will remain...").

The meditation is on loving kindness.

The meditation starts at 29:30

[Keywords: Loving kindness, Caring, Paul Ekman, William James, Stephen Hawking, Thomas Hertog, Bottom-up Approach, Top-down Approach]

Monday 20160509

PM

71 What Is a “Smordge” and How Does It Exist?

In the next section of the text, Panchen Lama is taking us from the limited domain of examining the self and establishing the absence of inherently existent self to the domain of all phenomena. Alan reminds us of a previous reference to the six elements in the analysis of the self. At that time, we examined these six elements individually and collectively in order to establish that they were empty of self, and that the self was not to be found outside these elements either.

We have not done a meditation on the imputed sense of “mine”, but Alan encourages us to do it during our individual practice. To linger experientially not only in the discovery that these six elements are empty of “I” but also of “mine”. To see how the sense of ownership arises as something objective. And then to see how light, how ethereal it is. To scan through the visual, auditory and other consciousnesses up to the mental domain and see whether with any appearances there arises the sense of “mine”. Is it my voice or just a voice? How mine is my sensation? How about my thoughts, my emotions?

Then we move on to today’s topic: the examination of the six elements themselves to see that they are just as empty of inherent existence as the self. That their ontological status is just as empty as that of the ownership of a cellphone. Before the meditation, Alan raises the question of whether these six elements are inclusive and contrasts them with the elements we know from science - the periodic table of elements. Alan points out that in Buddhadharma the elements are all about the world of experiences. The four elements of earth, water, fire and air refer to everything that arises in the physical world: the earth element is what provides solidity, the water - fluidity, the fire - heat and cold, and the air - lightness and movement. Then there is the domain of space where all these take place. And finally - consciousness which in this context covers all configurations of consciousness, all activities of the mind. In today’s meditation we

examine how these elements exist. How do their manifestations and configurations exist?

The meditation is on vipashyana

After the meditation, we return to Panchen Lama's text. We have already asked: how do we exist? Now the question is: how does everything else exist? Alan underlines that it is very important to read this 17th century text from the perspective of the 21st century and not 19th century physics. Hence he begins by quoting Andrei Linde's article on "Inflation, Quantum Cosmology and the Anthropic Principle". It turns out that if the whole universe is viewed as a quantum system then the element of time "falls out" of the mathematical equation. As if the universe was static. This is called the problem of "frozen time". Andrei Linde explains that the notion of evolution is not applicable to universe as a whole, because there is no external observer with an external "clock" outside the universe. So why do we see the universe evolving? For this we need two pieces: 1) an observer with a "clock" and other measuring devices and 2) the rest of the universe. The universe is evolving dependent on this observer and the measurements. If there is no observer, there is no evolution and the universe is static (or "dead"). Now, from this 21st century perspective, we go back to Panchen Lama, continuing to read verse 30 of the root text. Here the same sequence applied earlier in the meditation on self (way of appearing, apprehending and existing) leads to the conclusion that the six elements do not exist inherently, because they are composites. To illustrate this Alan coins a new term (a new concept) "smordge" which he makes to mean the configuration of laptop, smartphone and eyeglass case together. In this way, by designation, "smordge" comes into existence. And this means that there may be more "smordges" out there, just as there may have been "smordges" in the past and will be in the future. As long as someone designates them. And everything else is exactly like that! - underlines Alan. For example the solar system. It is also a mereological sum. Was it already out there? Does it include Pluto? Where does it end? Does it include its gravitational field? Who decides? It is a conceptual designation, it has the same ontological status as the newly invented "smordge". Here Alan quotes a question posed by another contemporary physicist Paul C. W. Davies: "Without a miracle, how can something come to exist that did not exist before?" The answer is: by conceptual designation!

Next, we read verse 32 of the root text and Alan explains the meaning of the phrase "you do not find even the minutest particle of meditative equipoise and of the one who rests in meditative equipoise". Physical objects can be described using space and time dimensions but configurations of consciousness occupy only a time vector, not a space

vector. Therefore in this context the “minutest particle” must mean particle of time (pulse).

Lastly, referring to the final phrase of the commentary to the root text read today (“Alternatively, the subtle basis for imputing a self is said to be the very subtle energy-mind”), Alan points out that at any time one can designate oneself on the basis of one of the three levels of the energy-mind: coarse, subtle and very subtle. For example, when resting in shamatha, one can designate oneself “I am resting in shamatha”, on the basis of the subtle energy-mind. Similarly, in the bardo, one may use the subtle energy-mind as the basis of designation. And finally, resting in rigpa, the Buddha nature can serve as the basis of designation. In all such cases, as previously, in order to establish how the mind exists, one needs to first identify the mind.

The meditation starts at XX:XX

[Keywords: Six Elements, Phenomena, Problem of “Frozen Time”, Observer Participant, Subtle Energy-Mind]

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Tuesday 20160510

AM

72 Compassion for Oneself and The Path

Alan talks today about the second of the four immeasurables, compassion. Like loving kindness, compassion is an aspiration and requires conative intelligence. It is the wish for sentient beings to be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. As such, we can ask ourselves how we’ve been doing so far at eliminating our own suffering? How is it working out for us?

Alan highlights two points. The first point is that, as Buddhaghosa states in the Visuddhimagga, the proximate cause for compassion is seeing a situation where beings are suffering and they are unable to help themselves, and the second point is that in order to have compassion one must also see that the alleviation of suffering is possible. One must know the causes of suffering and have a vision of the possibility of being free of suffering. In this way, refuge and renunciation might come as natural and intelligent expressions of compassion for oneself. As always, we come back to the theme of path; if there is a path, compassion is possible.

The meditation is compassion for oneself.

The meditation starts at 34:10

[Keywords: Compassion, Four Immeasurables, Path, Marga, Suffering, Dukkha, Conative Intelligence, Renunciation, Refuge]

Tuesday 20160510
PM

73 The Emptiness of All Phenomena

Alan begins the session by commenting on the difference between the way phenomena appear and the way they exist. It's very common when we are pointing the finger at something, at an object or a person, to reify that object or that person. But that object or person appearing really over there, from its own side, autonomous, objective, is a lie, it doesn't exist.

The meditation is on the emptiness of all phenomena.

After the meditation, before returning to the text, Alan expands on Martin Buber's explanations of I-it, I-You and I-Thou relationships. He then resumes the oral transmission and commentary of Panchen Rinpoche's text.

Meditation starts at

[Keywords: Emptiness of All Phenomena, Reification, Appearance, Existence]

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Wednesday 20160511
AM

74 Practicing Compassion by Taking Suffering onto the Path

Alan continues the meditative contemplation of compassion that we may be free of suffering and its causes by describing the aspiration as simple, yet deep and subtle. This is because there are three types of suffering that become deeper and subtler the more we investigate. Firstly, blatant suffering of pain, misery, unhappiness and so on; secondly, suffering of change in that we do not understand that our attachments to people and objects or ways to be happy etc., will change as they are not permanent; and the deepest suffering of the pervasive and basic existential vulnerability to the causes of suffering. Alan says that for our practice of compassion to be wise and effective, then we need to go deep so that we may be free of ALL suffering. The Buddha's first noble truth is to know the reality of all types of suffering, not just blatant suffering. The second noble truth is to know the reality of the sources of suffering arising from karma and kleshas. The root of the karma is the delusion of mental afflictions themselves which are rooted in hatred, attachment and delusion. Alan says in his experience there is nothing enjoyable about anger, hatred etc. As the Buddha said when the mind is overcome by ill-will, then you are sick, as it is not conducive to your or anyone else's well-being. The suffering generated by hatred appears more blatant than that generated by the pleasure we experience in craving or attachment. This is more subtle in that if we investigate closely there is always an element of anxiety about change. Underlying this is the pervasive existential uneasiness or restlessness as stressed in the Pali canon or from the viewpoint of the prajnaparamita approach, constant reification. This is the ground state of all mental afflictions and the root of all types of suffering. Gyatrul Rinpoche stresses that for our practice to get off the ground we need to deeply reflect on the four thoughts that turn the mind, namely: the preciousness of human life; impermanence and mortality; the nature of all suffering; and the nature of karma and its consequences. This generates the view that there is no way to be free of suffering and its causes apart from Dharma. Similar to Christian spiritual practices concerning suffering, it is very much a matter of taking suffering onto the path, rather than avoiding, ignoring or anesthetizing it. We each have to understand suffering at all levels in order to develop empathy and to have deep compassion. Similarly we have to understand our mental afflictions as part of taking the path.

The meditation is on compassion - taking suffering and mental afflictions onto the path.

Following meditation practice, Alan says it is not easy to deal with our reification of objects as we have to investigate how we apprehend an object in the course of the day. However there is a testable assertion that whenever a mental affliction arises it is always rooted in reification.

Meditation starts at 27:47

[Keywords: Compassion, Suffering, Mental Afflictions, Dharma, Reification]

Wednesday 20160511
PM

75 Cultivating Intelligence in Meditation Practice

Alan says that in the context of shamatha meditation there is a pyramid with the foundation being the ease, relaxation and stillness whereas at the top of the pyramid there is the clarity, vividness and acuity. The practice of vipashyana is all at the top of the pyramid. In practicing vipashyana we are cultivating the psychological factor of prajna, which in Buddhist psychology means discerning intelligence. When prajna is cultivated to its perfection, then it is translated as the perfection of wisdom. As an aside we should understand that intelligence is not by itself virtue. There are four types of intelligence to be cultivated. The first three are sharp, fast and clear intelligences which are part of vipashyana practice and hence explains why it can be demanding. The fourth intelligence is profound intelligence and brings about deep transformation.

The meditation is initially guided on the nature of awareness and appearances, followed by resting in our closest approximation of rigpa.

Following the meditation practice, Alan comments that the stronger and more stable our shamatha practice then the sharper and clearer the vipashyana will be, which will lead to the realisation of emptiness. Alan then resumes the transmission of the Panchen Rinpoche text from verse 35, and makes a number of comments and clarifications assisting our comprehension and enhancing our practice.

Meditation starts at 7:00

[Keywords: Prajna, Intelligence, Shamatha, Vipassana, Mind]

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Thursday 20160512
AM

76 Writing Your Own Namtar - Empathetic Joy

Following the classical sequence of the four immeasurables, Alan today turns to empathetic joy or mudita. He explains that the near enemy of compassion is grief and despair or, expressed in a modern term, depression. During the cultivation of compassion, we attend to a great extent to the evil things in the world. Especially for us, living in the 21st century, the exposure through the media to the myriad manifestations and sources of suffering can be overwhelming. Among many other reasons, this can be a reason too, to fall into depression. If we are dwelling in grief and hopelessness, without being able to help ourselves, we are useless to the world.

The natural antidote to the near enemy of compassion is empathetic joy. This is not a superficial look on the bright side of things, but rather balancing out deep insight into suffering with a vision and insight. The Dalai Lama demonstrated this when he was asked about his cheerfulness despite the immense suffering of his people. He answered that it comes from his insight into emptiness. Until we achieve this realization of emptiness, we can use empathetic joy to balance out the depression and despair.

Alan reminds us about the importance of being certain about the object of meditation. When cultivating compassion, we attend to sentient beings who are subject to suffering. In the meditation of Mudita we are taking delight in virtue.

This includes our own virtues too. Especially in the modern world we find very little encouragement to attend to and rejoice in our own virtues, because this can easily be conflated with pride, arrogance and vanity. In this light, it is even more important to focus on the things that bring meaning to our own life, like the cultivation of compassion and virtue. Cultivation of virtue is the only hope for the world in the face of all the mental afflictions that are destroying our civilization and disintegrating the whole planet.

In the search of the virtue that we have brought to the world, we must not overlook the virtue that comes from turning inward like going on retreats and transforming our minds.

The meditation is about empathetic joy.

After the meditation Alan reminds us of the quote from Stephen Hawking and Thomas Hertog about the universe not having one absolute history. Similarly, our own history can be seen in many different ways, especially if we consider the small amount of data points, i.e. exact memories we have of our own past. If we only concentrate on the crappy things of our own history, we easily get depressed. It's like eating dirt.

Thus writers of biographies try to concentrate on the important fact of a person's life in an objective manner.

In contrast to that, Tibetans write namtars, (total liberation) which are spiritual biographies to inspire others to reach liberation. Here a famous example is the life story of Milarepa, which also includes the evil part of his life, but then focuses on his liberation from the bad deeds and transformation into a yogi.

Considering the multiple version of our own history, Alan encourages us to write our own namtar. This can also include the times when we “screwed up” during our life and how we transformed.

Finally, Alan recommends for the time between sessions to attend to the kindness of others and taking delight in it. This can change our world. “Have the antenna up all day”.

Meditation starts at 15:50

[Keywords: Empathetic joy, Mudita, Compassion, Namtar]

Thursday 20160512
PM

77 The Four Types of Mindfulness in Taking the Mind as the Path and Vipashyana

We started the session with a quick review of the four types of mindfulness, with Alan mentioning that usually, for the untrained mind, there's not even the capacity to distinguish between stillness and motion, with cognitive fusion with movements of mind occurring as a most common experience.

Alan then did a review of the four types of mindfulness that we will experience as we embark on the practice of taking the mind as the path: (1) single-pointed mindfulness (which allows us to simultaneously be aware of stillness and motion of the movements of the mind, preventing cognitive fusion), (2) manifest mindfulness (where our practice gets simultaneously subtler, and implies less and less effort – stages 4 to 9 of the shamatha path), (3) absence of mindfulness (where we become aware of only the sheer vacuity of the mind, with both the mental factor of mindfulness and the five senses, going dormant) and lastly (4) self-illuminating mindfulness (where we focus awareness on the space of the mind itself, finally identifying the conventional nature of our mind). In the last point mentioned before the meditation, Alan returned to the familiar theme of the three higher trainings (ethics, samadhi and wisdom), with comments elaborating on

the fact that each of these really manifests greater benefit when used for the purpose they were originally designed, and by the mentioned sequence.

After the meditation, we returned to the Panchen Lama text, resuming the oral commentary, having covered material from stanza 43 of the follow up section of the text, to stanza 45.

The meditation, which was a vipashyana practice on searching for the true nature of the mind, begins at 40:00

[Keywords: Mindfulness, Stillness, Motion, Ethics, Samadhi, Wisdom, Vipashyana]

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Friday 20160513

AM

78 Have a Heart Like an Ocean

Alan starts by saying that this retreat has been embedded in the Buddhist teachings. It would be meaningless to teach Mahamudra in a secular way. It's been wonderful to be totally immersed in a way of viewing reality and a way of practicing and leading our lives that have these three elements, profoundly integrated: the pursuit of happiness, the pursuit of virtue and the pursuit of understanding or knowledge. In the Medieval period, the pursuit of genuine happiness, *eudaimonia*, was not conceivable without virtue; and the highest virtue is knowing reality – these were completely integrated. In Modernity, this integration was shattered – natural philosophy became science, religion became a matter of faith and the pursuit of happiness became more hedonic.

Then Alan pointed that nowadays, for many people, achieving and sustaining emotional balance is very difficult to. As many of us know, Alan has been championing a mental balance model based on four balances – conative, attentional, cognitive and finally emotional balance. Alan briefly addressed emotional balance before coming back to the Four Immeasurables. His way of presenting these balances is describing all types of imbalances. The hyperactivity in terms of emotional balance is overreacting, oversensitivity, lacking stability, ungrounded. Emotional deficit is being dead within, out of touch with emotions. And emotional dysfunction is responding in a way entirely inappropriate, harmful to the situations. In terms of practices, modern psychology has contributed with many ideas, theories and interventions, and some of them has been incorporated in the “Cultivating Emotional Balance” Program, as advised by Paul Ekman. Alan has contributed with the Four Immeasurables as emotional balance

practices, and he has been criticized because some of them - Loving Kindness, Compassion and Equanimity - are not emotions (well, at least, Empathetic Joy is an emotion!). These practices could be included among conative balance practices. But he gave us a metaphor: if someone drops a stone in a cup of water, and if you are a little insect on the surface, that would feel like a tsunami, the end of the world. In a swimming pool, the same stone would only make a ripple; in a lake or in the ocean, the same stone would make a ripple that wouldn't even be noticeable – the same liquid, the same stone. We are deeply habituated to having thoughts, desires, emotions, anticipations and all mental activities – I, me, mine – swirling around, like bees swirling around the hive. During the course of one day, “I, me, mine” thoughts are far more frequent than “the other person” or “all sentient beings”. “I, me mine” is one cup. If all we're attending to is only this little world, then when adversity strikes, in other words, life happens... “Oh, I can't handle this”, “I can't meditate today”, “I can't believe it – someone criticized me!” It's big deal! Emotional balance will never happen, because reality was never meant to be user friendly. So, what can be done? Get a bigger cup, trade it for a lake, and then, trade it for an ocean. And to do that, you just have to attend closely to all those around you - in their sorrows, their disappointments, their fears, their struggles – with your heart and your mind, with your eyes and your wisdom. If you attend closely to their suffering, inevitably you feel it and you care – and your cup gets bigger. As all the suffering we watch on the news becomes real for us, empathy and compassion start to break down the barriers. This can be overwhelming! Then, to balance it, we have to be more attentive to the joys and virtues of others, and let them become real for us. Thus, our hearts become larger. When we go to the Four Greats, then we can view the suffering of sentient beings from the perspective of rigpa, and the resolve “I shall liberate all sentient beings from suffering and the causes of suffering” makes sense. But as long as we view all the suffering of the world from the perspective of a sentient being, the only hope is collaboration, networking, sharing vision and encouraging each other – a kind of “Sangha” restoring the balance on the planet, serving humanity and all sentient beings.

Meditation is on Empathetic Joy and it starts at 24:00

[Empathetic Joy, Emotions]

Friday 20160513
PM

79 Why do Scientists Refuse to Look through Buddhists' Telescope?

Alan starts by explaining that there are two approaches to Mahamudra: the Vajrayana and the Sutrayana. The Vajrayana approach is embedded in the Kagyu tradition, where Mahamudra is placed in the culminating phase of the stage of completion. The assumption is that you've already laid a solid foundation in Sutrayana practice – bodhicitta, realization of emptiness, renunciation – moved on at the stage of generation, then at the stage of completion – the six yogas of Naropa – and then the cherry on the cake would be Mahamudra. In this Vajrayana approach to Mahamudra, what you're realizing is not simply the emptiness of the mind and of all phenomena – that's in the Sutrayana, and then it saturates the stages of generation and completion – you're realizing emptiness and viewing reality from the perspective of the indwelling mind of clear light, rigpa. And then, Panchen Lama presents the Sutrayana path – shamatha and vipashyana, overwhelmingly fathoming the empty nature of the mind. In Sutrayana, you don't have methods for realizing emptiness from the perspective of rigpa. Then Alan comes back to the context of the Panchen Lama text. When you're resting in meditative equipoise the central point is to realize the empty nature of your own mind, and in that openness, there is the luminosity of your own awareness, realizing the union of the luminosity and the emptiness of your own awareness. Then you dwell there, in the space-like meditative equipoise. Insofar you're immersed in dharmadhatu saturated by awareness, conventional reality fades out. But then sooner or later you have to come out, you get off the cushion, and the central theme is to sustain this dreamlike awareness of all phenomena. And the critical point is to be able to see, not simply believe, but viewing how phenomena exist as mere imputations. The real challenge in this post-meditative period is: can you apprehend all phenomena as non-existent from their own side, without reification, as opposed to apprehending them as existent from their own side? Can you view waking appearances as if you were in a lucid dream? If the rest of your life is untouched by your meditative experiences then there is no meaning.

Meditation is on Vipashyana on the nature of appearances.

Alan returned to Panchen Lama's text, from Chandrakirti's quote from *Introduction to Madhyamaka* on, up to the point where Panchen Lama correlates the Four Yogas to the Five Paths.

And then Alan paused to share an article, to prepare us to the post-retreat, when we will bump with people that are not immersed in this world view, meditation, way of life, aspiration and so forth – all our fellow sentient beings. The article, written by Daniel Simpson – Buddhist Meditation and Cognitive Sciences – is available at the link below:

Read the <a href="

<http://www.danielsimpson.info/archive/buddhist-meditation-science-1sd> "> article.

Alan highlighted some provocative things that warrant a meaningful response. Please refer to Mahamudra Retreat Notes – May, 13th for Alan’s notes on this article. Alan has drawn a parallel between modern scientists’ attitude towards Buddhist knowledge about meditation and consciousness and Cesare Cremonini’s attitude towards Galileo’s discoveries. From Alan’s notes: “Cesare Cremonini, was a friend of Galileo and among his contemporaries who refused to look through a telescope to confirm or refute Galileo’s discoveries. He explained his refusal with the words, “I do not wish to approve of claims about which I do not have any knowledge, and about things which I have not seen... and then to observe through those glasses gives me a headache. Enough! I do not want to hear anything more about this”. In this Mudita day, Alan ended on an uplifting note - during his stay in Italy, he met three very fine open minded scientists, in three different research centers, and he will join them next week to talk about consciousness. And finally he said he is giving us a pack full of ammunition, not to harm anyone but if people throw bullshit objections, be merciless.

Meditation starts at 14:45

[Galileo, Cremonini, Buddhist Meditation, Cognitive Sciences]

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Sunday 20160515

AM

80 Developing Pure Vision & the Power of Equanimity

Alan began by introducing the practice of Equanimity and by giving a snapshot of his experience the day before at a virtual reality laboratory founded in 1991 in Pisa. Alan then drew a deeply meaningful parallel between the reality we can experience in a lab with such refined instruments and the reality we experience while we are in a lucid dream. He invites us to do our best to see that all appearances to our mind are empty appearances as in a lucid dream, and yet they are deeply interconnected and clearly influencing each other. This should allow us to develop a sense of equality and an even loving kindness for all beings. We should go beyond appearances, in some way to “see through” them and see that we all have the same Buddha nature. The reason why we do not respond to all sentient beings in the same way, with equanimity, is because

reification comes up and we fuse the person with his or her behaviour, which sometime may be very disagreeable. All that appears to us as disagreeable arises from delusion, from misapprehending our real nature, our Buddha nature. By practicing Equanimity, by seeing the equality of all beings, and by seeing their lovability and pleasant qualities we may go beyond our grasping to their behavioural appearances. But this unconditioned loving kindness needs to be balanced with wisdom.

The meditation is on the cultivation of Equanimity.

After the meditation Alan says that by cultivating pure vision, by purifying the way we apprehend all sentient beings living around us, we can see their lovability and kindness and finally really apprehend their Buddha nature. Alan concludes by making very useful remarks about the proper way to practice Guru yoga and the importance of equanimity, the foundation for all other practices.

Meditation starts at 22:42

[Guru yoga, Emptiness, Pure Vision]

Sunday 20160515

PM

81 Assessing Different Levels of Realization

Alan began the session with the warning that this afternoon's session would be dense, which prompted laugh from everyone in the room, given that all previous sessions have already been pretty dense! He then elaborated on the three higher trainings (ethics, samadhi and wisdom), saying that in the beginning of the path, the importance of ethics could not be overemphasized. He gave some detail on how to cultivate ethics, namely exploring its two facets: non-violence (both overt and covert) and benevolence, with the aim of highlighting the importance of having a solid ethical foundation, so that the impact of our meditation can be optimized. As a way to make these comments practical, Alan paraphrased Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, namely on how to deal with mental afflictions (from chapter 5, "Be like a piece of wood!").

Bypassing comments on shamatha, which we've explored extensively, Alan then moved on to foundational teachings on vipashyana on the nature of the mind, by citing some quotes of the Buddha, from the Pali Canon.

After the meditation, we returned to the Panchen Lama text, with Alan recovering an earlier section from stanza 45, to which he gave additional commentary. The remaining time of the session was dedicated to exploring a contradiction in assessing levels of realization mentioned in the Panchen Lama's text (on the equivalence between the yoga of non-elaboration and the first bodhisattva stage), with Alan recovering a quote from Gampopa's "The Jewel Ornament of Liberation", to elucidate on this contradiction. The rest of the session was an inspiring discourse on the importance of being careful when assessing levels of realization, namely given all the differences of perception that exist between mere beginners and highly realized beings.

Meditation is silent and not recorded.

[Ethics, Shantideva, Path, Gampopa]

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Monday 20160516

AM

82 Prince or Beggar? Who You Really Are... & Cultivating Great Compassion

The "four immeasurables" we meditated on last week are common to many Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. They can be cultivated while striving for individual liberation. Today, however, we cross the "continental divide" - as Alan calls it - to the "four greats". Starting with the great compassion, Maha Karuna. It is sometimes referred to as "unbearable compassion", as even an arya bodhisattva, overcome by compassion, can burst into tears. Especially in the 21st century, in face of so much suffering, so much inequality in the world, one may easily feel disempowered - says Alan. One may therefore wish to become rich, powerful and famous in order to be able to do something to alleviate this suffering. Hence one looks outside for greater wealth, power and prestige - and this attitude is encouraged by the prevailing materialistic worldview. So what can we do to move from immeasurable compassion to great compassion? From the wish and aspiration that all sentient beings be free from suffering and its causes to an actual pledge, a resolution to make this happen? The only way we can do it is from the perspective of rigpa, of our Buddha nature. To make this possible we need to adopt pure vision, to realise our Buddha nature. To illustrate this theme, Alan reads the famous parable of a prince who became a beggar and forgot about his royal origin (the parable is found in Karma Chagme's "Naked Awareness", chapter 4), followed by Karma Chagme's commentary. "Sometimes a story is worth a thousand words of philosophy" - concludes Alan.

The meditation is on the cultivation of Great Compassion

Basta! If you are tired of being a sentient being, just dissolve it, shatter it, release it - says Alan after the meditation. You don't have to wait three countless eons. There is a faster way. "There is no way to enlightenment, enlightenment is the way".

The meditation starts at 25:30

[Keywords: Four Immeasurables, Four Greats, Great Compassion, Maha Karuna, Karma Chagme, "Naked Awareness"]

Monday 20160516
PM

83 Rigpa Is Your Warp Drive to Enlightenment

Tonight we return again to the theme of the path and to the four applications of mindfulness discussed yesterday. This time, Alan gives a presentation of the four application of mindfulness in the context of Mahamudra. First, however, he points out that contrary to some views which present Buddhism as "selfish" - centred only on "me" and "mine", as in "my body", "my mind" - in the four applications of mindfulness the Buddha actually gave instructions to attend to the body, feelings, mind and phenomena internally and externally, and then both internally and externally. Thus, for example, one examines one's mind subjected to mental afflictions and develops kindness towards oneself, and then attends to others and discovers similar mental afflictions and therefore is able to display empathy and kindness towards others as well. It has nothing to do with "selfishness" and self-centredness. Alan then explains why he chose the Buddha's instructions from the Satipatthana Sutta, and specifically the close application of mindfulness to the mind, as the basis for our meditation yesterday. First, he notes that according to those teachings, to achieve nirvana it is sufficient to gain insight into one of those four applications of mindfulness (body, feelings, mind and phenomena) by realising the three marks of existence, i.e. impermanence, dukkha and non-self. With a few exceptions (see the story of king Milinda, Nagasena and the chariot), in the Pali canon there is no reference to the emptiness of phenomena. However, we are here to follow the Mahayana path. Therefore Alan presents the four applications of mindfulness in a different light, namely from the perspective of Madhyamika view. In the close application of mindfulness to the mind, this entails the assertion of the lack of inherent existence of the mind. To "front load" the meditation, Alan reads a passage from his

translation of chapter 13 of Shantideva's "Compendium of Practices on the Four Applications of Mindfulness" (this text was used at the Fall 2012 Retreat on Shamatha, Vipashyana and the Four Applications of Mindfulness, and will be made available to us via Retreat Notes).

The meditation is on the close application of mindfulness to the mind.

After the meditation, Alan returns to the theme of mapping the four yogas onto the five Mahayana paths - a topic he discussed briefly yesterday based on Panchen Lama's text. For today's teaching Alan chose a number of relevant passages from Karma Chagme's "Naked Awareness", chapter 10 on the four yogas. These excerpts, too, will be available in the Retreat Notes. In conclusion, Alan stresses the importance of having a clear vision of the path, a strong motivation to get to the very end of the path to enlightenment. This will propel us through future lifetimes and ensure the suitable conditions to finish what we started. Alan also contrasts the "slow" approach in which getting from the path of accumulation to the path of seeing takes one countless eon with the fast Mahamudra and Dzogchen way in which this may be shortened to just a number of years, i.e. one lifetime. What makes it possible is, of course, cutting through to rigpa. Rigpa is the Warp drive - concludes Alan.

The meditation starts at 35:00

[Keywords: Four Applications of Mindfulness, Marks of Existence, Impermanence, Dukkha, Non-self, Emptiness, Shantideva, Mahayana path, Four Yogas, Karma Chagme]

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Tuesday 20160517

AM

84 The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel and Great Loving Kindness

Alan begins the session by talking about the importance of settling the body, speech and mind in their natural states. After that he goes to "An Introduction to a Parable and its Meaning Taught by Siddha Orgyan" about a wish-fulfilling jewel on page 87 of Naked Awareness. The wish-fulfilling jewel is, of course, our own Buddha Nature. He then talks about the importance of clearing out our sense of ourselves as ordinary sentient beings, in order to practice from a new platform and realize who we really are.

The meditation is on the cultivation of Great Loving Kindness.

After the meditation Alan talks about the metaphor of the dirt-encrusted and hidden jewel and cutting through the layers of delusion, understanding the three marks of existence, realizing their emptiness, and then going down to the ground and realizing who we really are.

The meditation starts at 35:46

[Keywords: Wish-Fulfilling Jewel, Rigpa, Buddha Nature, Great Loving Kindness, Maha Karuna]

Tuesday 20160517
PM

85 “Non-meditation” & The Fivefold Practices

Alan begins by saying that Panchen Rinpoche has made a magnificent job in bringing together these two great traditions of Gelug and Kagyu. Alan then comments that if we are operating from the perspective of a sentient being, it is going to take at least 3 countless eons to achieve awakening. But, if we realise emptiness with the very subtle mind (rigpa), not with the substrate consciousness, then we will be slipping into the 4th time - this is the warp drive. In this way we will proceed very rapidly along the stages and paths culminating in Buddhahood, even just in one single lifetime.

The meditation is on the closest approximation of resting in rigpa - “non-meditation”

After the meditation, Alan concludes the oral transmission of Panchen Rinpoche’s text with the final section on dedication. Then Alan goes back to the book “Naked Awareness” and he begins giving the oral transmission of Chapter 12, which synthesizes both “A Spacious Path to Freedom” and “Naked Awareness”.

Meditation starts at 19:30

[Rigpa, Non-meditation, Dedication]

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Wednesday 20160518
AM

86 The Renaissance and The Revolution Can Begin in Galileo's Homeland - Maha Mudita

Alan continues the teaching on the four greats by venturing into Maha Mudita, Great Empathetic Joy. In the Mahayana Buddhist context, reaching the path of accumulation entails the achievement of shamatha and bodhicitta, and then sealing it with insight into emptiness – there is no going back from there. Alan comments that Buddhism is not evangelical. Moreover, there are many paths from all wisdom traditions, and the book by Aldous Huxley's entitled "The Perennial Philosophy" he read many years ago, provides the idea that all these paths point in a similar direction to the ultimate ground of reality. Consummate scholars of comparative religion such as Huston Smith and Ninian Smart endorse the idea of the perennial philosophy. Maha Mudita then becomes the wish and the resolve that all people of all wisdom traditions find the path within their own tradition. Alan continues that also science could become a genuine path for which we can express the resolve of Maha Mudita. Alan quotes William James to suggest that philosophy can also be a path itself, where philosophy and science complement each other as when knowledge becomes consensual it moves from the discipline of philosophy to science. In each case, as demonstrated by the Galilean revolution, a strategy for developing and entering the path of inquiry is needed. This is evident in the modern 'philosophy of mind' where the nature of consciousness is not being properly addressed due to the path being the prevailing burying of heads in the sands of scientific materialism. An authentic path is thus critical, and we can express the aspiration that all people enter the path of their own wisdom tradition. Alan also comments on the power and blessings of devotion to Amitābha and the aspiration to enter Sukhāvātī. Alan continues commenting with examples on the lack of consensus in philosophy after more than 2000 years, and the dominance of modern science, and says there is a need for a revolution in the mind sciences to overcome the prevailing paradigm of scientific materialism to promote genuine well-being for all. Alan says the Tuscany retreat and potential Contemplative Observatory is in the right neighborhood for such a revolution, given the scientific revolution began in Galileo's Pisa and the Renaissance in Florence. A renaissance in contemplative inquiry of all the paths of world religions is necessary so that all beings may never be parted from genuine happiness free of sorrow. For any of these to be a path, we need to explore the nature of the mind and the observer. We need to achieve shamatha, which is pure technology.

The meditation is on Great Empathetic Joy.

Following the meditation, Alan comments on the current prominence of movements throughout the world of religious fundamentalism and scientific materialism.

The meditation starts at 1:00:00

[Keywords: Maha Mudita, Great Empathetic Joy, Path, Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy, Huston Smith, Ninian Smart, Daniel Matt, William James, Galileo, Science, Philosophy, Amitabha, Sukhāvati, Shamatha, Fundamentalism, Materialism]

Wednesday 20160518
PM

87 A Parable with Pointing Out Instructions to Cut-Through to Rigpa

Alan first reads and discusses two of the parables and commentary in Karma Chagme's text "Naked Awareness" on page 88 of the orphan son, and page 89 of an old man losing his cord. He comments on realising the nature of one's own mind right down to the ground – the in-dwelling mind of clear light, Dharmakaya, Buddha-nature. Then Alan comments on the different approaches found in the Gelug and Dzogchen traditions.

The meditation is a guided Avalokiteshvara practice based on Karma Chagme's "Naked Awareness".

Following meditation practice, Alan resumes the oral transmission of Karma Chagme's text from page 264.

Meditation starts at 24:08

[Keywords: Parables, Rigpa, Karma Chagme, Emptiness]

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Thursday 201605119
AM

88 Great Equanimity in the light of Dzogchen

Note: this is the only lecture for today, 19th May, because Alan will give a public talk at the University of Pisa.

Alan starts with reading “The analogy of seeing a rope as a snake” from “Naked Awareness”, on page 91. Here a man mistook a rope for a poisonous snake and got frightened until a friend showed him that it was just a rope.

Alan comments that there was no eye dysfunction. While the visual perception is always non-conceptual, in a very short time, the conceptual mind takes over, reconfigures, colorizes, dominates and reifies the experience. In the case of the snake this was clearly a false conceptual designation stemming from ignorance and delusion. “Out of Avidyā comes Moha”. Out of lack of awareness in the visual field comes the delusion of misapprehending the rope as a snake.

In Dzogchen it is strongly emphasized that the rope has never been a snake and therefore the fear is not based in reality. Likewise, when we ask ourselves why our own mind is tormenting us with mental afflictions, a spiritual friend will point out that we are not a sentient being. We have to shift our perspective.

Alan recalls what he learnt when he was in Dharamsala long ago: It is never too soon to cultivate Bodhicitta. Likewise, it is never too soon to be introduced to the Dzogchen view.

Alan continues elaborating on the four reliances from the Kadampa tradition.

1. Don't rely on the person, rely on the Dharma.

Some people are having faith in the Dharma because the Dalai Lama is such a great being. For having faith in Dharma there are two entrances. People with dull faculties have faith into the Dharma by way of an individual. People with sharp faculties have faith in the individual by way of the Dharma.

There is a great danger of reifying individuals which results in taking refuge outside our own mind streams and outside rigpa.

2. With respect to Dharma, don't rely upon the words, rely upon their meaning. This means taking refuge in what the words are referring to, without clinging to the words themselves.
3. Do not rely upon the provisional meaning, rely upon the definitive meaning.

The provisional meaning refers to a specific context and perspective. The Kalachakra Tantra states that there is no definitive description of the world. This is in line with the statements of Stephen Hawking and John Wheeler.

All the teachings of the Dharma, like the four noble truths and the twelve links of dependent origination are provisional, except the teachings on emptiness.

4. Don't rely upon conditioned consciousness, rely on primordial consciousness.
Conditioned consciousness refers to the fifth aggregate, consciousness, which arises upon cause and conditions. It also refers to the substrate consciousness. Primordial consciousness refers to rigpa, which is always present and active. We also can use the term intuition, which is a way of knowing that is not simply an observation of a phenomena or deferred by logical reason. It's a type of knowing which is primal, deeper and mysterious.

Alan continues reading a passage from the "Vajra Essence" which explains the difference between conditioned consciousness and primordial consciousness. It will be in the notes of today. Alan put special emphasis on the last sentence: "What arises is closely held by conceptual consciousness; it is bound by reification, and you thereby become deluded. Knowledge of the reasons for this brings you to primordial consciousness".

The question on the origin of samsara can now be answered. It's every moment. From the perspective of rigpa we don't have a history of a sentient being.

The meditation is on cultivating Great Equanimity.

After the meditation, Alan recommends to shift our perspective from the hedonic aspects of life to the cultivation of eudaemonia, which isn't binary, but rather a smooth spectrum, and culminates in the development of Bodhicitta.

Alan reminds us of the verse from Atisha's seven-point mind training: "Be always of good cheer" and recommends to welcome whatever arises to us. It can be a challenge for doing very constructive things that will bring about a meaningful change in the world.

Alan concludes with the statement that reality rises up to meet us. Instead of simply experiencing the results of previous karma, which is merciless and without compassion, we could rise up to meet reality with equanimity. From the center of our own mandala and with respect to our own well being, we shouldn't reify our own suffering and watching it from the perspective a sentient being, but instead shift our perspective.

Meditation starts at 48:00

[Keywords: Equanimity, Four Reliances, Dzogchen, Bodhicitta, Conditioned Consciousness, Primordial Consciousness]

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Friday 20160520

AM

89 What Do You Want? Be Content or Become a Siddha?

Alan begun this morning Dharma talk with one of his favorite parables (*Naked Awareness* p.93), and it is about a king who asked an illusionist to create an illusion as a means of causing his son to be drawn to Dharma. Alan pointed that just as the prince couldn't recall the very first moment of falling into that trance – otherwise he would be lucid –, we are never able to recall the first moment of a mind wandering – otherwise we would be aware and able to say “hello thought, good bye thought” and not lose our minds. The same goes for non-lucid dreams. Dharmakirti has defined something that exists as something that is fit to be known. Similarly, Heisenberg said “let's not attribute reality or existence to what is unknowable in principle”, referring to quantum measurements you haven't done yet, as what you measure arises relative to your system of measurement and in response to the questions you've posed. So, the first moment of a mind wandering or, if we take it seriously, the first moment of samsara, as we were unaware, is not knowable in principle – samsara has no beginning. The implication here is that we've literally had infinite lives, meaning we've had infinite opportunities to meet spiritual teachers, like the Dalai Lama, Gyatrul Rinpoche and so forth, and reach the path, and yet, here we are! This leads us to cultivating a daunting resolve of leading all sentient beings to complete freedom from suffering. And for this to be serious and meaningful, we've got to have a clear vision of the path. So – make it personal – today, as you've encountered such Dharma, such teachers, spiritual friends and so forth, what is your strategy to move from here to enlightenment? How rare is it?

Before meditation, Alan shared a bit of what happened in his lecture at the University of Pisa yesterday. His gracious hosts were a professor of Information Engineering and a neuroscientist and Alan was asked to give a bold presentation on “A Radically Empirical Approach to the Study of Consciousness” and so he did. After his (certainly brilliant) presentation, including his comments on Contemplative Observatory and the possibilities of having scientists and very well trained meditators together right there in Tuscany, they said “thank you”. Then, an elderly professor asked Alan to comment on the viability of robots being conscious and having feelings. Alan demolished this notion and said it was pretty much science fiction. And then the professor turned to Alan's

presentation and said “everything you said is science fiction. All the progress humanity has made has been made by Europeans.” And that was the end of conversation. A neuroscientist spoke to Alan, after his presentation, saying that if there was a neuroscientist that agrees with him, he would lose his job. It really is an environment of fear. When Alan was leaving, a very gracious woman told him, away from everybody else, that she was so grateful to hear his words on consciousness because she had experiences that resonate with what Alan was talking about, and he showed she was not crazy. But, at least for that professor, all the logical arguments that Alan presented made no impression. His Holiness said some years ago that if we achieve shamatha we will be able to display some siddhis and, in many occasions, he said that some of us should really practice and achieve shamatha. Alan commented that pratyekabuddhas make the resolve of achieving their own individual liberation in those eras of history from the time of one Buddha to the next. Maitreya for instance will not appear until the teachings of Buddha Sakyamuni have completely vanished without trace. This will be a very dark age for Buddhadharma, and for this reason, teachings on the Four Noble Truths will not even be heard. But it will be possible to make an impression by demonstrating very high tech siddhis to people, like levitating, let flames burn from the top of the body and let rain fall from the bottom of the body, all simultaneously. This could catch the attention of this primitive arrogant people. First this Buddha will have to blow their minds and then sow the seeds of Dharma. Atisha said we can’t develop paranormal abilities without shamatha; therefore strive in shamatha. Then we’ll accrue more merit in one day than in a hundred lifetimes.

So, what do you want? Do we want to do the plan you had yesterday or would you like to do everything you possibly can to become a siddha? Let’s start a Revolution; let’s start a Renaissance, for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The meditation on cultivating the extraordinary resolve starts at 50:45

Friday 20160520
PM

90 Alan Has Arranged a Marriage with Avalokiteshvara for Us

The next session of the text in this chapter is on guru yoga (*Naked Awareness* p. 273). In the introduction, Karma Chagmé says “The best way to counteract obstructive forces, avoid pitfalls, and enhance your practice is guru yoga.” The central point of this practice is to realize the indivisibility of your own mind with the mind of the guru, or *rigpa*. It means that this practice is designed to melt away any sense of difference, any

separation, between your ordinary consciousness of the present moment and Dharmakaya – to see your own face as the Dharmakaya.

Some people for many reasons may be more devotional than other people, the same way some are more artistic than others. Also, not being born in Tibet, not being raised with mantras and deities, this practice may not seem very natural. So what to do if you're not devotionally inclined? Alan compared this situation with an arranged marriage – the couple may not be in love in the beginning but, if there are no objections, it ends up working well. This practice we've just done is very simple, very sweet, and straight forward; so, If you feel like it, just do the practice, even if you don't have tears falling from your eyes. That's ok! Just do the practice! In the beginning, when we look at our guru, what we see is just reflections of our own minds, our own karma – impure appearances. But as one purifies the mind in the Mahayana path and gets to the Path of Accumulation, one really sees the guru as a buddha, a nirmanakaya, not imagining and not pretending – one really has the sense of being in the presence of the sacred, of a buddha. The guru does not necessarily change during the years or lifetimes of practice but the veils of your own awareness fade away. And then, when one progresses on the path and achieves the second yoga, freedom of conceptual elaboration, then from this perspective, from rigpa, you see the guru as Avalokiteshvara , sambhogakaya – just as Khandro-la saw a thousand-armed Chenrezig when she met the Dalai Lama. Then Alan said that seeing our own guru as Amitabha will be very good for us; if we're drawn to this simple practice, we should do it sometimes – let it be an arranged marriage! Faith is like intelligence, it's like shamatha, it's like learning how to play piano – you do it more and more, you cultivate what you have and it grows. Doing this practice you may receive blessings, know you're receiving blessings and then you will know your refuge is really not far away. If you're able to look through your guru, whoever he or she is, seeing his/her empty body, empty speech and empty mind, attending to buddha's body, speech and mind, your guru will be Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, or Guru Rinpoche. And then, at the end of your life, you couldn't do any better than hold the sense of your guru placed on the crown of your head. This will be really a good idea.

Alan elaborated a little bit on how we deal with appearances according to the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. And then when we come to guru yoga, the teachings of Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara, Guru Rinpoche, on pristine awareness, we don't get it by observing appearances or by analyzing them very profoundly. The intended audience here in Dzogchen is pristine awareness itself – Padmasambhava is talking to your pristine awareness. Actually, your own pristine awareness introduces itself to your mind. The guru is there as a reflection, a projector, and he has the appearance of pointing out your own rigpa to you.

And then Alan returned to the text, Naked Awareness, page 274, moving to bodhicitta, love and compassion. Alan encourages us to practice tonglen, within the context of pure vision, as described by Karma Chagmé on page 275, imagining our own form as Avalokiteshvara.

The next paragraph is on *tögal* or direct crossing-over. Alan commented that in those instructions, the posture is very simple, the gaze is very simple, and to do this practice resting in rigpa is also very simple – for those who have realized rigpa. There is nothing wrong about receiving teachings on direct crossing-over with no realization of rigpa. If you receive them, the seeds are there; so it's up to you and your lama. Then Alan read and commented on the text up to the two paragraphs on dedication.

And finally, Alan said that tomorrow they will all be visiting Castellina Marittima! Khandro-la has already been there and blessed the land, and Alan wishes His Holiness to come and bless the land.

The meditation is on guru yoga and starts at 3:15

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Sunday 20160522

AM

91 The Essence of Buddha Nature or Sugatagarbha - Bodhicitta

To introduce the essence of Buddha nature, Alan reads and explains the final parable of the chapter “An Introduction to Parables and Their Meanings” from page 94 to 96 of Naked Awareness. There is an analogy between Buddha mind and our mind: like the essence of gold is immutable, even if you can melt it and mould it into many different forms, similarly the essence of our mind is immutable all along, while we wander in the cycle of existence. If the essence of our spiritual awakening were not present in our mind-stream, the fruition of spiritual awakening would not be possible.

Once we know this, there are 3 steps to be taken to enter into the practice: first hear the teachings. But the mere acquisition of knowledge alone will not suffice, it will not purify or transform your mind. The second phase is to contemplate the teachings and try to understand their meaning. This pondering on the teachings may give rise to a mere theoretical or intellectual understanding which cannot truly eradicate the source of suffering. Therefore the third step to be taken is meditation. By doing this practice, meditative experiences will arise, and at the beginning they will be sporadic intuitions

and they will easily fade away. By continuing the practice there will be a deepening of our previous experiences and meditative realisations will arise. These first realisations are defined “togpa” and they still may fade away.

However here you know you have nailed your previous understanding and by continuing the practice these realisations will be nailed down even deeper and they will become “den-togpa “, and you will have identified with certainty your own mind itself as the Dharmakaya.

Meditation starts at 26:00

Meditation is on ultimate and relative bodhicitta

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Sunday 20160522

PM

92 Conclusion of Naked Awareness & Pointing-out Instructions from The Vajra Essence

Alan started the session by going directly into meditation, in a practice where we directed our awareness towards the space of our body, the space of our mind and, finally, awareness itself.

Following the meditation, Alan did a quick reflection over the theme of strategy for our path, highlighting as before some of the underlying assumptions behind scientific materialism.

Afterwards we returned to Naked Awareness, and Alan concluded the oral transmission of the text, with a closing section on how to proceed at the time of death, in case our level of realization is not the one we're currently hoping for. A possible strategy in that situation is to pray in order to be reborn in Sukhavati, a pure land which is outside of the realms of samsara, being a creation of Buddha Amitabha.

In the last part of the afternoon's teaching, Alan shared the oral transmission for pointing out instructions from Padmasambhava, by way of Dudjom Lingpa, in Alan's cherished Vajra Essence, that way ending new teachings during this retreat.

The meditation started at 01:00 - Non meditation.

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Monday 20160523

AM

93 Final Meditation and Q&A session

Alan started the session with a guided meditation summarising all the practices we have done during this retreat, culminating in Dzogchen non-meditation. It is never too soon to begin the Dzogchen practice and on occasion try to rest in non-doing, non-meditation - says Alan. It is good to sow the seeds for future practice.

The rest of the session is devoted to questions from participants, especially those who have not had their interviews with Alan.

The questions asked concern:

- 1) Vipashyana meditation and whether one needs to always go through the entire sequence of not finding the mind, its colour, shape etc.
- 2) Further and more detailed instructions on lucid dreaming.
- 3) The possibility of collaboration with other yogic traditions and with scientists in the field of contemplative science.

The meditation is a combination of shamatha and vipashyana methods, culminating in resting in the best approximation of rigpa.

The meditation starts immediately.

[Keywords: Dzogchen, Non-meditation, Non-doing, Emptiness, Vipashyana, Lucid Dreaming, Contemplative Science]

Monday 20160523

PM

94 Dedications & Celebrations!

Alan ends the 8-week retreat with a meditation. Celebrations follow.

End of retreat synopses