

**Mind  
and  
Reality**

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# Table of Contents

<b>TO PACIFY THE MIND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
TWO MEDITATORS .....	1
BEING AT EASE WITHOUT ATTACHING TO IT .....	3
<b>THE METHODS OF PACIFICATION – I.....</b>	<b>5</b>
INDEPENDENT MIND VERSUS DEPENDENT MIND.....	5
TO TAME THE MIND .....	6
MEDITATION ON THE BREATH.....	7
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A).....	9
<b>THE METHODS OF PACIFICATION – II .....</b>	<b>12</b>
WALKING MEDITATION.....	12
THE MEDITATION OF GIVE AND TAKE.....	13
BRINGING IN THE ANALYTICAL TO THE SITTING MEDITATION .....	14
FOLLOW A PROGRAM OF MEDITATION SUITED TO YOU.....	15
ADOPT A SUITABLE LIFESTYLE TO SUPPORT MEDITATION .....	16
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A).....	17
<b>INSIGHT MEDITATION.....</b>	<b>20</b>
THE ESSENCE OF MIND IS EMPTINESS .....	20
THE NATURE OF MIND IS CLARITY.....	22
MIND IS UNOBSTRUCTED .....	23
THE MEANING OF EXTRA VIEW .....	23
<b>SUPPORTS OF MEDITATION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
AN IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING.....	25
PRACTISE VIRTUES .....	25
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A).....	27
<b>KARMA.....</b>	<b>33</b>
THE EIGHT CONSCIOUSNESSES .....	33
HOW KARMA IS PRODUCED AND STORED .....	34
WHEN KARMA RIPENS.....	34
KARMA RIPENS IN THREE WAYS.....	35
MERIT REMEDIES THE NEGATIVITY .....	36
THE BARDO .....	37
TO BE FREE OR NOT IS OUR CHOICE.....	37
TWO TYPES OF KARMA .....	38
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A).....	40
<b>MAHAMUDRA.....</b>	<b>48</b>
A PROPER VIEW .....	48
CONFIDENCE IN BUDDHA NATURE.....	48

VEILED MIND .....	49
A MISTAKE OF DUALITY .....	49
EMOTIONAL MIND SUSTAINS DUALITY AND GIVES RISE TO THREE ROOT EMOTIVE CAUSES .....	50
OUR LIFE IS OUR OWN MAKING .....	51
DREAM .....	52
TO SEE THROUGH OUR REALITY NOW .....	53
COMPASSION .....	53
SEE THROUGH THE CONFUSION USING PACIFICATION AND INSIGHT .....	55
AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF MEDITATION .....	55
NO PRECONCEIVED AGENDAS .....	56
GENERATE POSITIVE ACTIONS .....	57
REFUGE .....	57
TO REDUCE SELF-CENTREDNESS .....	58
DEVOTION .....	58
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A) .....	60
<b>THOUGHTS AND VEILS IN MEDITATION.....</b>	<b>67</b>
UNMOVING KARMA AND POSITIVE/NEGATIVE KARMA .....	67
INSIGHT INTO THE NATURE OF MIND FREES US .....	68
TO SEE THE NATURE OF MIND AND THOUGHT .....	69
VEILS OF THE MIND - EMOTIONS .....	70
THE VEIL OF RIPENED KARMA.....	70
THE VEIL OF KARMA JUST RIPENING .....	71
THE VEIL OF POSITIVE KARMA .....	72
THE TWO SUPERIOR VEILS .....	73
QUESTION (Q) AND ANSWER (A) .....	74

# To Pacify the Mind

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On the theme of “Mind and Reality”, we present first a basic construct and then we will develop it step by step.

Two kinds of mind are possible: confused, or not confused. A mind in confusion gives way to faults, faulty perception, or faulty functioning. One could say that it has a mistaken idea of itself. Such a mind is pre-disposed to all sorts of disadvantages and apt to commit a great many errors. In contrast, a mind when freed from the influences of confusion becomes a source of an endless supply of amazing qualities.

Mind is fully capable of clearing away its own faults. It can purify itself, while at the same time, develop its own qualities. In other words, mind can be in control of itself. But this control is a skill, and like any other skills, must be acquired through training.

Training begins by first establishing a state of pacification or tranquility, attended by ease. Pacification of mind can only develop among conditions conducive and facilitative to its growth. Outer distractions and disturbances are clearly not calming to the mind and are to be avoided. When mind places itself in a very busy and active environment, to be tranquil proves plainly difficult. What is therefore necessary at the outset is to keep external distractions to a minimum. This requirement is only temporary so long as we lack control over our own mind. Eventually, when we can experience a stable inner pacification, we will be able to maintain it under any circumstances, in any milieu.

Ultimately, it is our own inner tendencies that obstruct and prevent us from experiencing mental calm. These tendencies arise in the mind as uninterrupted connections of thoughts, from one to the next, in an endless chain. However peaceful a dwelling we may have procured for meditation, to attain mental pacification, we must face this constant stream of inner thoughts which is the real situation of our mind. In fact, we will not experience tranquility if we are troubled from within.

The internal disturbances are what we call the ‘*simultaneously created obstacles*’. Difficulties are inherent in a mind that is thinking so they will continue to arise. On the other hand, if we are able to develop an inner state of tranquility undisturbed by the thinking, then whatever the outer situation — be it pleasantly peaceful or noisily distracting, we will feel peaceful in either case. Therefore, to pacify the inner mind is our main aim and focus.

## ***two meditators***

On the part of the meditator, much effort is required in the beginning. In addition to arranging an external environment as free from distractions and disturbances as possible, we also have to really exert ourselves. We must do very extensive research about our own mind in order to establish the meditation. I know of a practitioner who had gone to meditate in a cave. Even though he expended considerable time to

meditate, he could not develop his concentration. He was drawn into developing a whole project around his cave — how to maximize the use of it!

In contrast, another meditator I know has considerable responsibilities requiring his regular attention. He cannot retreat to a cave and yet his meditation is very successful. During his workday, this meditator simply goes about his daily duties without complaints, neither avoiding nor rejecting his duties. But, all his free time is devoted to meditation. He also had a very good meditation teacher, who had guided him correctly. And so in this way, over a significant period of time, his meditation has developed to such a point that when he sits down to meditate, he is able to do it for a whole day, forgetting completely about his family, and other situations. He would even forget to eat lunch. Several times, people went looking for him rather concerned that he had not come out of his room at all. His meditation is, in fact, very successful. As to the first meditator, I do not know whether he is still meditating in his cave or whether he has left it.

Once, I asked the successful meditator in person how someone like him, despite his great responsibilities and worldly activities, could be so successful in meditation. His answer led me to conclude that it is because he has neither hopes, nor ambitions aside from his practice. He is not constantly planning and aiming to be successful in anything. He simply devotes himself regularly to the practice of meditation. And it is this approach that has brought him the significant results. He does not usually engage in a lot of conversation being quite an introvert. His response to my query was straightforward. In his view, he was basically following the logic or understanding about life his meditation teacher had taught him. And what is that? It is that the only thing which would solve all of life's experiences, is the practice of meditation. Nothing else could produce any long-term solutions. And so, the meditator deduced that the best thing to do in his spare time would be to just meditate. He does not invest any of his energy in any other pursuits or considerations. This is precisely why he can simply apply himself to meditation throwing away, rejecting, or abandoning all hopes, concerns, or ambitions connected to the ordinary things of this life.

My analysis also revealed another reason. Where is the source of inner distractions? The answer is obviously the mind. We are distracted when our mind attaches to all sorts of ideas and experiences. In the case of our successful meditator, he has chosen to let go of all such concerns, and so he can remain undistracted in his meditation. If we do not have a firm control over our mind, then very easily, we could be led astray in meditation. Therefore, we should be very aware of our mind's situation. Otherwise, even a soft, or slight attachment could gradually lead to agitation. What we do with any experience that arises during meditation will determine our ability to continue to meditate. Obviously, a gentle irritation would not be as troublesome for us as would a strong one. But gentle or strong, we have to know what to do with it. For instance, we might hear the noise of a car and feel slightly troubled, but not enough to be distracted from our meditation. If however, we insist on attaching to the car's noise then we will become really bothered by it. Then in effect, we have been drawn away from our meditation. Whatever the experience during meditation, we must remain unconcerned and detached from it.

As long as we are constantly engaged in a thinking process, which is uninterrupted, then our mind is not yet pacified. This means the thoughts are coming one after another in a chain. We experience them as unbroken, and they disturb us. We experience agitation. The agitation actually comes from our attachment and our grasping. It is a strong feeling of a self, which is ego-clinging, the root of evil. You could no more stop this self-attachment than find it. But it is this feeling of ego-clinging that gives you all kinds of problems.

***being at ease without attaching to it***

When our mind is pacified, we feel that it is something pleasant. Our mind feels at ease. The mind is happy with itself. This happiness is the very nature of mind, which will not change. We rest in this nature of mind naturally at ease. We might perhaps also know of times when we feel equally at ease; but that feeling of ease is not the real and natural peace simply because it is not *unchanging*. It will inevitably change into feelings of dissatisfaction or of being fed up. However, if we know how to pacify the mind by following the proper instructions and advice from a qualified meditation teacher or from the teachings, then we, too, will come to experience an unchanging or a very stable experience of *being at ease*.

The many books on meditation and the many meditation teachers you may encounter will all agree on the very importance of a mind peaceful and at ease. You may then wish for it or try to create it in your mind. You may apply great effort into being peaceful. Essentially, you are grasping. However, a grasping mind is also one that is distracted very quickly. As a result, through your effort, you will feel some pacification but at the same time, you are grasping at it. Because that mental calm comes through your own exertion you will feel stuck or blocked at the same time. Sooner or later, it will change into something else and it will distract you instead. This is because you have managed to ‘*develop*’ the feeling of peace in your meditation so it is rooted in clinging and therefore unstable. For this reason, the highly qualified teachers always advise us to be very careful, and cautious about not getting attached to the peaceful state either. When the peaceful state comes, we must remember the remedy to prevent clinging to it.

This very point I also discussed with the successful meditator: did he have trouble with not attaching to the mental peace? He confirmed that the attachment was indeed difficult to overcome because the state of peacefulness was really limitless. It was very difficult not to attach to it. He had more difficulty trying to detach from mind’s ease than to control mind’s agitations. The caution the teachers give us is therefore justified. The tranquil quality of mind is the real nature of the mind and as such it has no limit. Yet because the root of the confused mind is not yet eliminated, we run the risk of being caught by the tranquility. You will attach, you will grasp, and then you will again be confused by the hidden agitations. Therefore, another remedy is needed. It is the experience of voidness, which will be explained later. Being non-dualistic, the experience of voidness is effective against this type of attachment to meditation.

To summarize in brief, in order to experience a profound feeling of pacification or tranquility, we need to be free of hope or expectation. When we sit down to

meditate, we should be free of fear, or hesitation, keeping our meditation steady. We should understand that to attach to the tranquility of mind is also an inner obstacle so that when the time comes, we will be careful not to commit this error.

# The Methods of Pacification – I

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We now look at the methods that could enable us to experience a calm or a tranquil state of mind. It goes without saying that we need to know the methods but moreover, how we implement them is equally important.

## *independent mind versus dependent mind*

In order to appropriately apply the methods, we must understand the difference between two states of mind. One is a mind thinking, and the other is a mind without thought production. We need to distinguish between the two – an active and busy mind versus a mind free of conceptual activities. The two minds are not really distinct. They are essentially of the same mind, and their differences superficial.

First, we look at dependent mind – an active mind that is producing thoughts. It takes place when the mind relates to an object. For instance, we may see, hear, touch, smell, or taste something. We may create an idea, or hold a concept, or have a mental image of something. Each instance is the mind reacting to something. The mind is relating to it as something external to itself, as *‘other than itself’*. Even though this is basically how the mind experiences life, it is, however, not the actual reality of mind. Nevertheless, when mind contacts and relates to the externals, it also falls under their control.

The other state of mind, independent mind, is *‘a mind under its own control’*, a mind with self-control. It is not under the control of something outside of itself. We could say that it is a mind not occupied by the tendencies of mind. It is not occupied by any concept. It does not connect to any outer object, or to any inner ideas. It is connectedness-free. Then it is mind in its own nature and independent. This state of mind is not under the control of anything. In our meditation, it is precisely this independence that we have to cultivate like a field, or a ground mind where we wish to harvest the limitless peace and mental ease already explained. You could also think of the ground mind as a young shoot that will grow and mature as you become more and more used to its independence. This is what is referred to as the development of the basic nature of mind.

The development follows two stages. Initially, it involves a forceful application of a great deal of effort. Once you have trained well in this first stage, a second stage wherein the training and progress are much more spontaneous will follow. In other words, once the base has been prepared, the growth process becomes increasingly spontaneous, and natural.

Dependent mind is influenced by what it considers to be external objects, and this dependency must be eliminated. However, this does not mean to get rid of the mind itself, nor to eliminate the dependent experience. Rather, we develop another habit of mind – another way of considering the objects. Dependent mind is simply distracted mind. We hold the key to make our mind free from the influences of the distractions, and it is independent mind. By encouraging and enhancing the

independent mind, we will be able to effectively reduce the influences of the dependent mind.

### *to tame the mind*

Concerning the methods to be applied during meditation, they can be presented in a series of stages. Initially, we apply methods that train the mind to rest on one single thing, or on one thing at a time. When the mind is well trained in this single-pointed experience, or when it can rest stably on a single reference point, then several other methods can be introduced which are designed to protect that state of mind, or to preserve it.

We begin first on the explanation to train the mind on one single point.

- *focal point*

When you first set out to train the mind, it is completely out of control, like a wild horse. To catch a wild horse and tame it, you have to first catch it, saddle it, mount it and then finally to be able to ride it. Likewise, the starting methods are designed to train and subdue the mind so that it can be brought under control. They include the widely known methods of concentration, of focusing the mind on a reference point in a stable manner. Examples of such training may be to meditate on a crystal, a flame, and so on, as focal points. A very common but effective method is to rest the mind on the breathing.

By focusing on a single object, your mind is concentrated. If you can maintain the awareness, then you can also realize the distractions of the mind. When a thought appears, you could recognize it and keep your concentration. The most important is your awareness of your mind. You watch it and you will know by yourself whether your mind is fully concentrated or not. You should not be tense or you will produce more thoughts. You can alternate your focal point either on the breathing, or a Buddha's image in front of you. The latter brings the added element of blessings to make your meditation more successful.

The breathing often serves as a focal point in meditation. Its effectiveness lies in the connection between the mind and a subtle energy system which circulates throughout our body. And it is our breathing that is closely related to the rhythm of this subtle energy. Due to this connection, when we rest our focus on the breath, both the breathing and the mind can be pacified more readily. This is why meditation on the breath is a particularly valuable and effective method for calming the mind.

- *sitting posture*

Our sitting posture is another important factor in meditation. It can directly affect the mind's ability to meditate. When we meditate, our sitting position should be relaxed yet at the same time correct. Our sitting posture is our physical support for meditation. There are several important points that we need to keep in mind, and to try to apply them as much as possible.

1. We must sit up straight when we meditate. It is important that the spine itself be totally straight. The stomach is slightly drawn inward and back while the abdomen slightly resting forward to provide an axis of balance. This keeps the central part of the body very straight, and it is the ideal posture for meditation.
2. To enhance a very straight central torso, the shoulders should also be correctly balanced and straight.
3. As for our hands, we can either rest them facing down on our knees, taking care to keep the shoulders straight, or we can place them together in the posture of meditation. This means to place the hands palms up, right hand on top of the left in our lap. In this latter case, we would raise our shoulders slightly up and backward, such that the lengths of the arms are gently pressed against the sides of our body. This position further reinforces an upright and straight spine favorable for meditation.
4. The neck should be slightly curved so that our chin is slightly hooked in.
5. The eyes are half open looking ahead with a slightly downward cast.
6. The mouth should neither be open nor pressed firmly closed. The lips should be relaxed in a very natural position.
7. Breathing is mainly through the nose and not the mouth.

These are the essential points to a correct physical posture to meditation. Sitting in this way, we then rest the mind on the breathing.

### ***meditation on the breath***

During meditation, the mind is attentive to the breathing process. To avoid dullness of mind or even sleepiness during this kind of meditation, a method that helps is to imagine the breath bright like a light, something very transparent, and translucent in quality like a shining crystal. We imagine the breath as an arc of light. When we breathe out, we visualize the breath exiting the nose in an arc and downwards towards the ground, not quite touching the ground but stopping just 3 or 4 inches above it. And then as we breathe in, this arc comes back in like a crystal clear light entering back into our body and descends down to the navel. This arched movement goes out and then in again. If we are sitting on a chair, we do not arch the light downwards completely to the ground. The arc shape stops at the level of our knees. So if we are sitting on a chair, we consider the level of our knees to be the ground level. We should consider the quality of the visualized breath like a mirage — something that is not fixed, solid, or real, but rather, as having an empty quality to it.

As we visualize the breath, we could count the cycles: each out-and-in breath counts as one cycle. We could count first of all from one to five, and then take a slight break just resting the mind on the breathing. We then start again and count to five, and break again. We repeat this process. By practising like this, our mind will very quickly become trained. In time, we will be able to extend the counting without interruption while remaining stable on the breath for a count of 100, or even 200.

When you could count to 1,000, then you'd be able to feel and experience the real tranquility. This method is very effective, and your mind will be trained very quickly. This then is the initial basis for the practice of meditation. We can develop it further, by going deeper into the nature of mind, into the awareness of mind. Broadly speaking, looking into the essence of mind actually involves these two depths of mind. Initially, we are concerned with experiencing some pacification to have a more stable mind, and then later, we hope to gain deeper recognition into the essence of mind.

The counting of the breath is one of the most effective supports. It is important to start with a relatively small count of five to remain undistracted. The point here is not to merely increase the counting while distracted. For instance, trying to arrive at a count of 10 or more if during this time, you find yourself thinking of something else. Start with a very small number, such as 5, and try to maintain quality focus for a short duration. Gradually, with experience, build up to a count of 10, or 20, or more. Don't force it or try to stick to the numbers without stability. Rather, we simply allow the mind to naturally and spontaneously develop and experience a growing stability. The result will be evident in a natural increment in our count accumulation. In this way, we gradually train to remain in the stability for longer periods of time. So it is important to take care of the quality of the meditation. It is precisely this quality, this undistracted relationship between the mind and the breathing that will produce a good habit, which will serve as the basis for further stability and pacification. In other words, by increasing the quantity only after you have proficiency and quality is the only way to develop a good habit.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** I find that I'm very aware of the precious teachings and all the great events. We're very fortunate. Therefore, I do not want to waste even a minute, so I find all these expectations.... in the mind. How can I not waste a minute?

**(A):** The appreciation of the Dharma is undoubtedly an important quality because it directs us to transform our lives into a path leading to enlightenment. We need to appreciate that the opportunities provided by our precious human existence could lead us in the right path above all else. To appreciate the presence of so many fine opportunities, and to also understand that they are vital to our spiritual development, are both necessary. However, we mustn't get overly appreciative lest it turns into a form of attachment and we find ourselves simply grasping at the Dharma. For this reason then, we need to relax a little the intensity of our appreciation.

In the mid-eighties, when I was teaching frequently in Germany, I had been asked questions similar to this. People were too extreme in their views especially surrounding the teachings about empowerment. I had to pull them back and to reassure them that it is alright not to be overly intense, or zealous about the opportunities.

**(Q):** How do I breathe in meditation? Is counting not a distracted mind or agitation? What's the difference between thinking and counting?

**(A):** Generally, counting is okay. It is a temporary method. Yes, there are two parts of mind: concentrated and counting. You won't require the counting mind later on once you've gotten used to having a stable focus. Once your mind is well trained, the technique is no longer needed. What is the difference between counting and thought? Counting helps the concentration. It makes your concentration stronger. When you're counting you're concentrating. When you're not concentrating, you cannot count. As to the peacefulness of the mind, it is free of thoughts.

**(Q):** Is it true that the more you meditate, the more you are aware of the world?

**(A):** Yes.

**(Q):** Then I would imagine that you'd be more aware of all the stuff...the sights, the smells, the changing body states, the thoughts, the feelings during all the time that you're trying to meditate, you would have more awareness. Is that true?

**(A):** Yes. The faculties will open up, so then you experience more, but there is no distraction.

**(Q):** Okay, so if there's no distraction . . . does not everything sort of blend into...?

**(A):** No, when the mind is more peaceful, then the power of the senses will expand simultaneously. The great meditators could understand, could hear, and could see in one instant. In a way, it is conceivable because it is your own knowing power that you have right now that will expand. It is different than what you are capable of at the moment. But it is possible for you to develop a whole different power.

**(Q):** Can you recommend a method of linking your concentration to the body, from the top of the head to the feet and then back up, and then progressing up and down, concentrating with relation to the body?

**(A):** That depends on whether the practice is to create sensations. Seeking sensation is not good.

**(Q):** I'm referring to the ... (inaudible).

**(A):** Anything that can develop the concentration, anything that can take you away from sensational attachments is okay. The aim is to pacify mind, so anything can be used.

**(Q):** What about the meditation that...(inaudible)

**(A):** You can do it, but then only after you have trained well first. Some very experienced meditators, they can even meditate while lying down, or doing different things. But that is only if you are already very familiar with meditation, otherwise, if you do it lying down, you might fall asleep!

**(Q):** I find that with meditation, when I am going through a life experience that is very agitating and very challenging, I cannot sit and meditate in the standard way. Rather, I find by walking, it is much easier for me to concentrate. I could walk for a long distance and then realize that I have walked a long time. It just seems during those stressful times, that walking meditation is easier.

**(A):** Yes, walking meditation is also good. There are two types of walking meditation. One is a walking meditation to develop "extra view", and the other is for concentration. I'll teach them on another day. Both are good: concentrate on the walking, or meditate on the "extra view" while walking.

**(Q):** Can you talk a little bit about the awareness and the 'chi' in our body?

**(A):** Sure! Chi is a kind of energy in the body. When chi is very balanced then the body feels comfortable. When the mind is balanced, then all the energy channels of chi are also balanced.

**(Q):** About the people or children who have attention deficit disorder, the psychiatrists prescribe certain medicine for them because their attention is going all over the place...they then become very calm?

**(A):** I think it is a kind of drug. The application of drugs for this kind of condition may seem like an effective solution, but in fact, it is only effective in the short term. In the long run, it may cause considerable disadvantages, or problems for the child. It would be better to engage in a profound relaxation program to balance the inner energy system. The mind and the body are related to each other through this energy system. By relaxing the tension in the mind and body, a more profound relaxation may set in. However, this is perhaps not as easily achieved as through drug therapy. But with this natural relaxation, there won't be the same long-term defects of drug treatment.

**(Q):** I have a question on breathing. I tried and found that the breath itself changes rhythm when it is natural. And then I start worrying about how I'm breathing, so

that becomes a distraction, a mild one. So I want to know how to use the visualization that you explained earlier to solve this problem.

**(A):** This is due to being overly concerned with the quality of the breathing, which is often a product of tension. So by engaging in the breathing meditation in a more relaxed state of mind, then this kind of preoccupation will not arise.

**(Q):** Rinpoche, I have a problem in my meditation session in the summer that has to do with feeling the heat maybe. It could be because of the heat, I feel funny in the stomach. Normally, when I meditate in the winter, I feel good.

**(A):** Yes, this kind of experience can actually be part of your attachment to certain sensations, which arise during meditation. As you meditate, your mind becomes fixed. You become more attentive, and therefore more fixed on the notion of heat, on the feeling of heat. And this automatically intensifies the experience of heat. By relaxing the mind and not being so preoccupied with the heat, then this effect will not happen.

# The Methods of Pacification – II

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Having explained how to use the breathing as a focal point of support for our meditation, we will now look at walking meditation. Afterwards, we will see how to develop further the experience of a stable mind.

## *walking meditation*

In walking meditation, there are two paths, or two methods. The first is to pacify the mind while the second leads to an insight into the workings of mind, or our experience of mind while walking.

- *to pacify the mind*

When we are using walking meditation relative to mental calm or pacification, we lower our gaze. Looking slightly downward, we walk slowly and develop a consciousness, or an awareness of each step we take. As we walk, we want to develop a very clear awareness of the movement of stepping forward. In this way, we are training the mind into a slow and peaceful movement, merging the mind with the movement. Outside the Dharma Centre here, it is good to create a paved walkway around the house with the Buddha inside. People could then practise walking meditation circling the Buddha. We first train in calming our mind during walking. We try to develop some stability in our awareness of the walking itself.

- *to develop insight*

Only after we have achieved some stability do we employ the walking meditation to develop insight into the nature of mind. As we walk, as we take each step, we look into the clarity of mind, the mind that intends, which is the basis for the stepping movement. We look at the mind that initiates the walking movement. In this way, we could cultivate a much more profound awareness of the walking process. Once we have developed this clarity of mind in addition to its pacification, and both these aspects have become easy and familiar to us, a feeling of spontaneous awareness will arise. It is this spontaneous awareness that prepares us to connect the walking with insight practice. It brings us into some insight of the mind. This then is where the pacification of the mind, or *shī'nay*, begins to move into the area of insight, or *vipassana* meditation.

The actual technique of insight meditation is a more analytical approach to the movement of stepping. For instance, as we step forward, we ask ourselves, “*Where is the stepping movement? Where is the walking actually taking place?*” Through this kind of investigative process into the actual reality of the walking movement, we become aware of each passing moment. We see that time, or the movement is neither fixed, nor real, in the sense of being precisely existent. Before we have the thought to step forward, the step has not yet occurred – the step itself is in the future. Once we have completed the step, then the step is over with, it is in the past. And while we are carrying out the stepping movement, then the stepping in-itself is not yet

complete. It is not yet a full step. So even from our relative point of view, we cannot in fact define a truly existing step. The reality of a step is that it has not yet begun, or it is over, or it is in the process of being accomplished thus not yet produced. And therefore, it is neither in the past, nor the future. In the present, is there really a step? The same rationale or analysis could be applied to all phenomena. And in this way, the walking meditation introduces us to the notion of interdependence of everything. Nothing exists on its own, by itself, independently of everything else around it. Everything is interdependently connected. And so, through this experience of insight while walking, we discover the true nature of all phenomena.

### ***the meditation of give and take***

The practice of *sending and receiving*, or *give and take* is a practice, which is, in many ways, similar to the breathing meditation. It entails a “giving out” of our own happiness to others, followed by a “taking onto” ourselves the suffering of others. We practise this “give and take” in sync with our “out and in” breaths.

In the practice, as we breathe out, we imagine that all our happiness as well as their causes, i.e. the results of positive actions we have performed are given to all living beings without exception spurred on by a tremendous sense of generosity. We wish that indeed through our meditation we could effectively bring happiness and its causes to all living beings. As we breathe in, we take in all the suffering of others. If we are motivated by genuine compassion, then automatically and spontaneously, the pure force of compassion will liberate others from their suffering. When we use the breathing for this give and take practice, there is no need to count. We are simply resting in the movement of compassion, a movement of give and take synchronized to our breathing.

We could proceed to this extra dimension of “give and take” having first stabilized the mind using the breathing technique. When we do, we do not superficially link compassion with the breathing movement itself. It is not to add an idea to our breathing. We have to develop the compassion from within ourselves. The point is to try to develop and engender compassion as much as possible, during meditation as well as in daily life, so as to make it continuous throughout the day.

During the day, in the different situations, try to reflect regularly on the various sufferings living beings face. Living beings include animals. If you can, consider all beings in the universe because suffering is universal. No one is exempt. We need to arrive at the understanding that the basis for suffering, or the environment in which suffering takes place, is confusion. And confusion is caused by a fundamental mistake in our understanding of the self in this world. How does our mistaken view affect us? It makes us act negatively and all negative actions lead to suffering. Therefore if only living beings could give up negative actions, then they would, at the same time, be rid of suffering. This may be just an idea to you now. Gradually through careful reflection, you will come to understand that to end suffering, you must abandon negative actions. And vice versa: to be happy, you must engage in virtuous and positive actions. These two axioms form the whole basis of the practice of give and take.

We give to others the fruits of our own virtues. And because the fruit of virtue is happiness, we are in effect giving them our happiness. This very *intention*, or *wish* to give happiness, and to take away suffering is the enlightened attitude, known as Bodhicitta. So the practice develops our compassion. At the same time, the contemplation is also a means to pacify the mind. It develops our experience of the mind at ease, or the mind at rest. This is a second benefit of this practice. If our motivation is indeed pure, it then becomes actually possible for us to help others through this meditation. The practice can purify our mind completely as well as the mind of others – it is then an actual *application* of Bodhicitta, a third benefit. And when the mind is completely purified, enlightenment is realized. This is why the quality of this third benefit is said to be “*limitless*” because it makes it possible for everyone to reach enlightenment one day.

The development of love and compassion is, in fact, the antidote to all our faults and disadvantages. At the root of all our personal imperfections is our own experience of self-importance, of clinging to one’s own sense of self-existence above the needs of others. When we meditate on compassion as described, we are, in effect, developing the antidote to all our faults within the mind. Compassion is the mind’s capacity to reduce the influence of self-centeredness. And therefore, we are reducing the influence of the very causes of all our faults. So this compassion meditation has the potency to purify all our thoughts.

Thus we have seen three methods of meditation to stabilize or to pacify the mind. There is the sitting meditation while being aware of the breaths and counting them, or focusing on a particular reference point. There is the walking meditation. We could alternate between the sitting and the walking meditation to further stabilize the mind. Later, we can progress to the practice of give and take, where we are, in fact, contributing to the presence of compassion in the world through our meditation.

### ***bringing in the analytical to the sitting meditation***

During the breathing meditation, when the mind is stable and clear, we can also apply the same analytical examination as in the walking meditation. Just as walking is a rhythmic or cyclic process, so is breathing. We apply the same analysis of seeing where exactly is the breathing. Is it at the moment of the out-breath? Is it at the moment of the in-breath? Is there an actual breathing process in any real sense from a logical or an analytical point of view? This analysis of the breathing is not absolutely necessary, but some people might find it a helpful extension. And through this, just as we saw for the walking meditation, we could be led to an experience of understanding the nonexistence, or the unreality of our breathing – an analytical understanding that the breath is not something which actually can be said to exist as such, but rather, it is in and of itself interdependent just as the step in walking. This type of analysis can be carried out, or not, according to one’s own ability, or inclinations should we wish only to pacify the mind.

We can also analyze any other focal point, any other object on which we are resting the mind while using it as a support to pacify the mind. This is important because any valid and proper meditation requires that we do not grasp at the actual existence of the object itself. We wish to understand its lack of reality, which will allow us to

cultivate wisdom, a deeper understanding of its real nature. If we do not go through this form of analytical meditation, our meditation on any support may cultivate a further grasping at reality. We might end up fixating on the meditation support in an extremely materialistic way. This then will not lead to any true insight into the nature of mind. Therefore, this kind of analytic approach is very useful, and helpful to develop insight, and to avoid mistakes.

Through these kinds of methods, we gradually train the mind to remain stable. When we sit down to meditate, we simply leave the mind in its own state, in its own nature. We may experience the pacification of mind. We will have various feelings, various experiences of the meditation. These will be experiences of a profound feeling of happiness, joy, or ease. We experience them when the mind is calm during meditation. They cannot, in the least bit, be compared to any kind of ordinary happiness, or joy that we might feel in any other context.

Particularly when we reach this point in our practice where we experience a profound tranquility, and ease, that we must avoid grasping to the experience. Try not to react to it by holding on to it. If we do, we would become attached to it and would wish to reproduce, or maintain it. We are then, in fact, contaminating our meditation. It will cause the mind to throw up a great many thoughts, a great many ideas, and we start to feel disturbed. Indeed, we will actually be moving away from the profound sense of pacification, which we originally had. In order to prevent this kind of contamination, we need to again apply the technique of the analytical meditation already described.

### ***follow a program of meditation suited to you***

You have now been introduced to the principal methods to pacify the mind. You may well ask: practically speaking, how does the practice relate to my own life experience during the day? Where do I begin personally? What is the best method for me? How should I develop the practical application of these different stages of practice? The best method to begin with is the counting of the breath. And when we have a certain amount of skill in this, not necessarily developing the count to a very high number, which is a rather difficult thing to achieve, but we have some degree of stability, then we can proceed to work on walking meditation. We can alternate the counting and the walking, and then gradually incorporate the breathing meditation of give and take.

A personal program of meditation could be, for instance, for the first ten days, we concentrate on the practice of counting exclusively. This is so as to develop a certain amount of experience in that one method for that period of time. And then we may spend another ten days concentrating more on the walking meditation, so as to learn it and to train in it. Afterwards, we alternate the two methods for another 10 days. This is one approach – where we would devote a 10-day period to learn each of the two techniques and then to practise them alternately. As time goes on, we can develop, for example, the walking meditation in the morning. We could arrange a time to go for a walk every morning to develop the walking meditation. And then at other times during the day, when we have the opportunity to sit and meditate, we can work on the counting meditation.

### ***adopt a suitable lifestyle to support meditation***

To enhance our meditation, where possible, we adopt a suitable lifestyle, one which supports our practice. For instance, we look at our eating habits. The Buddha advised his disciples, those who were particularly attentive to the quality of their meditation, to try to ingest the heavier foods in the morning so as not to compromise the quality of meditation. In the afternoon and evening, foods of a lighter nature would be taken. We should try to adjust our eating habits to support our meditation – in short, less junk food. Also, we should not indulge in alcohol. If we overindulge in alcohol and get drunk, then the mind is drunk. And when the mind is drunk, and we try to meditate, we won't develop any qualities. Since our main purpose is to meditate, we need to keep the mind in a state where the qualities of meditation can develop. Even when you drink alcoholic beverages, do not get drunk, which is the actual problem. Never under any circumstances should you get drunk. Drinking a little bit of alcohol does not imply the permission to get drunk. The beginners of *vipassana* meditation sometimes have insomnia. Vipassana means insight meditation. It is the most profound method by which you will achieve enlightenment. Once you get used to it, however, the insomnia will go away. Beginners will experience some insomnia due to the intense analytical concentration. To alleviate this condition, in the very olden days, light alcohol was sometimes allowed – the kind that is not bad for the health. Among the alcoholic drinks, red wine is better since it relaxes the nerves. Nowadays, there are so many vitamins and supplements you could use to relax the nerves. Again, the drugs that make you very drowsy are definitely not recommended.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** I have meditated while I was tipsy. Is it worse not to meditate when tipsy?

**(A):** It is better to meditate than not. When you have had a little alcohol, and there is a little effect from it, you could still try to meditate. I do not mean terribly drunk, of course.

**(Q):** With calm-abiding meditation and insight meditation: how does one identify when the pacification is sufficient to be able to shift to the analytic part without losing the pacification?

**(A):** Initially, if the state of pacification is not yet stable enough, then as soon as we try to do analytical meditation, the mind immediately becomes confused. The mind is agitated by this analytical meditation. This should indicate to us that it is not yet the right moment to practice the analytical meditation. If we are trained in the shi'nyay meditation, or the pacification of mind, and it is stable, then even when we apply the analytical meditation, the state of calm will not be disturbed or compromised.

**(Q):** If something is bothering you, like someone is giving you a hard time, which is strongly distracting, how do you figure out which course to take? Whether to accept that this is just something that is happening with me now, and I could just meditate and watch this experience, or my reaction to it, or to talk to that person about it?

**(A):** When we initiate a practice of meditation, it is important to precede our practice with some awareness that all phenomena in the world around us are not real. They are not important. We develop a feeling of meaninglessness towards them. This trains the mind to not get fixed on events, or memories of those events when we are actually sitting in meditation. It is extremely important to cultivate this training to serve as a basis for our meditation practice. When the mind is tranquil, or when the mind is at ease, then the memories, the reminders of things, or problems we might have and so on, are not grasped, or held to. This is because the pacified mind no longer grasps. Even though the memories of problems might arise, they do not at all bother the mind. They do not produce any disturbance. If we feel bothered, disturbed, by events or memories of events while we are meditating, this simply shows that the mind is not yet stable; the mind has not yet reached a level of profound and natural pacification. Sometimes, we think we experience a feeling of joy, or calm when it has simply come from our very wish to be happy, and is therefore fabricated and maintained through our very attachment to it. And so, when events do not go as we plan, we will feel a sense of hurt, and of being troubled or bothered. The peace we think we have or we try to hold on to is artificial and therefore it will quickly disappear or become displaced. Only the real pacification of mind will allow us to develop the true inner quality of mind – this natural calm or pacification unmovable and undistractable in the face of any situation, or any memory of an earlier event.

**(Q):** I have a question about the training of pacified mind in daily life. It seems that, if I think myself that when I'm sitting on a seat, or I'm here, and conditions are right, then there is no problem. But when something happens – I think these conditions are happening to me. Then I notice my own reactivity. And it seems to

require tremendous amount of patience in order to come back to a place of quiet. So could you teach a bit more about skillful means in those times of heavily conditioned reactions?

**(A):** When we are faced, especially during the state of meditation, with the kind of situation that knocks us off course, it is at such a point that the mind has, in fact, a particular sensitivity. We feel markedly concerned about an event, or a memory of an event. And that very sensitivity is the very precise moment when we need to drop all concerns about it. Failing that, it will take us over. The sensitivity is a movement of mind we must immediately reject. We make use of it by rejecting it, or dropping all our concerns arisen from it. This will stop the event from imprinting itself on the mind brought on by the sensitivity. It is much more difficult to get rid of this tendency to react in a kind of repetitive, and habitual way to situations once it has been set off and well into its motion. Picture the scenario where you suddenly realize that you've got a snake on your lap. What would you do? You'd pick it up and throw it away so that it won't have a chance to bite you. You do it quickly – quicker than the snake's bite. Similarly, we have to do the same when we're meditating. We act immediately as soon as we are aware of a potential source of trouble. Immediately, we drop it. Then it won't have time to sink in and settle into a kind of tendency, or a reactive process much more difficult to eliminate. There are many methods to facilitate this kind of immediate rejection. For instance, your understanding of the nature of mind enables you to see the true reality of the person who is bothering you. You know anger produces no benefit. Being angry does not bring any positive benefit. On the contrary, not being angry is virtuous and will bring a good result. Knowing this is very helpful. But right there in a moment, the best and most helpful is to immediately let go.

**(Q):** What about sadness?

**(A):** Actually, the same applies to grief, or feeling sad. It has the same quality, or essence, as anger. We should just reject it. Grief is really surreptitious. The more you grieve, the more you suffer. Then like a snake, it will bite you. Therefore, you should immediately abandon it the moment you are aware of it. You can do it. It is possible.

**(Q):** Continuing on the same question asked on sadness, please comment on the fact that in Western psychology, there is concept of persistently looking into the historical roots of one's current lifetime to try to understand one's feelings, and to come to some closure, rather than to stay with them. It is very different from the Buddhist approach. As I understand the Buddhist approach is one of examining the ultimate reality, or of restraining the feelings, or putting them down in different ways. Can you comment on what are the apparent contradictions between the two approaches?

**(A):** The main difference actually lies in the results produced by these two approaches. The Western approach is psychological where one is dealing with the intricacies of the actual emotional event and how it happened and what caused it and so on. This kind of reflection does not allow us to root out the emotional causes to begin with. We stay with the emotional effects until they are calmed or dissipated. The emotional energy will exhaust itself while we're thinking about it. Later on,

when we are faced with a similar event, we have to go through the whole process again because the emotive causes are still there. The Buddhist approach is one where we look directly into the very nature of the emotional root, or emotive cause. We see its essence. We see what it really is. In time, this will allow us to root it out completely. When the cause is gone, so is its effect. This seeing into the very nature of an emotive cause is an aspect of wisdom or knowledge that is absent in the analytical, or reflective approach in Western psychology.

**(Q):** Same question, I was struck by the use of the word ‘reject’. Could you speak more about that moment when one relates to it? I think rejection, the way I understand that word, connotes some aggressiveness, as opposed to an observance and an allowance of pacification. I wonder if there’s some attachment in rejection, as well as some negative energy in it. I’d like to understand how to be positive and to harmoniously work with even the negative energies . . . as opposed to rejecting them.

**(A):** The act, or the spirit, of giving up, or rejecting an emotive cause, can be done in two different ways. One is to see the disadvantages of the emotive cause. That is, instead of allowing the emotive cause to develop and to be accepted, which will lead to something with many drawbacks, and disadvantages, we understand that things are not going to get any better if we follow it. If we know and understand this right at the beginning of the onset of an emotive cause, in that instant, we also see no sense in following it. We then reject it because we can see right through it. So the movement of rejection actually springs from a correct and clear seeing. We see that it makes no sense to follow it. The effect is it has no chance to escalate into a full-blown emotion.

The second way to reject an emotive cause is a movement where we recognize the essence of the emotive cause – we see its emptiness nature. This is a slightly different approach, but the result is the same – the emotive cause has no chance to take root.

Both ways require an immediate letting go. When the emotive cause emerges initially, it is relatively insignificant, small and easy to deal with. For example, a small fire: because it is small, you can jump on it to put it out. However, if you leave that fire to burn, it will get out of control. Then, you cannot put it out easily on your own. So similarly with the emotive causes, or feelings of suffering, or feeling troubled by problems – as soon as they come up, look either into their essence, or recognize that it serves no purpose to follow them. This is the same as immediately putting out a small fire before it gets out of hand. If we accept the emotion, or accept the suffering and let it build up, then it will grow into an experience that we neither want, nor are we capable of dealing with it. For this reason, looking into the essence, or seeing the disadvantages of the emotional cause, or suffering, enables us to immediately remedy it before it escalates. There are other remedies but they are always based in dealing with things while they are still small, and therefore manageable.

# Insight Meditation

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After we have adopted a lifestyle conducive to practice, and our meditation has yielded some degree of stability, the next stage would be to begin to look into the essence or nature of mind. We engage in a type of meditation known as vipassana, or insight meditation where we learn to gain insight into the nature of mind.

In general, the techniques of insight meditation are practised in a mind that is already in an experience of a profound natural tranquility. To be in this ease of mind is therefore the starting point for insight meditation. As well, before we actually practise vipassana, we must acquire some basic understanding of what mind really is.

The mind has the ability to generate, or to experience its own sense of profound tranquility. The profound peace of mind allows us to discover a state of mind that is uninterrupted, without hindrance. None of the forms of outer, and inner obstacles could obstruct this state of mind. We experience an extremely clear, bright, transparent mind. And it is this clarity, which enables the mind to look directly at itself thereby to experience, very clearly, its own true nature. In general, we speak of three aspects with respect to the nature of mind. The first is: the essence of mind which is emptiness. The second is: the nature of mind which is clarity. And because mind is at once unhindered, it can make itself known uninterruptedly without hindrance, and this is the third aspect.

## *the essence of mind is emptiness*

What does it mean when we say that the essence of mind is empty?

When the mind is not influenced by any object, or by any attachment to objects, it is said to be totally free of any dependency on external objects or sensory experiences. Mind is independent and at the same time, experiences its own independence. When that happens, and we look clearly into its essence, we will discover that the mind does not have a shape. It does not have a form. It cannot be described. We cannot define mind by any sensation, or anything at all. And this is then what we call the empty essence of mind.

- *the mind connects*

We look at the mind as it goes through various experiences. Take the experience of a mind starting to get angry. We discover that this anger arises due to a connection between the mind and an object, that which is making us angry. Similarly, the experience of suffering in the mind is coming through a connection, or a relationship being established between our mind and that which is making us suffer. This is the case with all mental states. A sudden feeling of joy emerges when mind has connected, or is relating with something; only then would a particular feeling, sensation, or experience arise. We call this relationship with something a concept. These concepts, experiences, and feelings are not real in any ultimate sense. For instance, when we experience suffering, apart from the idea of suffering, there is no real suffering at all. Otherwise, if suffering were real, i.e. something of substance and

permanency, then our mind would be controlled by it continuously. It would then be very difficult to change this suffering. However, we all know that this is not true. This is why we say that all concepts, i.e., all ideas, feelings, and experiences that come up in the mind are artificial. And the experience and concept of an “I” or “me” is no exception.

- *the concept of “I” leads to duality*

It is in mind that a subtle concept of “I” develops. Once we have this idea of a self, or an ego, then it develops into a sensation, a feeling that we define as “the existence of self”. This then leads into a whole series of ideas, considered as “my” ideas, “my” feelings, “my” experiences, “my” sensations, and so on. They go on to define and stabilize the feeling of ego-clinging – a sense of really existing as a person apart from anything else. Once this feeling of individuality takes root, it naturally sets us apart from others. And so the duality of self and others takes over. Inevitably, duality leads us into relationships between the self and the others, subject versus object. The relationships then cause us to react with feelings of like and dislike, which are like movements of mind. We develop a movement towards an object when we deem it appropriate, desirable, and we wish to keep it. Or, we develop a movement away from an object when we feel dislike of it, and we want to get rid of it. The movements are, initially, very subtle experiences in our relationships or emotive causes that could potentially escalate into obvious feelings and disturb us.

This construct of duality between the self and others is actually a habit formed and cultivated by the mind since beginningless time. The mind is so used to dualistic perception that it is now completely and helplessly controlled by it. It knows of nothing else. It cannot change this experience at will. It is like water into which color has been added. The dye has transformed the actual color of the water. Our mind is likewise stained and affected by this habit of dualistic thinking from which it cannot separate itself, even though the duality is not real in and of itself.

- *a constant flow of thoughts continues*

But how does the duality occupy the mind? We have to look more closely. When we do, we will see that it manifests in the form of a string of habitual thought patterns. The thoughts come, one after another, in a constant stream of separate thoughts strung together. It is said that this thinking, this tendency to thinking, is beginningless and also endless, in the sense that one thought follows another in an uninterrupted flow. Looking closer, we will discover that mind is in fact a series of instants. However, each instant of mind is so infinitesimal that we cannot catch it. Immediately, each instant passes into another instant of mind. Mind is therefore not actually a thing. It is constantly changing, ever active, in a perpetual series of passing moments. In fact, it is precisely this beginningless and endless capacity of the mind to be caught up in thoughts which shows us that our existence, our sense of self, our sense of being, is a continuity that started long before we were born. This life is simply a continuation of past thoughts progressing into this life, which began at the moment of conception. This life being a continuous string of thoughts will not end at death. After death, the mind will still be thinking – still developing this constant succession of instants. Inevitably, the thinking mind will lead us into our next

incarnation in much the same way it had led us into our current life now. By this kind of examination into the essence of mind, we will discover that mind is not a truly existing thing. It does not exist in the way that we imagine it to be. The stream of thought flow is also not truly existing but is passing in every instant and so we say the essence of mind is empty.

- *seeing mind's essence frees us*

In our meditation we look deeper into the constant flow of conceptual thoughts. We will begin to recognize it as essentially empty. This recognition releases us from the thought flow. No longer are we caught in it. Mind discovers its independence. Freedom from grasping at the thoughts is then achieved. And when this happens, all the suffering, the difficulties, the grasping, everything that we were so convinced of being real and existent before, are recognized as unreal, or empty. This then is the true liberation of mind. The thinking mind is seen right through, and the mind becomes completely independent. Therefore, by seeing into the empty essence of the constant movement of mind, we reach liberation.

When we wake up in the morning, and if we have been dreaming, the very fact of waking up takes the dream away. The dream just disappears. It fades away. This does not mean that the waking state chases the dream off to somewhere else. It does not mean that the dream still exists, and we've pushed it away. Rather, the very fact of waking up makes us realize that the dream we were so convinced was real earlier just disappears by itself as soon as we are awake. We recognize that the dream experience was just part of the mind's illusion. Similarly, by switching on the light, darkness just disappears. We do not have to imagine that the light has chased the darkness away. As soon as there is light, then darkness is automatically gone. These kinds of examples are used to illustrate what happens when we see the essence of mind. As soon as we have insight into the empty essence of mind, then the mind has the ability to overcome its own confusion. As soon as the mind recognizes its own empty essence, the confusion of duality which existed up until then, simply disappears. We do not have to push it away or get rid of it. Just by seeing into the essence of mind, the confusion is shown to be a mistake and automatically disappears.

*the nature of mind is clarity*

That the mind's essence is empty does not mean it is nothingness, or empty space. It is not a void in the sense of a blank nothingness. In fact, the mind is clarity by nature. It is clear. "Clear" does not mean bright and shining like light. "Clear" means the mind knows. It is aware. This tells us that the mind while empty in essence, is at the same time clear with the ability to know, and to understand itself. Mind can know, and understand that the different neuroses in the mind, the negative states, and all states of mind arising are empty in essence. This recognition enables us to discover the endless or boundless primordial awareness within the mind, which we call the clarity of mind – the ability of mind to know in a limitless way.

### ***mind is unobstructed***

The third aspect of mind describes how the mind presents itself. It does so in a way, which is unobstructed, endless, and without hindrance. Mind is completely and freely expressive. This capacity is limitless. As a matter of fact, this unhindered aspect applies both to the mind in confusion as well as the mind free of confusion. While the mind is still caught up in its own confusion, then it is the confusion that is unobstructed. The forms arising out of a confused mind are able to manifest limitlessly. And when the confusion is overcome, then it is the primordial awareness, which is the clarity of mind that manifests, unobstructed, and completely endless. We use this term “unobstructed” in the sense that “obstructed” connotes something solid, an entity, like a stone, which is a form with boundaries. Unobstructed is the exact opposite. The mind is not a solid object. It has no limitations – it is boundless.

These three: the empty essence, the clear nature, and the unobstructed aspect of mind are then the qualities of mind. Although we described these three terms one at a time, they are in fact, inseparable. They are the very nature of mind – how the mind is.

### ***the meaning of extra view***

The realization of the true nature of mind unlocks the mind from its own confusion. It is like an exit so we could leave the confusion. The term “insight” is an English translation from the Sanskrit term, “vipassana”, or “lhagtong” in Tibetan. Its literal meaning is a view that has something extra to it. One might say it is almost like a *super* view so called because the ordinary person who does not meditate, and therefore does not have this insight into the nature of mind will not experience this view. He will not be able to see the mind as it is. His mind is still under the influence of confusion. However, for someone who meditates, and who is practising vipassana, the person will be able to eventually achieve a deep insight, a super view, into what mind really is, and this is the purpose of lhagtong, vipassana, or insight meditation.

Nyemowa was a famous and highly realized meditator. As with the custom of great meditators, he, too, sang songs about his realization. And in one such song, he described the view from his cave. He praised the view of the snow mountains expressing how much he appreciated it. His song, in fact, represented more than just an admiration of the physical view. It was actually a profound reflection of his understanding of the nature of reality. The mountains symbolized for him the idea of isolation, the idea of being in retreat withdrawn from worldly fascinations. These conditions had effectively enabled him to develop a profound meditation. His praise was his way of thanking the mountains for affording him their help so that he was able to realize the nature of mind. In that song, he expressed how the usual graspings, the neuroses, and tensions in the mind had fallen away through his meditation. Having seen the nature of mind from within, he had achieved a deep insight into the actual nature of outer phenomena, the mountains not excepted. He recognized and fully appreciated that every phenomenon contained this enormous benefit of allowing him to express his realization. Every phenomenon allowed him

to experience the very profound view of mind. The actual realization itself could not be described in ordinary human terms, and so he used the scenery as a metaphor. In his song, he talked about the rock on which he sat meditating was just like an illusion or a mirage. His surroundings had lost their forms of solidity, and with that he had been freed from the very concrete and materialistic way of grasping. He went on to express the joy, which he felt was the joy of an unobstructed mind that could not be expressed in words nor imagined. The happiness that he had was ultimate, and again beyond words.

Everything we need to know about the nature of mind is included in this very concise presentation of the three descriptives: the *empty* essence, the *clear* nature, and the *unimpeded* or unobstructed aspect. Of course there exist many elaborate instructions or expansive developments from these three. If we have simply understood what has been presented, then we already have everything we need to know about the nature of mind.

When we actually meditate, any experience must necessarily arise within the nature of mind and therein lies the chance to experience directly what has been described. We begin with a theoretical understanding of what mind is. Theoretical understanding is very limited – a rather constrained approach to the reality of the mind. However, when we meditate, our understanding is allowed to expand into a direct experience, which is beyond the limitations of an intellectual understanding. This entry into a vaster dimension can only be achieved through a personal experience supported and guided by the directions of a qualified teacher.

This completes the explanation on the actual nature of mind.

On the side of meditation, we can say that through a very deep tranquility or pacification of mind, it becomes possible for the mind to discover and to experience its own capacity to control manifestation. By training in pacification, we acquire the ability to experience a spontaneous concentration in which we no longer have to fall victim to the incessant manifestations. It is as if we can control the outer world, or manifestations. When it comes to insight meditation, the second phase of the training, knowing directly the nature of mind, is actually going to allow us to reach enlightenment. It is insight meditation that will bring us to the threshold of enlightenment.

# Supports of Meditation

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To meditate successfully, we need support. We need associates, we need friends just like we need the right soil, fertilizer, water, and so on when we want to grow flowers.

## *an important understanding*

What kind of associations do we need when we meditate? What kind of associates can actually support our meditation? One such support is right understanding. It is to understand that so long as our mind is under the influence of its own confusion, we are constantly cultivating the tendency to repeat the confusion. This tendency is responsible for our habits of confusion and their manifestations. Inevitably, we are led into committing repeatedly all kinds of negative actions. And we have to face their results – the inevitable suffering in its many, and endless varieties. The mind thus continues to be clouded and is prevented from seeing its own true nature. This is why the effects of negative actions deal us a double blow when they ripen – not only do we suffer, but also at the same time, our meditation is blocked.

## *practise virtues*

It follows then that the greatest support we can have for our meditation is the purification of the seeds of our past negative deeds thereby preventing their ripening. Instead of continuing to repeat the same confused ways, we overcome, or surmount the flaws and negativities by practising virtues, as much as we can. The effects of virtuous actions weaken the harm of ripening results. And the best way to accumulate positive actions is to cultivate the qualities of compassion, and faith and confidence.

What does it mean to develop compassion and faith within our mind? First, we look at faith. Faith means to have trust, and confidence in Buddhahood as a goal we wish to reach. Therefore, we try to develop the aspiration for and confidence in Buddhahood, which is the realization of the true nature of mind as shown and taught by the Buddha himself. The Buddha, in this context, is a representation of the enlightened mind, our ultimate goal. We develop faith and confidence also in the teachings of the Buddha, which form the path to Buddhahood. And we develop faith and confidence in the sangha, the spiritual teachers who are qualified to guide us along this path. Having faith and confidence in these three directly supports our efforts to overcome our negative tendencies.

To develop compassion, it helps, initially, to understand that all living beings without exception, at some point in the past and/or in the future, have been and/or will be our parents. We have therefore a very close connection to all living beings. This recognition prompts a concern, a care, and a feeling of love towards them. It also makes us feel a certain responsibility for them, and so we begin to develop concern and compassion for them.

Among the countless ways to develop virtue, cultivating faith and confidence in what is truly meaningful on the one hand, and cultivating compassion towards all living things are the two most powerful and effective. The inner virtues we cultivate provide the ground, the seeds, and the necessary conditions to nourish and develop completely the fruit of enlightenment. Virtues are the very roots of the qualities of enlightenment. These roots will grow the main stem, the branches, the leaves, the flowers, and then finally the fruits at full maturity.

Buddhahood is attained through the simultaneous accumulation of two qualities: skillful methods, and wisdom. Within the context of the path of meditation, the roots of virtues, or the cultivations of faith and compassion constitute the skillful means. Through the meditation itself, through both the pacification phase and the insight phase, we will acquire wisdom and be able to perfect it to realize enlightenment. By applying what has been explained thus far, we are in effect availing ourselves amply in both accumulations. Enlightenment is indeed within our reach.

We look again at the situations of the two meditators: the unsuccessful meditator who tried to meditate in a cave in strict retreat versus the successful meditator who lives a very busy schedule, but still can find time in his daily life whenever possible to keep up his regular meditation. These two men are not characters out of a fairy tale, but people I know personally. The reason why the meditator in the cave retreat failed was because he was unable to develop the right methods. He had not gone through the process of gathering the roots of virtue by developing deep faith and compassion. Without such crucial supports, obstacles continued to arise for him and blocked his progress. Again, we remind ourselves of the very important understanding that when the mind is under the influence of ignorance, it simply goes on and on repeating the same mistakes, developing the same confusion. The mind falls victim to the same tendencies and the same obstacles over and over again. The meditator in the cave, due to his lack of sufficient virtuous roots to support his practice, was unable to cut through the obstacles to reach the true nature of mind. The second meditator with a very busy schedule has, on the contrary, an abundance of opportunities to cultivate the roots of virtue in his daily life. His rich store of virtues in turn supports his meditation and continues to reward him with success.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** . . .(inaudible...concerning a variation on meditation) . . .

**(A):** Within the Buddhist teachings called the tantras, which is a path of methods also referred to as Vajrayana practice, mantra recitation is used to stabilize, or to pacify the mind. Various mantras are taught to support the practice of concentration. The effect is to pacify mind in much the same way as any of the other objects already explained. However, among all the different objects of focus to promote concentration, I still consider the breath the most effective support to stabilize the mind. It is a method widely taught by the Buddha, described very precisely and in the greatest of details. Because the mind and the breathing are moving at the same time, somewhat synchronized, focusing on the breath is therefore a particularly powerful means to pacify the mind.

**(Q):** Reality, we're talking about how things exist and do not exist in relation to the question of mind. The idea that the nature of mind is empty, something was said earlier about mind as a series of moments. And there's no real start, there's no beginning and there's no end. They are always passing, that mind does not really exist. It is confusing. I wonder if there's a difference between that idea of mind and the idea of mind, which is really clarity, does that not have existence? Do you see the difference between the idea of mind as something that is always moving, moments that are always passing, and therefore when we think of those as mind, that is not really mind as opposed to when we think of the clarity, that is unchanging, so is that mind? The question, is there harmony in mind given the light and clarity versus the open space of emptiness?

**(A):** As explained earlier, to talk about the nature of mind necessitates the use of words. The terms and explanations unfortunately can only approximate a description of mind. The reality of mind is beyond concepts. For this reason, the many questions we might ask ourselves about the exact nature of mind, these can only be answered in the meditation itself. Whenever we use words or explanations, inevitably we are limited, and restricted. Whereas in our meditation experience, we can have a direct insight, which is beyond words and which is therefore not limited. The example presented of a meditator's song in which he tried to express his meditation experience illustrated this point. The song didn't describe that experience. The song was only a reflection of that profound experience. The song was meaningful to the meditator only because his experience was meaningful to him. When we hear his song, we can only imagine if that. When we think, the ideas we have, how we listen to something and then our comments and questions, they still all fall within the realm of confusion we are now in. As a result, it is very difficult to receive an explanation that goes beyond our current level of understanding. We could not make sense of it because of the difference in the two points of view – confused, versus not confused. Only when we meditate would we reach eventually a direct experience of what has been presented in the teachings. When that happens, it will all make sense.

**(Q):** In a Buddhist's view, what is the exact value of a direct spiritual experience by a Christian or Hindu, etc. Is that particular direct experience, however it is defined

in words, identical? The actual direct spiritual experience of a mystic, irrespective of tradition, is it identical to an experience of emptiness.

**(A):** The meditating mind will have many different experiences. I do not know about mystics, so I cannot comment on their ways. In general, all practitioners from the various traditions or schools will have meditation experiences. Because everything depends on the methods applied, the resulting experiences are not exactly the same. For instance, some practitioners talk about the sensations, the feelings, or the palpable experiences they have during their meditation. Sometimes these experiences happen by themselves as a natural development of their meditation. Sometimes they're actually deliberately produced through certain methods, visualizations or practices designed so as to bring up those experiences, thus by force. Some of them come about through manipulation, and are therefore artificial. Sometimes, we can tell that they are not of any true value, because they do not last. These experiences will go away after a little while. And in fact any experience which is based on duality, or when there is still duality in the mind, is clearly an experience that belongs to the realm of pacification. When we pacify the mind, the mind will have many experiences. In the process of pacification, meditators in the Buddhist tradition describe all sorts of experiences; however, they are considered to be worldly, in the sense that they are not going to help the practitioner attain enlightenment. They remain within the realm of a certain sphere of temporary experience. And that is why all of the Buddhist commentaries, all of the texts on meditation, instruct the meditator not to attach to these experiences. They will disappear. They will leave. They will fade away. Do not rely on them. These experiences are said to be like the mist around a mountain. They are in fact clouding the recognition of the true nature of mind. These experiences come in all varieties. Sometimes it is an experience, which is very gloomy, miserable, and dark. Sometimes it is very beautiful, very attractive like the witnessing of northern lights, for example. Things are coming and going, nice colors, nice rainbows, etc. So we can have wonderful experiences sometimes, and at other times, they are less wonderful. But the point is, they are not real. They are not the nature of mind. They do not last. Again, anything that is real, lasts.

**(Q):** With this duality — the duality you're trying to pacify, how do you develop the virtue of compassion?

**(A):** Compassion and faith are virtues that have to be cultivated in the presence of duality. Their cultivation prepares you for meditation. They lead you to develop a deeper experience of the nature of mind by stabilizing the mind. The development of the qualities of compassion and confidence has the effect of reducing the influence of the negative tendencies in the mind. Naturally, these qualities develop within the context of duality. They are not non-dualistic qualities but we need them to start us off on the right track. The non-duality intervenes when the mind is already pacified and some clarity is there, and so we are poised to experience some direct insight into the nature of mind. We can then begin to develop this primordial awareness in the mind. It is this primordial awareness that is not dualistic. It is beyond duality. At that point, we can encounter and experience directly the non-duality of mind — it is like waking up from illusion.

Actually, there is another kind of compassion at a different level, which one might say, is non-dualistic. And we encounter it when we develop the primordial awareness, a non-dualistic insight into the nature of mind. It is the mind recognizing itself, its innate and original nature. Within this primordial non-dual awareness, there is also a quality of compassion, which is non-dualistic. This level is very difficult for us to understand, because we think that compassion must mean feeling compassion *for* someone. We think always in terms of duality. But actually, when we get to that point, we will have another understanding of compassion that is non-dualistic emerging from a non-dualistic mind. Right now, you cannot imagine it, or figure it out. You need to develop the non-dual mind first, then you will understand.

**(Q):** You're surrounded by a lot of suffering and you're able to be compassionate. But there's so much suffering and only so much compassion you have to give. Sometimes, your mind starts to feel a little overwhelmed with all this suffering. And it is not only my suffering, but I experience as well other people's suffering.

**(A):** Actually when we are developing compassion, particularly in the face of suffering, there's another element that we have to consider and bring into play. And that is the element of wisdom. In this particular context, it means knowing that the suffering is there, but not thinking that it is real. It is this that will allow you to not grasp at the suffering. Then you will not be overwhelmed by it. We should understand that even by clinging to the suffering as real, we could not develop compassion. Know that the suffering is not real. It is only experienced because of ignorance. Understand that it is not something solidly real, or fixed, but a manifestation of a confused mind. This will soften the force of the suffering and allow compassion to develop. If we're so fixed on compassion as a thing, there will be no room for understanding to arise. Then we will feel overwhelmed by it. Developing love equally towards all beings means training ourselves not to grasp. Free of grasping, true compassion has a chance to develop.

**(Q):** Rinpoche, earlier in your talk, if I remember correctly, you said once you recognize a pattern of thought, you would realize the nature of mind. I was wondering if a person becomes enlightened, would this person still produce thoughts?

**(A):** No. Then, all in one nature.

**(Q):** No thoughts?

**(A):** No thoughts. But when you realize the nature of mind, you also at the same time realize the nature of thoughts. And so, the thoughts will not influence you the way they do now.

**(Q):** You still produce thoughts?

**(A):** Yes, you can. Up until you've reached a very, very high level of meditation, you can still produce thoughts. The difference is you can overcome the thoughts. The thoughts are there but at the same time, mind also understands – the realization of the nature of thoughts is simultaneous. There are thoughts and simultaneously, the realization is there, too. It is like the movement of a snake, tight and release all at the same time.

**(Q):** So a person like a Buddha, does he have any kind of thought?

**(A):** Not a Buddha. Buddha means wisdom. Buddha means completely open. When the mind is completely open, there is Buddha. Buddha is not a person, or the name of a person only. Buddha means a better state of mind that is open completely. So it means a mind that is liberated. It is a different mind one that you cannot imagine now. This is why I said earlier that you need non-dualistic wisdom first before you can imagine it.

**(Q):** So for now, the completely awakened mind does not produce thought?

**(A):** Yes, but at the same time there is a different understanding. The mind does not produce thoughts does not mean that the mind collapses, nor is it like a blackout.

**(Q):** But what will it be? Nothing in the head, or. . . ?

**(A):** No, do not try to imagine that by your thinking now. Just go through with the instructions, and you will understand. Do not try to imagine it now. You cannot open your mind right now, no more than you can stop thinking in the way you do now. But if you could separate from your currently thinking mind, when you could realize that, then instead of thought, you would have another ability to understand. “*To produce thoughts*” is your way of thinking. But thoughts can never be produced. Actually, you can never produce thoughts. There is no singly existing thought so it cannot be produced. Even at the relative level, in terms of your mind now, you still cannot produce thoughts. When your mind contacts something, then that experience you can say is a thought. But thought itself does not exist as a single substantial thing on its own.

**(Q):** Can we just go back to the previous question. When you talk about how suffering is not real, I can’t go there. I can’t understand that. What I feel is suffering is very real, so I . . .

**(A):** In order for you not to grasp at the suffering, try to develop another mind that understands that everything is like a mirage, and not real. This is true understanding. Everything is not real, but a manifestation of the mind under illusion. To say that everything is an illusion is accurate. Don’t you think?

**(Q):** I do not know. I’m talking about a war, or somebody has been raped, or some horrible suffering. . .

**(A):** Yes, terrible sufferings, as long as you are in this illusion, they are there. But if you go into the real nature of each suffering, you will see that it is not real. It is like in a dream. During your sleep, you can dream and experience a particular suffering. But when you wake up, it is gone, and you’d say it was a nightmare. It does not mean you’ve pushed away the suffering somewhere. It just does not exist. This is why it can disappear when you wake up. All phenomena are like that in nature. But as long as you are in this illusion, yes, all the sufferings you named are real to you. Search into the reality of it, you will not find anything there. So, it is an illusion. The length of the illusion of this life when compared to the length of illusion of a dream is the only difference. But between the nature of the dream, and the nature of the waking life’s experiences, there is no difference. They are the same. Allow this view to penetrate and influence you in order to develop your compassion. Then the resultant compassion will not be of a sensationally grasping type – which can

markedly bother you. Well, even if you have that kind of compassion that bothers you a lot, it is still very good as it carries a lot of merit. Nevertheless, it disturbs you because the compassion becomes suffering to you. Am I right? Therefore, to make compassion softer, try to develop the understanding about the real nature of all phenomena – that it is an illusion. Then there's hope that you will eliminate the suffering. Otherwise if suffering solidly exists, there's no way to eliminate it. This view is therefore an optimistic and a useful one.

**(Q):** My question is somewhat the same. In our family, there's tremendous suffering: on the part of our parents, and then our siblings. Is there something that we could offer? I mean I understand what you're saying that I can try to accept it, the illusion nature of it; I go in and try to give some compassion to our family members. But the suffering is still really there and there's a lot of anxiety in them. I would really have a hard time going in and saying to them that it is an illusion. Instead, I go in and just breathe and look at my mother who's dying and show her I love her. I keep it really simple. And it seems to work to some degree. But now it's getting worse. So how can I detach without ignoring what my family is going through?

**(A):** Quite apart from the wisdom, or insight into the nature of suffering, if we were to consider the experience of suffering within our current dualistic experience, then it's very important to be able to reduce the overwhelming hold of suffering on us. We need to reduce its grasp sufficiently for there to be space to develop compassion such that we can still be compassionate and act in a supportive and helpful way.

Suppose we have people close to us who are suffering or in difficulties. Often we tend to emphasize that suffering by our undivided focus thereby giving it a particularly strong and important place. The mind is narrowed down to that suffering, and we feel it exclusive to the people immediately affected by it. In effect, our very clinging to it has exacerbated the condition and inflated its proportions. There are two ways to help us overcome this very normal tendency in us.

The first is to reflect that the person's suffering is not exclusive to him alone. In fact, suffering is experienced by all beings in our universe at any given time. To suffer is a common occurrence in life. This view opens up the mind. The immediate effect is that we are able to see sufferings that are greater by comparison. At the same time, we are also able to see lesser sufferings. The purpose here is neither to belittle nor to elevate a particular suffering but to quite simply remain balanced with a sense of proportion. This effectively reduces our own anxiety regarding the suffering thereby freeing us to become more useful to the person who is suffering.

Another approach is to recognize that some people suffer because they are trapped in their dualistic clinging. If they can release this clinging, which is the cause, then they will become free of the suffering. We understand that as long as the cause continues, then it is inevitable that they suffer. And so we recognize and accept that this is the state of affairs for the moment. Our contact with suffering signifies to us the essential need to follow the Path of the Buddha's teachings. It will awaken us from the clinging and the confusion and then we can be free of the suffering. It is the only way out of dualistic perception. This reflection drives home the point that as long we are not ready to invest effort into walking the path out of confusion, then

the situation is hopeless – we are indeed helpless in the face of suffering. We are at a loss to actually act intelligently and beneficially for others. On the other hand, by understanding the causes, whenever we see suffering, we will also see the causes underneath it. We bring to mind the different methods the Buddha had taught to overcome these causes. Then we can work with any situation and that gives us hope. It strengthens us to give help and support.

These two reflections are then the means to deal with problems and difficulties.

**(Q):** You do not have to answer this because you just did. I was just going to say that I was feeling, too, the same thing as expressed by others here. For someone who has to feed his family, for example, in the middle of a drought when his crop has failed, he really feels helpless. It would be very hard for him to see it all as an illusion.

**(A):** Yes, also people in the conditions of the slums in India, and elsewhere.

**(Q):** Even in our Midwest right now, when there's drought — I mean that is a very challenging thing. We try to understand to help us cope. I guess it is just what you were saying and doing the best that you can in a situation.

**(A):** A reasonably good explanation will also come from the teachings on *karma* tomorrow. I stop here today. Thank you.

# Karma

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On the subject of *karma*, the law of action and result, or cause and effect, we begin with an explanation of the mind itself and how it functions.

## *the eight consciousnesses*

The functions of mind according to Tibetan Buddhist psychology can be considered in terms of the eight consciousnesses. Mind itself has an innate quality – a capacity to know through various ways. These ways are the processes of knowing, called the consciousnesses, and there are eight.

We begin with the basic consciousness. It is also known as the ground mind, or the fundamental consciousness, so called because it is the source out of which all the other consciousnesses arise. This basic consciousness is in a state of ignorance, a state of not-knowing meaning that it is unaware of the true quality of its own essence, or nature. Not knowing, the ground mind makes the mistake of grasping onto an impression, or an idea of a self thereby giving rise to the experience of ego clinging. Through ego clinging, a great variety of emotions come alive. It is as if the ground mind has developed another aspect rooted in ego clinging with its unique functioning through the rise and fall of the emotions. We classify this aspect of mind as another consciousness. We give it a label, “the emotional consciousness”, or “the emotional mind”.

When the emotional and basic consciousnesses go into operation together, they give rise to the manifestation of an outside world. In order to interact with this manifested external, the mind further develops six *sensory* consciousnesses. As a matter of fact, five of the six give rise to our five senses that we all know too well, and then also a sixth, which is thinking.

1. a *sight* consciousness for the manifestation of form,
2. a *hearing* consciousness for the manifestation of sound,
3. an *olfactory* consciousness for the manifestation of smell,
4. a *tactile* consciousness for the manifestation of physical textures,
5. a *taste* consciousness for the manifestation of tastes,
6. last but not least, a *thinking* consciousness for the manifestation of all thought/mental forms.
7. Add the *emotional* mind/consciousness for the manifestations of all emotions,
8. and the *basic* consciousness for the manifestation of the above seven consciousnesses, we have the eight consciousnesses of a fully functioning human mind.

Through these six sensory consciousnesses, the mind then sustains a manifested world and fully engages itself in it. It grasps at the outer sense objects entering into relationships with them: seeing them, hearing them, smelling them, touching them,

tasting them, and thinking or being aware of ideas and concepts about them. These are the activities of the first six sensory consciousnesses.

### ***how karma is produced and stored***

What is the role of karma in all of this? Karma encompasses all the habits, tendencies and conditions of mind that are stored in the basic consciousness. How did they get there? They are first produced by a kind of system. The system is the activities of the six sensory consciousnesses as the mind engages the world. These sensory processes or activities are like the servants carrying out the directions of a master. They are like a system directed by a controller. And who is the master? Who is the controller? It is the emotional mind, which senses self-existence and experiences ego-clinging. So in one sense, the ego is the master or controller commanding the system of sensory processes.

With every cause, there is always an effect. With every activity through our thoughts, speech, and actions, sometimes referred to as our three doors, there is always a result. A result in this context refers to the habits or tendencies of mind. All produced results are kept and stored in the basic consciousness. They are stored in the form of what we call a seed – not something definite, or material that can be touched or pointed to. Instead, it is rather like a certain quality of mind, a certain potential or influence that is in the same nature as mind. The seeds themselves will turn into causes when they ripen or mature.

### ***when karma ripens***

Karma, the seeds that we sow through our actions, can be positive, neutral, or negative. But irrespective of their qualities, without exception, their effects are stored in the ground mind. As these seeds of tendencies gather and collect, they become the causes of our future. They have the ability, or power to cause us to take rebirth accordingly based on what we have accumulated by our own doing. They bring us into rebirth, life after life. Therefore karma is the underlying generator of cyclic existence, of reincarnation, and of continuity. And the influence of ego clinging is at the very source of all karmic potentials that had been created in the past, and are being created in the now, which will ripen in the future.

The karmic tendencies, or seeds within the fundamental consciousness are extremely subtle, and extremely profound. Here, we are not talking about some obvious substance or thing, which actually exists. If we try to investigate and to see these different karmic potentials, we won't discover anything. This is because they are like a mirage, like an illusion. They do not have any true reality. Nevertheless they give us a sense of existence, or a sense of presence. Our very own individualistic karmic causes are interwoven into our very stream of being. This means that at any given moment, our basic consciousness consists of a complete set of immeasurable accumulation of tiny infinitesimal particles of karma, or aspects of karma, waiting to ripen. As these seeds ripen, they will determine how we experience our 'self' and the world around us. A ripening karma could mean, for instance, the end of one life and the rebirth of another that is reincarnation. With each rebirth, an individual will take on whatever new form, character, and personality traits. As well, his rebirth will take

place in a surrounding, or world with characteristics appropriately corresponding to his form of life. Those seeds not yet ripened will remain within the fundamental consciousness. They are just there, like sand particles in the desert, just waiting to come to the surface and ripen.

There are millions, and billions of these tiny habits of karma – countless of them. Their nature is the same as mind. They are not separate from mind, but their appearance is separate, and distinct. Each one is very powerful and when it ripens, it will open up and spread. You are right in it. You are not separate from it as if it is the object, and you the subject. No, you are in it. Your mind is in that kind of experience. We say that you are in that realm of experience. From only a very tiny mirage of one karmic droplet, literally billions of them could pour out and run like a river in your mind. Those seeds are there now lying dormant. They are blocked by the active karma, which is happening now, i.e. your life now. The cause of your current life will eventually weaken until it has been exhausted. Then your current life will be finished. Your life will disappear to you, and you will enter the bardo, a stage in between lives. And then, the next karmic seed, i.e. the most active one among the billions of them, will ripen. Very quickly, you will find yourself in your next life within a particular setting along with all its conditions.

### ***karma ripens in three ways***

Concerning how the karmic seeds ripen into results which we experience, this can happen in many ways. There are so many possibilities of results both in terms of their timing and the different forms and varieties. This process of karma is not simple in the least. Generally speaking, however, we can say that each action that we do, and therefore each karmic seed sown, may ripen in three possible ways.

1. It may ripen in this life, i.e., it ripens into conditions similar to the perpetrating action. The result resembles the original action that caused it.
2. It may ripen at the moment of death when our current karma ceases. Our current experience of this life in this world comes to an end. A transition period between the end of one life and the beginning of the next then comes into play until the next karmic seed surfaces and ripens.
3. It may ripen much later, not in this life, not in the immediate next life, but many lives later.

The process of karma is often called the law of karma described as infallible. It is infallible because the result of any action will be stored until its ripening one day. There are no exceptions. Even the very highly realized beings who have already attained the 7<sup>th</sup> bodhisattva level but have not as yet achieved the 8<sup>th</sup>, they still have to experience the ripening of their accumulated karma. The only difference is the realized beings are able to see their living in a play of illusion like watching TV. Life for them is passing on screen only. They actually know how the mind functions and therefore can see right through the confusion. As the karmic results unfold before them, they can remain unattached, and unmoved. Nothing can overcome them. They have the ability to see beyond the confusion so they cannot be controlled by it. We, on the other hand, are totally taken over by the manifestations of the ripening karma, and so are lost to it. For us, duality rules because we cling to it and

experience it as solidly there. We are totally caught up in it and we believe it. Those on the higher levels of realization, even though duality is not yet completely resolved for them, they nevertheless recognize the illusive nature of it.

### *merit remedies the negativity*

We call positive karma, *merit*. We all know merit, or positive actions, bring positive results. In addition, merit has a particularly unique quality. Picture if you will the collection of karmas like a storehouse where the positive, negative, or neutral seeds are all mixed together. Where a greater proportion of merit is present relative to the negative seeds, then the positive seeds have the power to bring to the surface all kinds of karmic seeds. In the process, these accumulated seeds are forced to ripen and to be exhausted within the same lifetime as their accumulation. The greater the concentration of positive seeds in storage, the quicker the clearance. Not only that, but the ripening negative effects are actually reduced. This means we will suffer less. This is indeed an advantageous quality of great merit. For someone who has a tremendously positive reserve with little negativity, his karmas can quickly clear up, their effects hardly felt. Therefore, by sowing positive seeds limitlessly, we are in effect clearing away our karma, and diluting and reducing the potential of the stronger ones.

Where the storage of merit is not as strong, perhaps due to the presence of some negative seeds, the positive influence is likewise weaker. In this instance, when a negative seed ripens, the negative effect will be felt. There are two reasons for it. First, when karma ripens, even though it may start out being very small, it will further develop which tends to encourage the ripening of tendencies that resemble the perpetrator-action itself. Second, the storage of positive merit at the same time is also active encouraging karmic seeds to be brought to the surface so as to weaken and exhaust them – to finish them up. These two factors acting together mean that when one karma ripens, further similar effects and tendencies will be brought up, developed, and experienced. The potency or the extent of the negativity we experience is directly dependent on the size of our positive reserve, which can weaken the negativity making it more tolerable – the greater our merit, the lesser our negative experience; the lesser our merit, the greater our negative experience. This is precisely why the accumulation of merit is so important. It directly affects us in our experience of the karma we have created. In short, positive karma remedies the negative. But if we wish to totally overcome our negative karma, we must acquire the ability to see into the nature of reality.

Concerning the karmic seeds that ripen to give an effect similar to the cause, we can see these effects in our own experiences. It is something, which we regularly encounter in our daily lives. Here is one example of this kind of experience of karma that we can see for ourselves – where the karma ripens within the same lifetime.

Last year, I was at Dulles airport in a store buying some batteries. I had on me only dollar bills. When I went to pay, I needed 14 cents in change. Unwilling to break up a 10-dollar or 5-dollar bill, I do not remember exactly, I asked the cashier if he would mind dropping the 14 cents. Suddenly, a man from behind me said, “Here’s 14 cents. Merry Christmas!” And he gave me the 14 cents. So this unusual incident

happened to me. Not long after that, perhaps 2 or 3 months later, I stopped over in Hawaii for a few days en route in my return to India. I had gone to a shopping center. As I was coming out of the building, suddenly, a man came up to me and asked me, “Do you have 70 cents?” He needed 70 cents. I was taken aback by the suddenness of his request, but then immediately it came to me, “Oh, this is what I owe – the 14 cents has now become 70 cents that I have to pay!” It was very unusual for a person to come up to me like that and to ask for such an odd amount! But then, that karma is finished.

### *the bardo*

There is a space we experience after our death called the bardo. It is an intermediate state between our death and our next incarnation when we are moving towards the next re-birth. The experience of the bardo is very fluid and unstable, because many different tendencies are coming to the surface during this process. Then, sooner or later, the karma of our next life will also rise to the surface to ripen. This ripening karma will determine all the circumstances of our next incarnation – what kind of body, what kind of life, what kind of conditions we will next find ourselves in. The bardo is then a space of possibility for one of these ‘waiting-in-line karmas’ to ripen. The process itself is slow, and gradual. It may take some time before the next karma will finally rise to the surface. When it does, our mind will take part in an illusion or a manifestation of the conditions of our next re-birth. For instance, if the karmic cause is to be reborn as a human being, then we will see the sexual union of our future parents. In our consciousness, an intermediate experience – a reaction of both anger and love will be felt. Depending on our future sex, we will feel love towards the parent of the opposite sex and hatred towards the other. Through these emotions, our consciousness will be drawn into the womb, and our re-birth process begins at that point – the first moment in our new existence.

### *to be free or not is our choice*

We will continue to have many rebirths in the various forms of existence. The cause of rebirth is sexual attachment. The methods of the Hinayana or Theravadin tradition are aimed at releasing all forms of attachments. The goal is to renounce any form of participation in samsara – to be cut off entirely from cyclic existence. To this end, the meditation focuses on each emotive cause to extinguish it. An arhat is a person who has cultivated successfully such methods and thus capable of arresting further rebirths. His realization enables him to extract himself from the rebirth process altogether. The downside is his realization is also arrested at a certain level and therefore cannot progress to reach true liberation or complete enlightenment.

The bodhisattva, on the other hand, is in a slightly different situation. He has promised to continue to work for the benefit of living beings requiring him to be reborn among them. The bodhisattva meditates and renounces all the negative emotive causes. He does not particularly focus on the sexual attachment nor does he reject it. He might adopt it when it becomes necessary depending on the circumstances. He neither focuses on sexual attachment nor does he renounce it. To be of use to those around him in whatever form is his overriding aim and concern. His participation in samsara becomes a means to this end. Unlike the

arhat, a bodhisattva's very wish to help beings connects him to them. In fact, he allows himself to be pulled into the rebirth process. He adopts rebirth by his wish grounded in compassion. He has what we call the enlightened attitude, or Bodhicitta, which is the cause for re-birth as opposed to disengagement.

The type of rebirth varies from the very lucky and good to the very miserable and bad. To be reborn comes from one karma, and then the form and conditions of your life depends on many other karmas. The karmas depend on your self-clinging and emotions, i.e., the mental events and conditions stored in your mind. Among the innumerable karmas, some are ephemeral – appearing and then disappearing. They are very, very weak. Some are strong karmas, stored and kept in the ground mind or in the basic consciousness. Each of these very strong seeds has the potential to produce a certain experience or a certain manifestation that is extremely widespread, and vast. So long as the seed itself is not ripened, then the resulting manifestation is not apparent to you. But as soon as the seed ripens, then immediately the whole result expands infinitely. It is such a vast expansion that we again find ourselves in it, in a whole lifetime wherein millions of karma will be accumulated again.

So karma is, and will always be countless in number. Once you are caught up in the cycle of rebirths, and if you don't do anything about it, you won't have a chance of getting out or getting free. But if you know how to wake up from this confusion of mind, then all the karmas are like mirages. You then hold the key to unlock the prison. A mirage is a mirage. Switch off the television, and it is all gone, just like that. Everything disappears. It is possible for you to become liberated from samsara. You can also choose to do nothing and to continue to be entirely involved with samsara. It depends on how you use this life, what you choose to do now.

### ***two types of karma***

There are two types of karma. One relates specifically and exclusively to an individual so it is called individual karma. The other is collective karma, where a common karmic experience is shared among a group of people. For instance, when collective karma ripens within the minds of the group of people affected, they will experience the effects of it at the same time so we say that they share the same experience. For instance, the fact that we are here in this room tonight together means that we share a common karma.

An example: a Thai Airline flight from Bangkok to Nepal crashed and everyone on the plane was tragically killed. The passengers had the common karma of dying together in the plane crash. A man who missed the flight survived. It was on account of his dog that he did not board the flight and so escaped the subsequent crash. He had stayed behind with his dog to take care of it. One could say that his dog saved him. One could also say that his concern for his dog saved him. Karma is actually very natural. Nobody controls it like a judge who sits in judgment. It is not like having someone watching over things as in "I am going to reward you because you did good!" Karma is natural, it is free of manipulation and distortions in the sense that you get what you put in. For example, the work of traffic controllers produces good karma for them. Their work safeguards the lives of many. Whether

they know it or not, whether they want it or not, what they do naturally benefit others, and will naturally yield positive effects. Likewise, a very vicious animal may attack and kill without understanding that its actions are bad. Nevertheless, its aggression will yield negative results.

The details about how karma actually takes place, or the intricacies of karma, are extremely difficult for us to understand and would take a very long time to understand. It suffices to know that so long as we remain caught up within the illusion, then we will continue to cultivate the causes through our every action. More and more seeds will accumulate in our fundamental consciousness. Sooner or later, the seeds will ripen into various situations. The key then is to really understand the illusory quality of karma. What is important is to truly see and experience for ourselves that everything is a mirage, an illusion. Our mind will then not be caught up in the ripening karma whatever it is. We will not be drawn into thinking that it is real.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** Once you've been born as a human, will you always continue to be reborn as a human?

**(A):** That depends on karma.

**(Q):** Are your chances better?

**(A):** It depends on what kind of good deeds you have performed. One cannot be very sure. King Ashoka had been very cruel in his youth, having killed many people. He had been what we would call *mara*, a great evil. Then, the King met a monk — an enlightened arhat who demonstrated all kinds of miraculous powers. Using these fantastic feats, the monk was able to subdue and finally defeat the King's ego. Following the teachings of this monk, the King was transformed into a very generous ruler. He became very moral, and virtuous, and performed innumerable positive deeds helping people. At the end of his life, he fell sick. Just before he passed away, an incident happened. The King's attendant mistakenly caused a fence to hit him. This made the King feel terribly disappointed. "I'm such a very great king, yet when I'm dying, even my attendant hit me." He felt this kind of tiny anger and then he died. He was reborn as a python. His arhat-teacher told people that it was on account of the King's tiny anger that caused his rebirth as a python. The arhat went to the python and called out to it, "Ashoka". He called out his name like that many times. Then through the power of great blessings and through the former King's own good deeds, and merit, the python remembered. It stopped eating, and died. Afterwards, King Ashoka reincarnated as a very great Buddhist teacher, and became enlightened in that life. This is not a fairy tale. King Ashoka was a very great king whose wonderful works had been carefully recorded in the history books. And so everything depends on cause.

**(Q):** In the Western tradition, they talk of ... free will, or the ability to actually make choices. And ... there is something called determinism. Does karma mean fate or that life is sort of laid out by some kind of positive principle? Where, in that display of phenomena happening due to ripening seeds, is there room for choice? Can you move your life in a more positive direction? Can you encourage the positive seeds to ripen, and discourage the negative seeds from ripening?

**(A):** Sure! Yes, it is possible. That was how Milarepa attained enlightenment, exactly like that. He, and all humans alike can change their karma. As I've explained, if you know the keys, then you will know how to change. You will have control over karma.

**(Q):** So the karma does not determine that choice, is that it?

**(A):** Karma can in one way determine the choice. Karma, which had already ripened, is difficult to change. But compared to animals, the possibilities are greater for humans to change their karma. It is on account of our sharper sense faculties, the result of our good karma, that we are capable of altering our own karma. This is why a human being has the capacity to attain enlightenment. This means a human being can change karma. Animals stand much less of a chance. Again, it depends also on what kind of animal. Some animals also have that potential though the

probability of success is much reduced due to duller sense faculties. Their capacity to understand is weaker. For instance, you could try to teach them how to be enlightened, but they do not understand. They do not know how to meditate...so it is very difficult for them.

**(Q):** Rinpoche, you said that in the bardo, just before taking rebirth, one is attracted to the parent of the opposite sex. Does that mean it depends on your own gender?

**(A):** Yes. If you're going to be a female, you will feel attachment to the father. This applies only at the moment of taking rebirth when you are really not yet formed as a fetus.

**(Q):** And also at that time, there are emotions? So you have a karmic attachment to the father... if he has anger or fear, that you have.....?

**(A):** No.

**(Q):** You said love, or anger, or something?

**(A):** When your karma ripens and you are to be born as a human, your future sex will eventually manifest based on your own past habits or potentials. If you're going to be a son, you will feel attachment to your future mother. You will also feel anger towards the father in the form of jealous thoughts. Those feelings or thoughts will lead you to attach and grasp. And you will be drawn into rebirth.

**(Q):** An attraction to one and an aversion to the other?

**(A):** Yes. Whenever there is a desire for something, there is always a pushing away of others who want the same. So that comes with the territory of grasping. It always happens like that.

**(Q):** How do you choose the parent?

**(A):** The ripening karma will lead you. You have no choice.

**(Q):** How about you? You have choice?

**(A):** The Bodhisattvas who are highly realized, then they can choose; but there are many also who do not choose.

**(Q):** A similar question: does that mean then that there's only one mother and father that you can go to dependent on how...

**(A):** No.

**(Q):** Because in the bardo, some of the seeds have ripened. Are there all these couples out there that you can choose from as to where to go?

**(A):** No, I used only one example of a human rebirth to show how a being participates in the rebirth process – how one takes part in assuming a new form during the bardo after one has died. But as far as the possibilities of new forms are concerned, they can be any life form. You can be reborn as an egg of a spider. There are some who live only like a mist in the sky, and they could be killed through exposure to light. You could also take one of those forms.

**(Q):** So what is the final determining factor, in terms of whether you will be a spider's egg, or a human, or the air-being?

**(A):** A tiny karma ripens and one form of illusory life is established. Why I call it illusory is because it is an appearance of a life form that is going to be established, be it human, or otherwise. When that happens, the form of your next life is finally determined.

**(Q):** You can only be in one place at one time?

**(A):** Because of our own karma, we can only see the parents we're going to have. We do not have a choice. We're not up there looking down at lots of different parents as possibilities to choose from. The whole rebirth process continues to take place within our illusion developed from our karma. We are undergoing a change due to a change in our karma. Our previous karma has finished and we are moving on to the next one. At the moment of change, the ripening karma will cause us to see our future parents if we are going to be human again. We use the term, "parents", very loosely here. We could be born in other states of existence where the rebirth process is not necessarily one of a couple's relationship. But the basic emotional experience is the same – there is grasping which leads us into the next incarnation whatever its form.

**(Q):** The law of karma. . . would in fact be an illusion to the awakened mind, right?

**(A):** The enlightened mind knows everything. It is not a question of perceiving karma as a mirage or an illusion. The Buddha knows directly in his own mind the karma, the cause and effect of each and every action of each and every living being. And this is direct knowledge exclusive to enlightenment. Before enlightenment however, some degree of all-knowing can be experienced. Various supernatural or supersensitive cognitions would allow, for instance, someone highly experienced in mental pacification to know directly a few details of karma about a few individuals. For instance, a highly realized meditator, when asked where a deceased person's consciousness would be reborn next, he'd be able to answer though his view is still considered limited, but accurate within its scope. Only the Buddha can see everything.

Breathing, focusing. You have to become very used to that, so you can constantly do it. Then if you could count up to 1000 times without any interruption, then this means your mind has become very, very stable. That stable mind shines, and its perceiving power very big. It is lucid, and very clear. Even a glimpse from it will afford you the knowing and the understanding of many things otherwise blocked from you. In a very clear and stable mind, the sense of knowing expands.

**(Q):** Okay, so you have this illusion of all these differences. You calm the mind and you just perceive the world directly. Is the world just like when all is unified as one thing, and you see it that way? Each and everything, all the separate stuff, is an illusion?

**(A):** There are actually two levels of illusion, one might say. First of all, there is the manifestation of an external world from the mind – that is already one illusion. Furthermore, a second phase of illusion takes place when the mind considers the manifested externals as truly existing. The mind is distracted and connects with it. Both are illusory – the world and our connection to it.

**(Q):** [inaudible]. . . a description of what is really there? . . .

**(A):** Concerning reality, it is the point where we are free of the illusion or no longer attracted to it. Traditionally, two levels or definitions of reality are given. The first is a reality perceived by a mind that is liberated from the cycle of existence. This is a mind at the level of realization of an arhat. And a person with that realization is called a realized being. Even though complete Buddhahood has not been reached, yet the realization is so high that one is able to be absorbed in a state of mind very vast and at the same time, extremely profound and stable. Such a mind is no longer under the influence of confusion, and we say that confusion has come to an end. Reality perceived by this unconfused mind is defined as one level of reality. In its description, it is said that it is an experience that goes beyond total relaxation and satisfaction. ‘Beyond’ here means cannot be described through words. When we say relaxed and satisfied, we are inevitably implying that there is *someone* who *experiences* those *feelings* with *something*. The words we say and the feelings we have are grounded in our current mode of experience that is dualistic. On the other hand, a realized being directly experiences reality without duality. As to the second level of reality, it is the reality of Buddhahood. It is the level of primordial awareness, or primordial wisdom. This is impossible to describe. Primordial awareness can only be experienced. No words are sufficient to describe this experience. The dictionary contains many words – we have created all of them to stand for objects, and attributes, of which we share a common experience. So the words come out of our experience. If I say, “I feel comfortable,” you’d have an idea as to what I feel because you have experienced it. If I say, “I am angry,” you know what I am talking about from your own experience. But if I were to say, “primordial wisdom,” or “to perceive reality through primordial wisdom,” you’d be at a loss as to what to think or feel – you’ve never experienced it. This is why these terms are not in the dictionary.

**(Q):** But for instance, karma seeds ripen, or they may be extinguished by the accumulation of merit or ripen and then come to...?

**(A):** The ripening of karma is natural. Sometimes, if it is not fully ripening, you can be stuck in it, that is also karma. There are beings like that, too. The negative karmas can always be weakened and subdued by positive karma. There is no need to eliminate the positive karma. To really eliminate karma, we have to realize the direct view of phenomena, and of mind’s true nature, then karma will cease to exist altogether. It will be seen like a mirage. That is an ‘extra view’ that has to be developed from your mind. When duality is gone, so is karma. It is as simple as that.

**(Q):** I’m having a little trouble with the concept of merit, because it seems maybe you are performing the good deeds for the purpose of your own enlightenment, that is why you’re doing it. It seems calculated. The line seems too thin. You probably weren’t really thinking of enlightenment when you did it but you did it because you felt it was the right thing to do. It seems so hard to separate the self-interest from the good deed, or I have a misconception about merit.

**(A):** When the action is right, or positive, but at the same time, you are deliberately accumulating merit then you are harboring some selfish motive. Your aim is for a good return to you. This is why we say that that kind of good deed is limited. When you hold some self-interest, you limit the positive extent of your actions and so the returns are likewise limited. If you do not aim for self-interest, which means you

fully dedicate your efforts to benefit others, then it is genuine compassion and a loving mind towards all sentient beings. You are not in it for the reward – whatever is good for others, you just provide it. You just do it. This is what we call Bodhisattva practice. Like the man, in the example I gave earlier, who gave me 14 cents quite spontaneously and naturally, wishing me a ‘Merry Christmas!’ <laughter>

**(Q):** Often you’re in a situation where you see the same thing happening again and again to someone. And you see things in our lives, too. I’ll use just an example: some people always seem to get to a certain place and then they’re fired from their job. And then continually they have the same kind of boss. They go and work and then one day they’re fired again. And it always seems to happen to them. So eventually they seem to become aware that this is karma, this is something that is going to continue to happen, until there’s some kind of resolution.

**(A):** You mean it is inevitable?

**(Q):** Now when one reaches that point of being aware that it is karmic — and I do not know whether you would call this a karmic action, or a karmic reaction, what do you do with that awareness? How would you deal with it? It will happen again, because you’re almost drawn to it.

**(A):** Well, there are certain things that are not necessarily connected to karma, for instance, through a temporary lapse of attention, you hit a table, or while driving, you hit a tree. That kind of mistake does not necessarily come from karma. There are many instances like that. But whether a problem is due to karma or not, we still have to try to manage. If you are always running into some difficulties, then you need to know the cause. If you know, then you’ll know whether it is just an occasional mishap, or something that you can correct and change. If you can’t help but land always in some difficulties, then it means that the foundation of your lifestyle is weak. As a result, anything you do, you encounter some problems. This may be connected to the past, to some negative karma. But the fact that you are aware, or you are taking notice means that you can take measures to improve, and that in-itself tells you that the karma is relatively weak – you can do something about it.

**(Q):** But once that happens, and you become aware of what is happening, what do you do? If it always seems like it is happening and it continues to happen again and again, what should you do when you can almost see your own karma?

**(A):** It means that you understand, so already you do not have to suffer the regret about making the mistakes. In one way, if you accept what you observe as repetitive and following a pattern, and you attribute it to your own karma, then if nothing else, you will be less shocked. It also implies that you are starting to accept things more readily. You should feel less regret and self-blame. In this way, you can find some solace.

**(Q):** But then, can you change it?

**(A):** Yes, by knowing you have an opportunity to seek a way out, how to develop in a different direction, how to change it, and to correct it. This is definitely possible.

**(Q):** Rinpoche, you said that we have now a chance to practise Buddhism, that we should think for our next life in order to have a better one. We should practise the six Paramitas. But then you also said that we have no control over the form of our

next life. I mean it does not matter what we do, we do not know what will happen to us. And it seems that we do not have enough information so it is not easy for us to do what it takes to get a better next life.

**(A):** The main thing we have to understand is that whatever good that we do will go towards reducing the negative karma we have sewn and accumulated thus far in our mind. Our positive actions will inevitably affect and determine which seeds will come to the surface and ripen into a manifestation of our next rebirth. In this way, we do have some control over our next rebirth.

**(Q):** Next rebirth... our chance of becoming enlightened is very small. We do not really know our inner storage of karma so we have no way of knowing whether we'd have a good life or not.

**(A):** If you have not done enough good deeds, plus you do not know what's going to happen next life, then yes, you can only wonder about what is to come – you do not know, and you're not sure. But if you perform the good deeds now, and accumulate them as much as you can, then that is assurance that your next life will be good. This is because your next life depends on the good deeds that you do in this life now.

**(Q):** I was just wondering, it's kind of off topic, but sometimes people have been together for a long time, maybe through different lifetimes. Between them, there is this wave of mutual understanding. Is there a reason for that?

**(A):** This can be due to past interactions, or past connection. There might be a karmic connection to meet together so it could happen.

**(Q):** Referring to the story about King Ashoka who was angry when he died, and became a python. Afterwards, in his next life, he became a Buddhist monk. Did he then remember?

**(A):** The Buddhist monk would not have remembered that he was a python. But by the good deeds he had accumulated, naturally, he became a Buddhist monk and his practice developed very successfully.

**(Q):** Generally speaking, we are not arhats now. We are Bodhisattvas.

**(A):** Yes.

**(Q):** Why don't we remember?

**(A):** Due to the ignorance in the mind, the mind is very gloomy. Secondly, dying, being in the bardo, and taking rebirth will cause you to suffer a few bad collapses of mind. Each collapse causes you to forget everything. For instance, dying causes you to suffer a collapse much like fainting wherein you lose all consciousness for 12 hours. Then again in the bardo, every week you will experience the same dying again until you take part in a new life. At the moment you enter into your next life form, there is another collapse. Therefore, you move through many disasters during the transitional process. The effect is you will forget or lose much of your memory. This is quite true. The collapses do happen during the process of reincarnation.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** To remember the past is easier than to know the future. This is because the past is stored in your mind. Like a tape recorder, it is possible to rewind it. When you do the concentration meditation wherein you concentrate on every thought, you can employ a certain tactic to remember the past. You concentrate on every thought, and that can bring back quite extensively the memories of a few past lives. As to the future, it is not easy at all. To know, you have to be highly enlightened.

**(Q):** How long you stay in the bardo is determined by your karma?

**(A):** It is said that generally it is 49 days. One cannot be sure because of the many changes that occur during that period. Again, it depends on the individual.

**(Q):** With any ripening karmic situation, what would be the best way to cope?

**(A):** When negativity arises, treat it if you will, a snake in your lap – immediately push it away. You do not want to give the negativity any opportunity to grow and stabilize. Karma is like a small leak, you can plug it and mend it right away. Do not let it get any bigger.

**(Q):** What if the karma's already grown? You're in the middle of a fight with someone, and you've done this before. And then you realize you're doing it, and you hate it but you can't stop. What do you do?

**(A):** It is bad when you cannot control it. As soon as you realize that you are angry, then you should try to take back control and drop it. This will reduce the power of the karma. Otherwise, it will continue to grow, and the habit becomes stronger, and stronger. Growing means the habit gets more deeply rooted in your consciousness.

**(Q):** You said that an arhat has the ability to go into a deep absorption. If the body dies and the mind is still continuing, how does it manifest an existence if there isn't a body anymore?

**(A):** The mind does not need a body. The mind can still go on. Mind is neither anything substantial nor does it need a form to reside in.

**(Q):** Mind can be anywhere then?

**(A):** Yes, it can go on by itself.

**(Q):** Some people claim to be able to channel to the deceased, like our deceased relatives. However, when somebody dies, his mind goes into the bardo, and then reincarnates after 49 days. That means his mind has gone somewhere else. So these people who claim they can channel and touch base with our dead relatives, like our grandparents, it is not possible then?

**(A):** The mind in the bardo is a very confused mind so it is very difficult to communicate with those minds. You cannot get in touch with the minds there.

**(Q):** So theoretically, in Buddhist belief, people shouldn't be able to channel their grandparents because theoretically, their minds had gone on and reincarnated into other people.

**(A):** Yes. You can have millions of grandparents from all your past lives, too many to innumerate even.

**(Q):** Could it be just one set of grandparents, theoretically, out of the millions of different grandparents?

**(A):** Satellite! <laughter>

# Mahamudra

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by Lama Rinchen

I would like to incorporate the different aspects of the practice of meditation as explained by Shamar Rinpoche into an overall understanding of the notion of mind and meditation. I would also like to show how the various aspects fit into the principal path of meditation in the Kagyu lineage, called Mahamudra. This understanding is important to avoid getting trapped by the very techniques we employ. Knowing where we are going basically with our meditation, or why we meditate will enable us to apply the techniques meaningfully within a proper context.

## *a proper view*

According to the teachings of the great lineage masters of the Kagyupa, the path of Mahamudra begins with an understanding of Buddha nature. Each school of Tibetan Buddhism approaches this slightly differently. As well, the Buddha nature is sometimes presented from the point of view of ultimate reality. Sometimes, it is looked at from the point of view of someone enmeshed in duality wherein his discovery of the Buddha nature progresses gradually. To practice Mahamudra meditation then, it is the ultimate view, which will give us the required perspective. It is important to us because when we come to sit down and meditate, the ideas that we have about ourselves, about the world, about what we are actually going to do during the meditation, will affect our meditation. Even though we may think our meditation experience fresh, when in actual fact, we are all but influenced by the very attitudes and basic prejudices that we have. They act on our mind and affect what we will allow ourselves to do during meditation. The same applies to the meditation methods we have learnt – we bring them into the meditation to apply them. These may be the techniques we are using as taught by Shamar Rinpoche: the ways to pacify the mind, or to investigate, and to discover the nature of mind. We also form our own ideas about the methods, and our perception of our own ability to apply them. All these concepts we bring with us when we sit down to meditate; and so they will influence us. We use this to our advantage by learning beforehand what mind is, what ultimate reality is within the context of Mahamudra as much as we can. We learn first about the innate qualities of mind so as to be properly influenced. This is why Rinpoche explained them to us: the empty essence of mind, its natural clarity, and its capacity as being unimpeded, or unrestricted in all its manifestations. These are the qualities of mind that define Buddha nature that we should try to understand before we sit down to meditate.

## *confidence in Buddha nature*

Buddha nature is present within each and every living being. The Buddha, in his third cycle of teachings, gave instructions about it. He explained that Buddha nature is everywhere, unequivocally; it is within each and every living being, and every phenomenon. If we consider Buddha nature as reality, then we can easily understand

how it cannot be restricted to one place. It cannot be found only in one place and not in others. And if reality is a universal truth, then it must be everywhere. This means we can discover it in each and every experience of our mind, and in every phenomenon in the external world. We should understand at least this basic character of Buddha nature instead of latching onto it as a personal thing that everybody owns, which is not at all the case. Buddha nature is the enlightened reality that every living being can wake up to. This is a more precise understanding – that Buddha nature is a reality whereto every being and every phenomenon bears witness. This then is the starting point for our practice of meditation.

When we meditate, we should be confident that Buddha nature, or reality, could be discovered within each and every experience of our meditation. We do not wonder if we have Buddha nature or not. We do not entertain thoughts of whether we have a part of it but not all of it, or whether our neighbor has more of it. There is no need to have these kinds of doubts. Reality is everywhere. We are fully capable to be as enlightened as the Buddha himself. We have this potential and with confidence we begin to practice meditation without any doubt whether we will be successful or not.

### ***veiled mind***

Then why is it that when we sit down to meditate, we do not see Buddha nature? In fact, it is quite difficult to even catch a glimpse of it. And so we might ask, “How come we do not see it if this reality is everywhere?” We have to understand that our Buddha nature is now obscured. It is veiled, hidden from us. It is hidden not in the sense that someone has hidden it from us, nor is it barred from us because of something we did in the past. Our real nature is veiled by each and every mental event that arises in the mind at each and every moment. We can experience this for ourselves. When we sit, we can experience the hold of all the mental events have on us. They are incessant making it near impossible to see our Buddha nature. This is why we say they obscure, and veil our mind. However, these veils are not *things*. The ultimate view of reality, on which Mahamudra meditation is based, tells us that these veils are not *things* which have been building up since beginningless time; neither are they like a thick layer covering the surface of our Buddha nature. These veils are not concrete things. They are, in fact, the totality of the mistakes we make at each and every moment of mind.

### ***a mistake of duality***

When we begin to look into mind’s nature as described by Rinpoche, we will discover that the mind is not a thing. We cannot really fix it. We cannot spot it. We cannot define it in any way. The mind is simply a stream of moments of consciousness, of awareness. They are at the same time, moments of reality. However, we mistake that reality in each and every moment to be other than what it is. Instead of seeing things as they really are, that is, to perceive ourselves and the world around us from the point of view of reality, from the point of view of a Buddha, we repeat the same set of mistakes by seeing them through the perspective of a self. This self is a mistaken sense of self-existence, of an “I”, and of an ego. This sense of self is the emotional mind that Rinpoche explained already as the

seventh consciousness arising out of the ground mind. And once we have a sense of I, a sense of existing, then automatically important is our sense of the “other”. It also is supported and defined. This is what duality is: “I” and “other”. This mistake of duality, therefore, is not something we have made a long time ago and it is still here. Rather, this mistake of duality is simply repeated in each and every moment of our consciousness. The veils are repeated in each and every moment of our mind consciousness. In Buddhist philosophy, these veils are considered incidental. They are not concrete. They do not exist as such. They are a mistake, fresh, in every moment. The veils in-themselves have no real power to pollute reality. Reality can never be polluted. No matter how much ignorance there is in the mind, no matter how many mistakes we make about reality, our Buddha nature is as it is. Reality remains pure and perfect, and ever present. And so, in terms of Mahamudra meditation, from the point of view of the meditator, we sit down to have that chance to not repeat the same mistake. Instead of ignorance, we try to experience mind as it really is, free of veils. That chance is there in each and every moment. Instead of creating confusion, instead of repeating the dualistic mistakes of self, others, and the inter-relationships between them, we try to experience Buddha nature, or reality.

And so with this view, we sit down to meditate. In Mahamudra meditation, we look very deeply into what is already there. However, people who do not have an idea of what Buddha nature is tend to create one. In actual fact, we simply have to look deeply into the true nature of things as they already are. We do not have to wash it, purify it, or make it into something it is not. We do not have to consider the Buddha nature as simply a potential that we have to develop. None of this work is necessary, which is precisely why Mahamudra is considered to be the most direct path to realize the nature of mind. We are not held back by any view wherein we assume we have a lot of work to do. We know that the reality of mind is already there. There is nothing for us to create. Reality is in-itself perfectly pure – no washing or cleaning is necessary. We know that if we can just catch the mind the very instant before it creates duality, then we can see the nature of mind. This kind of understanding is grounded in the Mahamudra approach. The effect is it gives us confidence which supports us when we sit down to do Mahamudra meditation. At the same time, it adds a certain freshness, and clarity with respect to meditation.

### ***emotional mind sustains duality and gives rise to three root emotive causes***

Another aspect of Buddha nature is its capacity to manifest a universe. Inevitably, we are unconsciously beleaguering our meditation to attain enlightenment by obstacles we create. In so doing, we are short-circuiting our own potential. For instance, we tell ourselves that we cannot get enlightened. Rinpoche already explained that the mind in a moment of ignorance, instead of seeing itself for what it really is, i.e. fully enlightened, it creates a division in itself; it creates a separation between the self and other. This separation, inevitably, leads to a relationship between the self and other, which develops and is experienced in a way such that the “other” simply becomes necessary to maintain a “self”. That which gives rise to and sustains the notion of self and other and their interrelatedness is called the emotional mind. It develops a view of the world, which motivates and drives an engine of

limitless activities. These activities are endless within a concept of the world where living beings are separate and distinct.

The duality of self and other further supports a belief that how we relate to others is going to determine our capacity to exist. From this belief, three primary emotive causes can arise. They are deemed “primary emotive” because all the different emotional states of mind that we experience come from these three, be it a combination of two, or three, or each stand-alone. Each of them has the potential to develop into overt emotions or feelings, and so they are considered causes. The three primary or root emotive causes are desire, aversion, and ignorance.

Since we would all like to exist, we are naturally attracted to our relationships with others who are supportive, helpful and friendly towards us. We wish to associate with them. This attraction we call desire, one of the three root emotive causes. We desire anything we think can help us or stabilize our sense of existence, and so we attach to it and we try to keep it. The opposite of desire is aversion to that which threatens our existence, or our own ability to exist. We dislike that which conflicts with our sense of safety. We feel anger towards those whom we feel are overly demanding of us, or infringing upon us, so we reject them. We push them away. This is the basic emotive cause of aversion. Then there is a third basic emotive cause, that of ignorance, or not-knowing. It is a state of mind unable to discern the truth of how things are, or whether something is helpful, or harmful to us. We call it ignorance because it is an inability to see clearly, but simply put – we don’t know.

### ***our life is our own making***

These three are then basic in how we relate to the world, how we establish the self towards the other. Accordingly, these three basic emotive causes could develop into overt emotions we know all too well in their endless varieties and degrees of intensity. Therefore, our emotional mind, or our emotions lead us into action. And this is also where the law of karma begins to function. The law of karma — the law of cause and effect as explained by Rinpoche, can only function in a dimension of duality where duality veils each and every moment of mind wherein we repeat and replenish the storehouse of karmic seeds accumulated hitherto this moment. The karmic seeds are simply the results of our dualistically motivated actions just waiting to ripen. They bear tremendous impact and considerable importance for us because we live through them in each and every moment. The manifestation of our world around us at the moment — how we experience who we are, how we experience our life are the fruits of our previous actions. This world around us did not come about haphazardly. It is not an accident. Neither did someone create it nor that somehow we have to endure it all. The world is actually a creation of our own mind. This we have to understand for without this view, our meditation, and our ability to realize the nature of mind will be very difficult – we will be off track!

Initially, it is rather difficult for us to comprehend that this world is a manifestation of our mind. Our mode of perception is that we exist *in* the world, along with others. We consider the world to be an external thing, one over which we have neither control nor influence. We are living here at the moment, and when we die, we will no longer live in this world. We expect that the world will continue without

us. In our view, the world is concrete, permanent, and it exists independently of us. Likewise, we attribute the same independence and distinctiveness to other living beings. We think that others, too, live here as we do, within a limited lifespan. When they die, and if we are still alive, they will pass on...to somewhere else, and will no longer be here in this world. This is our assumption of reality – it is how we experience reality.

### *dream*

However, if we look at the Buddha's ultimate teaching about the nature of mind, which brings us to the title of these teachings, Mind and Reality, it is that the world comes from our mind. The Buddha discovered that one's experience of the world at any moment is nothing other than an experience of the forms of confusion. And it is mind that gives itself these confusions. At first, this is perhaps difficult to understand but if we look at how our mind works in our own personal experience, we will, in fact, find many experiences that demonstrate this ability of the mind to create a world, a universe and confusion. For instance, we do it every time we dream in our sleep. When you are dreaming, you are utterly convinced that dream is taking place. Within the dream, you have no idea that your body is actually lying down sleeping. When you wake up, you immediately see that it was just a dream. You know without a doubt what was in the dream does not exist. Yet it was just moments ago that you were a full participant and believer in your dream. This shows the mind capable of believing in its own manifestations wherein it is completely confused and overtaken by them. The mind manifests the dream, is convinced that it is happening, and then falls under the influence of its own confusion/dream. The mind does indeed believe in its own confusion.

Our dream experience also tells us that the mind can create a whole universe in an instant. A dream begins, and in that instant, we are immediately in a world created by the mind. The dream world appears highly detailed, and all existing. It is usually much like the waking world, although of course, it can appear in many varieties. The mind when dreaming senses that world to have always existed. It does not sense that the dream world has just taken form a few moments prior. Similarly, when the dream stops, we can see how the mind manages quite easily to allow the dream to simply collapse. The mind stops that manifestation once again in an instant. This is particularly obvious to meditators. Their awareness continues even during the dream state due to their mind's calm – because their mind is very pacified. This result is not exclusive to any special Buddhist technique of meditation. All pacification techniques of meditation can yield mental calm.

A pacified mind at the point of sleep will find a state, which is completely neutral. There are no projections of any idea, dream, or form at first. Then, all of a sudden, in one instant, the mind is in a dream world. The dream world as if it has always existed, the sense of being in it as a self, other people and things, they are all there in one instant simultaneously! The mind then dreams. Whatever the events and experiences, we go through them. Because the dream is just a ripened result, or karma of some of our previous actions, once experienced, or finished, it will stop. We may not wake up yet because we usually have several dreams during the night though we do not always remember each and every one of them. Between dreams,

we pass through a neutral state of mind without any projections. Then in an instant, another dream can arise. We find ourselves in its setting with all its happenings, very complicated with all the details of a normal waking life. This proves directly by our own experience how the mind can create a vast surrounding, unhindered, and containing many things. This is what Rinpoche explained to us as one quality of mind – its unimpeded or unhindered capacity to project itself in the many varieties of manifestations.

Another instance where we can catch a singular experience of mind is in the morning when we are just about to wake up, especially when from a dream. There is a moment of consciousness, a moment where we are neither awake yet not asleep. We are just coming out of a dream. The memory of that dream we just left is still very fresh, and we have not grasped that which is around us. We are in no man's land, neither here nor there. And in that moment, we can see how the mind has dropped its grasp of the dream and not yet clinging to, or fixating on the solidity of the waking world. We can see that the mind is free of either illusion: sleeping or waking. At that point someone who meditates a lot on insight meditation will be able to have a glimpse of the nature of mind, the clarity of mind free of its own confusion. But usually this moment is very fleeting, and, in the next moment, we are once again caught up in the reality of the day.

### ***to see through our reality now***

The Buddha taught that our waking reality is just as insubstantial as the dream — the quality of our reality is exactly the same as a dream. We have to understand this within its proper context. We should be careful not to think the world around us is like a dream but we exist. This is a wrong view, which does not make sense. Rinpoche explained that the mind in confusion projects a separation between self versus others. Both aspects of the split are from confusion. You cannot say the “other” is the confusion, and only keep the self. Just as in a dream, both the self in the dream and all the other contents are equally illusive. Similarly, in this waking reality, as we develop an insight into the true reality of things, we will understand that both the self and the others do not exist in any real sense. And this then is the point when the functioning of duality at each and every moment, can perhaps, for a brief moment, come to a stop. We realize the non-reality of both self and other. We see beyond the confusion created by the mind. This experience of the nature of mind is therefore the aim of our meditation. It is the path of Mahamudra meditation, which will lead us into recognizing the mind as it really is at every moment. We will be able to see through the illusions whereby our clinging to them as real and substantial will come to an end.

### ***compassion***

While we are trying to understand that our reality is basically insubstantial and unreal, we must be careful not to swing to the other extreme by painting everything as non-existing. To do so would be to commit the very grave error of nihilism – that nothing exists. The Buddha's assertion that everything is empty in nature does not mean that there is nothing but empty space. Once again we remind ourselves of the nature of mind. Rinpoche described an innate quality of Buddha mind to be an

unhindered capacity for mind to express itself. Mind can manifest unobstructedly to express itself. We have already seen how this is evident in our dreaming mind's capacity to dream up a world.

This creativity of mind, if not trapped in duality, is actually what we call compassion. When released from confusion, it is no longer a dysfunction of the mind, but rather, a natural expression of mind itself. One might regard compassion as an outward expressiveness, or energy of the mind. Here compassion is not just a feeling when we witness the suffering of others. It is an innate quality of enlightened mind, and so it is often referred to as the enlightened attitude, or Bodhicitta. We want to encourage the development of this enlightened expressiveness because it actually enables us to evolve as a spiritual being, and as a Bodhisattva – one who lives to benefit others. The expression of compassion simply goes on naturally and we cannot stop it even if we wanted to. Moreover, in order to attain full enlightenment, our capacity to benefit others must be fully developed and unobstructed.

The activities of compassion are therefore the positive side of illusion. When we say everything is like an illusion, by no means are we saying, “Don't bother with it; drop it, get rid of it, wipe it out, and we all fall into a black hole and that is enlightenment.” Rather than caught up in the illusion, we are encouraged to connect to the fundamental creativity of our mind, which is empty, clear, and spontaneously expressive. When we do, the effect will be our active engagement in working towards the benefit of others, free of any ego-clinging, or attachment.

In response to the questions about how we can help others in difficulties, Rinpoche explained that we should try not to fixate too much on the suffering of others such that it overwhelms us. We are then at a loss to do what is needed. Compassion is not just a response to suffering. Compassion encompasses a deep insight into the illusory quality of what we are experiencing. Only then are we able to work to benefit others by understanding how things really are. We learn to work with the illusion for a beneficial outcome for others. In fact, this is the practice of the Path of the Buddha. Through training in ethical conduct, generosity, patience, and other positive actions, we begin to develop these important qualities while we are here, which will naturally help and support others. We train with our eyes opened as to what we need to understand in terms of the correct view of mind's nature, who we are, and where we are going.

To know of this creativity of mind is very important because it will help us in dealing with our thoughts. One major problem in meditation is thinking that, “I must find a state of mind free of thoughts – I must be thoughtless.” And so we try to suppress thoughts. We try to get rid of them. But in fact, when we can really understand thoughts and can really see their nature, we will discover in each and every thought the expressiveness or creativity of mind, i.e. compassion. There's no need to suppress thoughts at all. The reason why we think thoughts are such a problem is because we get stuck on them. We grasp at them. We fixate on them. Then, they seem to disturb us. But actually there's nothing wrong with thoughts, at all. We base our meditation on creativity, compassion, or expressiveness for the benefit of others. Terms like illusion, or dreamlike, may seem to imply not to bother with anything, however, it is not the case at all. It means there is no need, no point to get fixed on

things. Learn to work with the different situations and conditions in a more open, and more creative way. And this is basically what we are training for in meditation.

### ***see through the confusion using pacification and insight***

Rinpoche spoke of the mind being obscured. He spoke of how due to our karma, the ripening karma resembles its karmic perpetrator/seed. This is the basis why the very same habits are very often recreated from moment to moment. Our mind is recreating its own confusion every instant. It is not that the confusion lasts and protracts itself linearly; rather, it is being recreated at every moment. When we meditate, what we are trying to develop is enough clarity and insight into the nature of mind to enable us to see through its confusion. Then, instead of recreating the same old habits, even if just for an instant, we see what the mind really is. And this is the purpose of the two phases of meditation practice Rinpoche taught us – stabilizing the mind, and then developing insight into what the mind really is. The latter often employs an analytical approach and charters our curiosity about mind itself.

It is because we are so caught up in the tendency to repeat the same mistakes that we need to first pacify the mind. We attempt in meditation to give enough space for the mind to distance itself from those mistakes, to not recreate them. We sit down to meditate to develop the ability to create some space – to slow down the mind. At least, this is how it feels subjectively. We do not really slow down the mind, but that is how it feels to us. We need to calm the mind. If we just tell the mind, “I need a bit of space, stop thinking,” this doesn’t work. The mind does not know how. We have to train the mind a little bit at a time. We train the mind to rest on an object. Rinpoche explained how to use different objects — the breathing, the walking meditation, the giving and taking, they are all methods to help you develop the calm and stability of mind. The effect of these practices is like saying to the mind, “Well, you’re very busy creating confusion. In fact you’re so busy I can’t get in to stop you. Let’s at least slow things down. Here’s just one thing to think about...” Instead of giving the mind loads of things to think about, we just say to it, “Let’s just think about one thing at a time.” When the mind is given the chance to do this, it will feel to us that thinking is perhaps stopped or slowed down somewhat. The mind simply rests on one thing. It will feel to us that things are getting simpler, and so we feel we can deal.

### ***an overview of the process of meditation***

The purpose of having a meditation object such as breathing or some other is not to fix the mind and keep it still. It is just saying to the mind, “You’re so busy thinking, you’re very creative, but I’m not very impressed with what you’re producing. We’re just going to stay on one thing and afterwards we’ll see.” We tell the mind to remain on one thing. The mind settles on that and will get a feeling of stability. And when the mind is feeling more stable, we will then drop the object because we do not need it anymore. And we just let the mind rest in its own stability. That means we can stop giving the mind something to do. Actually, mind is just in its own stability. Soon, it will maybe panic a bit and look for something to do and so we again assign to it the breathing or some focus object. The mind will once again rest on the

breathing. Having only one thing to do, it will feel more relaxed like having a holiday. Whenever the mind is relatively settled, we just drop the breathing. In this way, we train the mind to come to its own stability.

When the mind can rest on its own stability, we no longer need to use a meditation object such as the breathing. As soon as we sit down, the mind relaxes into its own nature, its own stability. As we progressively cultivate this practice, the mind gets clearer, and more aware of itself. Then, all kinds of experiences might come up. This is an effect of the mind actually purifying itself of its tendencies to create in a haphazard and confused way. The mind is starting to use its own stability as a support to see its own confusion. The mind grows more relaxed, clearer, more transparent, and more at ease. Gradually, the mind will start to be able to recognize itself. That is the point when we move onto insight meditation having given the mind enough space to allow it to see itself. And Rinpoche has shown us how to give our mind this very space through the different methods.

This very simplified presentation of the process of meditation gives you an overview of what you are doing when you practise the breathing meditation. Some people might do the breathing meditation for weeks, months, and years forgetting why they are doing it in the first place. Especially for those of you who do not have much time for meditation, it might take a long time before some stability sets in so there is the chance that you might lose sight of your original purpose. There are also people who get stuck in doing the breathing meditation. They feel very stable doing it so they just continue with it instead of dropping the breathing, and moving on once some stability has been achieved. So it is important to keep in mind this overview of how things are to develop.

In terms of technique of the actual meditation, Mahamudra meditation is the simplest form there is. How can it be so simple? It is because we are basically just sitting down and inviting the mind to see for itself what it really is. We do not have to do anything. We are not asked to create something interesting like flashing lights, or rainbows. We are not asked to breathe in a specific way. We do not have to produce any special experience to get excited about and to then report it to our teacher. It is simply to sit down and see what is there. And because of that, some people might feel somewhat discouraged thinking there must be more to Mahamudra meditation. They would prefer that more is required of them. How could it possibly work? How could it be so simple? Actually, the reason why Mahamudra meditation is so simple is because you have to furnish very great efforts before you actually come to sit down and meditate.

### ***no preconceived agendas***

If we try to do things while we meditate, we are then simply adding a sense of ambition to the meditation. We bring to it a sense of a definite project, a definite goal, and we sit down to make this huge effort to make sure it happens. This has the adverse effect of creating an unnecessary filter for our meditation. For example, suppose we are aiming to feel blissful, we will then pick and choose. We will keep the blissful thoughts thinking, "Great! This is just what I want." As to the not so blissful thoughts, we quickly get them out of the way. Instead of letting the mind see

into its own nature at every moment, all we are concerned with is ‘blissful or not’. And if you are not, you sit and wait for the bliss to descend upon you. In this way, we are channeling our mind, fixing it in a certain direction. We are in effect adding to the confusion in the mind. We create a personal ambition and then try to produce it in meditation – make it happen. We cannot practise Mahamudra in this way. The reality of meditation will not thus appear.

### ***generate positive actions***

This is why the path of Mahamudra meditation places a great deal of emphasis on the kinds of conditions we need to develop in our mind. These are conditions, which will allow us to simply drop all ambitions, hopes and fears, and to simply and directly let the meditation happen when it comes time for us to meditate. And what are these conditions? Positive karma is one such condition that Rinpoche has already explained to us. During the normal course of our day, we perform positive actions as much as possible in our daily activities. ‘Positive’ here means that which benefits others. It automatically reduces our own self-importance and self-concerns. When our motivation is devoid of self-interest, the outflow in action is most likely positive. And as such, it will sow in our mind positive seeds, which will have the effect of weakening negative karma. The fact that we cannot meditate, or we tend to recreate confusion when we try, is largely due to our negative karma. This explains why it is necessary to work on creating positive seeds to weaken the negatives. Then when we come to practise, we may have a better to catch a glimpse of what the reality of mind is. The seeds, or the tendencies of confusion must be dealt with first by weakening them through the force of our positive karma. This is where ethical conduct, and good behavior come in to make a difference. We neither engage them for some kind of reward nor for fear of punishment. Ethical conduct is quite simply a means to reduce the mind’s confusion. And we need quite a lot of it in order to be able to properly meditate.

### ***refuge***

We need to have a sense of where we are going. When Buddhahood is our goal, we naturally take refuge in the Buddha. Our goal is not to be a nice person. Our goal is not to be famous, or powerful. Our goal is to be enlightened. The spiritual path we have chosen is a Buddhist one towards this goal, and so we take refuge in the Dharma – the teachings of the Buddha, which show us the way to enlightenment, our goal. Knowing our own limitations, we realize that we cannot make much progress without some help. And so, we take refuge in the Sangha. We take refuge in the spiritual teachers, in people who have practised the path, and who are experienced in Buddhist meditation and practices. They can therefore guide and advise those of us who are at the earlier stages. And we do not seek help from those who are not qualified. Neither do we seek help from the teachers whom we like but who may not know what we are doing and so could give us the wrong advice. Instead, we learn to develop a good relationship with our spiritual guides.

By the time we come to sit down to meditate, we clearly know what our objective is. We do not do it in order to be peaceful. We do not meditate to just relax. We do not use meditation as a method to have a nice and happy frame of mind. We

practise meditation in order to reach enlightenment. We follow the methods and practices laid out by the Buddha and the realized masters who have already gone through them. The methods should not be some inventions of our own. By taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, then our practice becomes relevant in a proper context. Otherwise, sitting down to practise may develop into a personal ambition.

### ***to reduce self-centredness***

Many people sit down to meditate in order to feel relaxed. If that is the case, everybody can do it. You sit down to feel relaxed, and as soon as you do, you stop meditating. You think, “I’m relaxed. I’ve done it,” and so you stop. The same applies if you meditate to gain some personal objective – as soon as you have achieved it, you’d stop.

But what we call complete Buddhahood is developing a true realization of everything — a realization which is then able to express itself for the benefit of others. And we continue meditating until we have perfect realization. We meditate not for ourselves but in order to be of benefit to others. We have already seen how our confusion of mind is repeating itself in every moment. One of the mistakes we make is to create a separation between others, and ourselves and then we use them to support us. In other words, others exist only because we need them.

To counter this error, many Buddhist practices help us to develop a concern for others, to consider others more important than us. This is Bodhicitta, or the enlightened attitude. Through the many techniques, and meditations, very gradually, the tendency to consider ourselves the most important begin to diminish. It gets purified. We stop using others just as a way to support our own existence. Things start to even out between a developing concern for others, and a reduction of self-centeredness. In the process, the mind relaxes much more easily. Actually, ego clinging is quite tiring causing much strain. However, because we are so used to it that we are blind to it and its workings. But when we start to develop compassion, the enlightened attitude, care and concern for others out of true understanding, and not just an emotional response, we will discover our mind more and more relaxed, and meditation increasingly easier. This is why enlightened attitude is so important and beneficial all around.

### ***devotion***

The most important asset we have is probably devotion, and it is particularly emphasized within the Kagyu lineage. Devotion is like the energy, which runs the meditation. It wakes up the meditation. We all know how enthusiasm or ambition can energize us. If we are ambitious, or very enthusiastic about a project, we will put in the necessary effort to accomplish it. As I said earlier, you try to do that with meditation and it won’t work. It is trying to obtain something for the self is precisely what blocks the mind. However, if you just sit back and say, “I do not want anything. I do not want to go anywhere”, that doesn’t work either. It is effectively what will happen. You do not go anywhere. You just keep repeating the same confusion so that’s no good either.

One of the Buddha's teachings highly regarded in our lineage is the role of devotion. Devotion has the capacity to fire us up, to get us going, in an unambitious way. Through devotion as a motivator, we can effectively avoid the disadvantages of ambition. Devotion bypasses the ego and brings us out of ourselves. It is therefore a quality to be greatly cultivated in our practice.

Once we have these different peripheral ingredients of refuge, Bodhicitta, devotion, ethical conduct, sitting down to meditate becomes very easy. The techniques Rinpoche taught us are actually very simple and direct. They are not difficult to put into practice. And we can be successful if we are cultivating as well the peripheral qualities as our support system for meditation.

Through meditation, the mind will gradually grow clearer, and more relaxed. The mind will see for itself what it really is. And in the successive moments of confusion, there will be a point where the confusion forgets to form itself – and so we see the nature of mind just for a moment. It is like a little glimpse into the nature of mind. The confusion comes back and it goes on and then perhaps another moment is again freed from confusion. But if we then think “Ah yes,” then we are back in the confusion. Off we go again.

But each time, the mind becomes a little more aware of itself. And in time, instead of having successive moments of confusion, we will have successive moments of wisdom. This then is what Rinpoche called the mind of primordial wisdom, or primordial awareness. It is mind that knows itself before duality sets in. And when every single moment is a moment of insight and wisdom, and when there are no more moments of confusion, we have Buddhahood. If you wonder what Buddhahood is, that's it. And that's what we are aiming for in meditation. Now you know! All the explanations I have given gives context to the practice.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** Can you say a little bit more about the cultivation of devotion?

**(A):** Devotion is very much emphasized and highly developed in our system of meditation, so I can say a little bit more but it could also take a week! One might say that devotion is a way of getting us out of ourselves. Very often, just to give an example, when we sit down to meditate, we think *we* are doing the meditation. Any success, or failure seems to rest on us – on our capacity to meditate. Our frame of reference is thus very restricted and self-centred. This means we make meditation into a personal success or failure story according to how the meditation session goes.

Having devotion means that we are ready to accept help and support from spiritual teachers who are other than ourselves. It entails humility. It means we recognize that we neither know everything nor control everything. We need help and support. In this way, it becomes an act of giving up our ego, the controller. This is a movement, or an opening away from the restrictions of the ego. This is the reason why every session of meditation begins always with our taking refuge and calling up the right motivation. We always begin by praying to the enlightened lamas of the lineage. We acknowledge that there have been many beings throughout the centuries who have attained the realization of the nature of mind. We therefore appeal to all of them who can be contacted and are accessible to us. They have no egos, they have transcended egos, and so they are enlightened. This means we are appealing directly to reality itself when we appeal to the realized members of the lineage who are beyond the labels of being dead or alive, and unrestricted to any physical placements such as being here or there. We pray simply to their enlightened minds for help and support. In return, we receive from them what we call blessing. They inspire us. We allow ourselves to be inspired by everything they have taught, the examples they have set, and the inspiration they can give. And this inspiration can awaken the mind, and make it very clear. Then it is much easier to meditate. This is a very brief explanation of devotion as the subject is actually quite extensive.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** Well it does not necessarily have to be a form of prayer because there may be some disagreements about what prayer to use, who does know or does not know the prayer, etc. It is a state of mind. It means that as we begin a session of meditation, we recognize just mentally that we have received instructions from a meditation teacher (otherwise we wouldn't be meditating) and that teacher is our living contact, in a way, with reality. The teacher, when teaching is showing reality. He is showing the way to reality. And so, especially in terms of the lineage, in terms of the handing down so as to maintain the continuity of the expressions of reality, and realization in each and every generation, then Shamar Rinpoche is the current lineage holder. The fact that you can receive teaching directly from him is a very, very good thing. Therefore, you might appeal to Shamar Rinpoche, you might make a kind of wish or expression of devotion to this person from whom you have received the transmission. You might think, "Well, here I'm actually putting into practice your teaching. I'm sitting here giving some time to meditation. So please, from your

enlightened state of mind, please give me some support and help in what I'm doing.” Just that is enough.

The main thing is not to consider the lama, in this case, Shamar Rinpoche, as a person because the lama is just the current expression of reality. So when we pray to the lamas of the lineage, or when we pray to our root lama, we have to try to mentally get beyond the idea that this lama is just a person. In fact, the lama is enlightenment as it appears to us at the moment. Through the lama we receive the teachings, through the lama that we contact the blessings and the expression of reality. In other words, we will come to know enlightenment through the lama. So the process itself can be very simple – just a quick prayer, a quick appeal for help and guidance. There is really no need to formalize it.

**(Q):** ...I was corrected... in that everything is . . . a mirage, and that the approach to mind is meditation. By meditating, more and more we will acquire the ability to see the nature of mind. But I still wonder, can you try hard to tell us just what do you really mean when you say we can't see the nature of mind? What can we see then? I know it is a concept, but I want to know what you really mean. What do you see in the nature of mind?

**(A):** Well, it is exactly what Rinpoche said. The kind of perception into the reality of mind cannot be explained in words. Because even to say 'to see the nature of mind' is misleading as a statement, because it is implying that there is somebody who is seeing something. Whereas in fact the actual seeing of the nature of mind does not contain, "I see something". We use words to talk about meditation experience because we have got to say something. But whatever we say is very approximate. And that is the whole point of meditation – that you have to meditate because nobody can tell you the nature of your mind. You've got to see it for yourself.

**(Q):** How will we know whether we are seeing the nature of mind or not?

**(A):** Then you need a lama, because an experienced meditation teacher will guide you through the process of meditation. When you start to see the nature of mind and when you talk about what you see, because the meditation teacher has been there, he will recognize the scenery, and say, "Yes, that's it. That's the nature of mind." On your own, it is very easy to confuse yourself. This is the reason why we always need, at this high level, a meditation teacher to confirm our experience. That is precisely the role of a meditation teacher.

**(Q):** I wonder why I feel agitated in meditation, what could I do? What kind of feeling am I supposed to have?

**(A):** Well, stop wondering. Just meditate. If you meditate, you'll find out for yourself, and then you do not have to wonder anymore.

**(Q):** What if I try and I can't do it?

**(A):** Then you need good karma. Practise ethical conduct, patience, and Bodhicitta. If we meditate and we have difficulties, there's usually something stopping us from meditating. That means that sometimes we have to look outside of the meditation itself, look at its peripheral. See what's going on in our life. Maybe we do not have enough merit. Maybe we haven't taken refuge. Maybe we haven't developed the enlightened attitude. Have a look at what's going on outside the meditation. Then,

work and develop the qualities recommended by Rinpoche. And then probably our meditation will improve.

**(Q):** I turned Buddhist a couple of years ago. In terms of pacification, I find that my mind is quite agitated. Is it necessary to do both the breathing, and then something else? What is the right or appropriate way?

**(A):** Yes, the breathing can be used as an object of focus for us in meditation. You can use different kinds of objects for focusing so as to pacify the mind. Some objects are more concrete. Usually, the more concrete the object, the more stability it will induce. If the mind is agitated, we need a fairly concrete object — this means the breathing or some object in front of us. When the mind is relatively relaxed but not quite, then we can use the mind itself as the object. It is subtler, and we can work with our thoughts in terms of their coming and going. That's okay, too.

**(Q):** Do you recommend a length, or a time of day for practice?

**(A):** It is not so much the amount of time but rather the regularity of practice that is very important. A lot of people get very ambitious to start with, and then after three days they give up. The idea is to do a little bit of meditation every day. As to when to meditate is up to you. Some people are fresher in the morning, because they haven't yet been drawn into the activities of the day. Others are quite the opposite; they wake up in the morning and they've immediately got the day planned out in their minds so meditation is out of the question. For them, it is best to wait until their day is over with and they know the only thing left to do is to go to sleep, and that is when they feel they have some space to meditate. So it is really just a personal decision. The main thing is regularity. As to the length of time: do not meditate for too long in the beginning. Half an hour is already quite a lot. Even if you can just do ten minutes a day, but if you do it every day, it is amazing how it builds up. The main thing is to acquire a taste for meditation. Many people put themselves off meditation simply because they try to do too much. As a result, they develop distaste for meditation, and so they give up very quickly.

**(Q):** The chattering mind can become very giddy. Does the observer observe the mind, or focus on the changes of breaths? Is the observer part of mind? Or do you speak about the nature of the one who is trying to quiet the chattering mind?

**(A):** Everything that goes on in the mind is the mind. In fact, everything even if it does not go on in the mind is still the mind – because there is only mind. When the mind is tense, it splits itself up into different parts. There's the person doing the meditation, there's the mind that is watching what's going on in the meditation, and then there's the mind that is giving a running commentary on what's going on in the meditation. All of that is because we have a tense mind. When the mind relaxes, these things tend to merge, and part of the stability of mind is the ability to let the observer mind and the mind object to merge in a very relaxed way without the chatterer, without the running commentary. One of the ways to overcome this running commentary is to look into the essence of the one who's talking, the one who's doing the commentary. But this is actually a kind of insight meditation so it could only work when the mind is already fairly peaceful to start. Beginners in meditation, or agitated states of mind will find this not an easy thing to do. This is why it is best just to concentrate on letting the mind relax in the beginning. And

gradually, as the mind settles down, that tension relaxes and so there's nothing to stop the different parts to merge together. And that is stability, or the integrity of mind.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** It should be possible. It is not very easy, but it should be possible. For that one needs a certain amount of previous training. Usually in meditation what we do is we first train ourselves in sitting. That means we preserve a certain environment in which we meditate. And when we can meditate within that, then afterwards, automatically, whatever we're doing, moments of meditation will come up. And as the mind grows clearer, insight or moments of glimpses about the nature of mind will arise from time to time. They are sometimes easier to come by when we are active because our mind is actually more awake. Sometimes in meditation, we tend to get a bit like *sunke* into ourselves. Many people do discover these glimpses in action as well as in meditation. So yes, it is perfectly possible to glimpse reality in daily life but it is unlikely without prior training in sitting meditation.

**(Q):** Regarding the practice of give and take, during sitting, it is as if I go through, starting with a group of people, or a situation that I take in, and then like a laundry list, all of the depressing things in the world. However, I do not think it really very good to do. How would you advise me to work with give and take when I'm sitting?

**(A):** Well, there are actually two ways of doing the practice of give and take. The way Shamar Rinpoche described it is for pacifying the mind. That is the simple version wherein there is no need to make a list of who we know are suffering. We simply imagine one example of a friend who is suffering, and we feel compassion towards him. And once the compassion is active, there's no need to refer to other instances. Initially, we call up the compassion and then allow it to work by itself.

**(Q):** And what is the other way?

**(A):** It is much more complicated because it is in-itself a whole practice. It is called mind training, "*lodjong*". It involves a very extensive reflective process where we first develop a profound understanding of the world and where we are in our relationship with other beings. Only then do we reach the point of doing *tonlen*, or the exchange of give and take. After, we engage fully in training ourselves to put that practice in daily life. So if you ever have the opportunity to hear this teaching complete with its entire commentary and explanations, and if you then work to develop this practice, then you are doing very good mind training. It is the best there is to develop Bodhicitta, the enlightened attitude – the goal of this practice. The subject is enormous, and very good, of course, because it targets and counteracts the ego. Definitely, we all need it.

**(Q):** Does it help to see the kinds of things that arise in our mind? How do we know to avoid going after them?

**(A):** Sometimes it might be helpful. In the commentaries on meditation, this is a given option. If we find ourselves systematically being drawn away from meditation by the same preoccupations, we need to look into them and ask why we are so fascinated by them. Why do we consider them more important than meditation? It is all a question of motivation so we have to work on our motivation. We try to see

what attracts us about these peripheral concerns. Can we change our understanding of these concerns so that we'd find them less attractive than meditation? When we understand, or can change our feelings about the distractions, then it will be easy to bring our mind back to meditation. So this is one way to tackle them. However, we also have to be careful not to become even more agitated by this kind of reflection. We reflect a little, and then drop it. If those thoughts keep coming back again, we can again reflect for a while, and then leave it again. And so this is the process.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** Well, how, for instance, when you are asleep and dreaming, how did the people in your dream get there? It's the same.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** How do you know how many dreams are in this room at the moment?

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** How many illusions are in this room? Is it as many as the people in the room? For instance, would 30 people in the room imply 30 illusions going on? If you're asleep and dreaming, does that mean that the people in your dream are also dreaming because they happen to be in your dream? <laughter>

**(Q):** But you do not usually get an opportunity... I've considered the dream and... I completely agree that inside the dream it is similar to this world... But I do not have the experience of going back to the dream; I cannot go back to it and focus on the situation or share it... I've never really had that experience. But in this life of mine if seen as a dream, I can have the experience of going back to the people and speaking to them about experiences. So in some respects, the dream and this waking world seem similar yet they are different in others.

**(A):** Well, maybe you should debate more during the day! Then when you sleep at night and dreaming, you probably have a lot of debates in your dream, too! <laughter>

You see, the thing is, we are quite ready to accept that we are creating the people in our dream. They're actually not real people. They are not other people who are asleep and dreaming. We're also not having a meeting somewhere in somebody else's dream. However, when we are told that the wakeful world is like a dream, we won't accept it. We think it different.

The Buddha discovered that this waking reality is exactly the same as a dream. In a particular moment, technically, there are actually no individuals in the room each having his/her own reality. It only seems to us like that because our mind is creating that impression. But from the point of view of ultimate reality, the mind is creating confusion where both the self and others are illusions. And when that illusion is seen through, or understood, it is not that everybody will disappear in a puff of smoke. The appearances continue except that their underlying basis has been transformed from confusion into a creative compassion for the benefit of others.

All this is perhaps very difficult for us to understand at the moment, but in time, through meditation, we will be able to have some direct insight into the mind doing this. And then, we can relax. Because we no longer have to be concerned about

who's thinking what and so on. In other words, the tension of duality is released. This is something we just have to experience directly for ourselves. Logically, philosophers adept in deep and precise deliberations can actually prove this same conclusion or to arrive at it by deduction.

**(Q):** I wonder what your thoughts are on building together the teachings to present to others? How do you put together the very many different traditions you have studied? Can you comment on your version of the teachings based on what you have studied, or what you know, or your focus?

**(A):** Well, basically, the Buddha's teachings are a tool – a means to get somewhere. It is called the Path. The Buddha showed us the path to get enlightened. It is like a manual: "How to get enlightened in a few easy lessons". The Buddha knows because he is enlightened. He has completed the path to Buddhahood and so he can say, "This is how to follow in my footsteps."

But before we start to evaluate or pick apart the Buddha's teachings, or any other systems of methods through analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, and contrasting the various differences or alternatives, something we're very good at in the West, we must first ask ourselves: are we enlightened enough to do that? Or are we merely introducing more of our own filters? It is dangerous to try to synthesize because it will inevitably draw in judgments, personal biases about what fits with what, or how to organize everything, and so on. If we ourselves are not enlightened, do we have the ability to make that kind of judgment? What's more, going beyond a personal accomplishment, in keeping with the goal of wishing to show others the path, have we really enough confidence in our abilities? Are we capable of taking the responsibility for what others would have to go through while on the path? Can we give them the guarantee that they will definitely get enlightened? Now the Buddha could give that guarantee because he is enlightened. We, as Buddhists, believe him. We know that we will find out ourselves if he is right if we just do the practices. That is where belief, or trust comes in.

**(Q):** [inaudible] He didn't begin from enlightenment....

**(A):** That is a question of belief. You see this is what refuge is all about. When we take refuge, we're saying that we believe that the Buddha got enlightened. Not that he had a moment of clarity, but that he got enlightened. And that he was omniscient. And therefore the teaching that he gave is showing us the path to get there.

**(Q):** [inaudible] . . . I meant before he reached enlightenment, when he was young – stories of what his life was like. He had entered the city and had seen something, and then he stepped out to begin practice . . .

**(A):** Yes, of course, but he was on the path before that. You see, you are taking the Buddha's life as an isolated event. From the point of view of reincarnation, and particularly emphasized in Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddha had already been in training in his past lives just like we are training now. His training had taken a very long time, many lives in fact. His life as Shakyamuni was the culmination of all his efforts up until then. Of course he wasn't enlightened until the final moment of complete realization but that final moment was the apogee of all his merit or positive

actions, dedicated for the benefit of others. They included all his meritorious deeds in his countless lifetimes wherein he had been training and developing all the virtues. Then in his life as Shakyamuni, he showed the classic and exemplary way to reach enlightenment by giving up home and family, and by devoting himself to the spiritual path motivated by his deepest wish to liberate every living being from the suffering of sickness, old age, and death.

# Thoughts and Veils in Meditation

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Tibetan Buddhism in general, recognizes that it is insight meditation, lhagtong, or vipassana that is the very path or method that will lead to enlightenment. In our Kagyupa lineage, it is Mahamudra meditation that will enable us to attain the realization of Buddhahood. In the Nyingmapa, practitioners follow the Maha Ati meditation.

Dealing with thoughts in meditation principally occurs in the phase called insight meditation. To be successful and to achieve genuine progress in insight meditation, we need two elements, which will support us in our meditation practice. The first is a stable mind developed through the phase of shamatha, or shi'nay meditation. The mind being able to be at rest is then a genuine condition for insight into the nature of mind. Thus the practice of mental pacification is an indispensable prerequisite. The second element for success in insight meditation is the purification of the veils that obscure our mind's nature. It is equally important as the first because if we do not clear away the veils, notwithstanding our having a calm and stable mind, we will not be able to see the nature of mind. We will now examine the kinds of faults, or veils that obscure our meditation.

## *unmoving karma and positive/negative karma*

The practice of shamatha, or shi'nay is actually a worldly path in the sense that it gives us mental tranquility. We could experience a profound experience of the mind stable and at ease. We could reach the very depths of a very vast mind yielding us deep experiences of mental calm and stability. Shamatha, without question, can bring such results. But we do not stop there; otherwise, we will not transcend the ordinary and worldly level of meditation. It alone will not lead us to the nature of mind. We will simply be accumulating what is called unmoving karma — action which actually does not have a determining result.

In terms of action or karma, we should know that there are three types of karma: virtuous, non-virtuous, and unmoving. The third kind is also called undetermined karma, which accumulates when we rest in a profound state of contemplation. A mind absorbed in meditation leads to one result only: the cause to be able to rest for a very long time, even to the extent of millions of years in a state of meditation. Its result can be experienced either as very subtle impressions of forms, or as an impression of existence in a very subtle body, one that is almost formless. This may happen to some very accomplished meditator, someone who simply equates meditation with pacification of mind without venturing into the actual nature of mind. Such a meditator perhaps meditates for a very long time, all the while cultivating an increasingly deeper absorption in various states of meditation. Then, at the moment of death, while still meditating, the meditator's mind is reborn in a world that is not like our world. Instead, it is one where the representation of a body is extremely subtle or even one without representation. If the meditation still consists of a certain formalism, or development of ideas or forms, then the rebirth will occur in a state where the meditation is continued while in a very subtle

impression of a body and a world. Meditators who have gone beyond formalism during their human lifetime are reborn in the formless state of existence where their mind is just mind. There is no longer any impression of existing in a body; neither is there any impression of a world. Their minds are immersed exclusively in meditation. This state of meditation can last for millions and millions of years, because of the karma accumulated during contemplation as a human. And this is what we call unmoving karma.

In this context of unmoving karma, accumulation is mental in nature. The meditator accumulates the contemplation mind. The effect is the maturation of contemplation so that your mind and your contemplation experience become one in nature. But what lies underneath is still the seed of ignorance. Therefore, this kind of contemplation is still within a worldly life. One has not yet gone beyond it. Though this karma could last through millions of years, but still it will end – it can be exhausted. When it does, that contemplative state will come to an end. Then the next karma, be it only a tiny karma, will mature as a mirage establishing an entire universe into which you will be reborn. The karmic seed is like a habit of mind stored in the ground consciousness called the *alaya* consciousness one among a limitless number – each when activated and ripened is capable of producing a whole lifetime and everything that goes along with it. This is why a contemplative mind without recognition of the actual nature of mind is not enlightened mind because its end will see a return back to samsara. Whether the return will be good or bad depends on the activated karma, whether it is positive or negative. What's considered positive might be a nice human life connected to a Bodhisattva, or a Hinayana practitioner. A negative life might be one associated with very negative beings.

Concerning the other two types of karma, we accumulate either virtuous actions, or negative or non-virtuous actions. The latter would only produce experiences of suffering. They also would deprive us of the opportunity to be able to meditate. We'd suffer and experience difficulties, the natural outcome of negative actions. On the contrary, the person who has a storage of positive or virtuous actions will experience a very fortunate life. This is the case even if he perhaps does not spend a lot of time practicing meditation. He is very lucky in his encounters. He seems to find himself always in very good living conditions, and other good conditions – the natural outcome of his past positive actions.

Our goal is not to pursue a deep and long contemplative absorption. The unmoving karma is accumulated or developed if we pursue pacification practice to a high degree. However, the path of meditation we follow does not develop mental stability to such an extent. In fact, we develop calm to the point where it enables us to look into the essence, or nature of mind. We cultivate pacification until the mind is stable enough to allow us to start insight meditation.

### ***insight into the nature of mind frees us***

When we look into the essence of mind during insight meditation, we can discover the empty essence of mind. In a state of stability, we will come to realize that mind is emptiness in essence. It cannot be pointed out. It cannot be defined. And at that

point, we will discover that all the confused manifestations emerging from mind are created by it and so we will understand their nature too. Since our world's manifestation is an expression of our mind, once the mind is understood for what it really is, automatically we can also understand the nature of its manifestations – that they too are empty in nature like the mind. This recognition releases our mind from being controlled by its own manifestations. We no longer have to fall victim to our own projections, which is where we are currently. We no longer have to be helplessly under the control of something up until then we thought external.

### ***to see the nature of mind and thought***

There are various stages we go through when we investigate the essence of mind. It is a step-by-step process. First, when the mind is stabilized, and we are in a state of pacification, we turn our attention to the mind, which is experiencing this state of stability or pacification. We ask ourselves, “What is the mind like? Can we define the mind from this current state of meditation?” We will discover, in fact, that when we try to look for it, or define it, we won't be able to see anything. This same investigative process we then apply to a thought. When a thought arises in this calm, stable mind, we ask ourselves then, “This thought, where did it come from? Where is it now? Can I locate the thought? Can I describe it? And where will it go in the future? Where will it go next?” We ask ourselves these questions for each thought, to try to determine if there is any real ‘thing’ that is a thought. Be it mind or thought, we look to try to discover its color, its shape, its form, where did it come from, where it will end up, and so on. Then we will discover that no matter how much we investigate, we cannot reach any firm conclusion.

We will also discover that mind and thought are inseparable. They are not two separate and distinct things. Furthermore, we cannot grasp them either. We cannot define the mind in any way. We can't get a fix on it. We can't grasp at it. It has no color, and so on; similarly for a thought. We can't define it in any way either. This is the kind of investigative process we engage in during the first phase of insight meditation. When we have some direct insight into the true essence of mind: i.e. neither mind nor thought can be said to really exist in any real terms because we cannot describe or define them, then we try to rest in our discovery. And our ability to rest stably in our understanding is the fruit of the training in mental calm. When we can do it, it means we can rest in mind's nature. Ultimately, as our insight meditation matures, we do not even have to begin with the investigative process. We simply rest stably in our understanding of mind's nature. The discovery has been done and so there is no need to question any further. In fact, more and more realization about the true nature of mind will arise in the mind.

This completes then the explanation, or the introduction to the main phases of meditation: shi'nay and lhagtong. Concerning the instructions and explanations about meditation, be it shamatha or vipassana, we have to know that not all the different techniques and developments are taught all at once. The instruction is given in step with the practitioner's development of inner experience in meditation. The reason for this is if a lot of instruction is given at the outset without the backup of an actual personal meditation experience, then the instructions tend to become the cause of a great deal of thinking, speculations, and intellectual activities, which

make meditation difficult. They may turn into an obstacle in our meditation. This particularly applies to the instructions on the insight into the nature of mind. This is why traditionally, at first, only a little bit of explanation is given on how to investigate the basic nature of mind. The student will then go away to meditate and to develop some experience of that, and then go back to talk to the teacher, who would then give further explanations. In this way, the teacher leads the disciple along the path of meditation gradually and the progress in insight meditation will not be jeopardized by too much of an intellectual approach.

### ***veils of the mind - emotions***

To be successful in insight meditation we must purify the veils which obscure and block our realization of the nature of mind. Concerning these veils, living beings are in general, particularly veiled by the emotions. These are tendencies of the mind to develop an emotional view of the self and others. They can be aroused by various situations we encounter in our lives. As we live through the different circumstances, various emotive causes are awakened. They are triggered by the conditions around us, and so they come to the surface and are then experienced by us. But actually, these emotional tendencies, or emotive causes or seeds, are within us all the time. We say that the emotive seeds form the very fabric of the veils of mind.

What causes the emotions? Where do their seeds come from? They are accumulated when our mind lacks awareness of itself. They are there when the mind does not know its own true nature. Our state of ignorance then creates a false idea of a self, or an ego. This further leads to a separation of self and other — a duality which forms the basis of an emotional mind. When we do insight meditation, the general objective is to weaken the ignorance of mind. Take for instance, the sun. The more it shines, the more clouds are cleared away; or the greater the light, the lesser the darkness. Similarly, during the process of insight meditation, the greater our insight into mind's true nature, the more ignorance is cleared away. This means that the base for our emotions is being eroded by our insight. When the base itself is shrinking, then the emotions themselves are constantly being weakened. This is why the more we practice insight meditation, the more and more unreal the emotions feel to us as they arise. They no longer seem so solid, and are experienced more like a mirage.

### ***the veil of ripened karma***

Of all the varieties of veils that we can experience, the worst is what we call the veil of ripened karma. This means that the seeds of past actions, particularly those from our negative actions, are coming to fruition. We are then in the actual experiencing of our own created results. Their effects have been established; as such, there is nothing we can do about it, except to experience it. We cannot change anything. None of it can be undone. And this is why this ripening karma is particularly difficult to bear. It cannot be remedied. We look to the scorpion as an example. A scorpion, due to its past negative actions, is born in a body of an animal, viz. that of a scorpion. Once its form of rebirth has been established due to its ripened karma, it finds itself busily experiencing all the conditions of being a scorpion. A ripened karma means it is already too late to prevent. We will just have to endure a

scorpion's life. Unfortunately, a scorpion has a very dull mind, as do most animals. It is incapable of understanding the world around it, or benefiting from any spiritual situations. For example, even if a fully enlightened Buddha were to walk up to it, sit down next to it, and starts teaching it Dharma, despite its immediate proximity to a Buddha, it would still not be able to understand the teaching at all. On top of that, it would continue to develop the emotion of anger — an aggressive disposition natural to that species. You cannot do anything about ripened karma let alone get rid of it. A ripened karma just has to be endured until exhausted before things might change. Relatively speaking, human beings have a small amount of this kind of veil such that it does not have that major an impact on us. This is why it is still possible for humans to take advantage of the conditions vital for spiritual development, and so the reference *the precious human existence*.

At the moment, our ripened karma has brought us into this human form. We now have to go through with it. The main advantage in being human is that we have clear faculties. We can absorb, and understand. The Buddha was a human prince, and he became enlightened. He then taught his experiences to others, so that they, too, could be enlightened following his methods; and many did. The possession of good faculties and relative reprieve from constant disturbances or sufferings are definitely the necessary ingredients in the makeup of a precious human life. On the other hand, it also helps not to be in constant joy because you could get stuck in it and you would not be able to part with the happiness. Being in too much happiness will deter you from thinking about the future; you will also not develop distaste for this life. It is therefore good to have some suffering because it makes you question a great deal about life and all its conditions. It makes you think and to want to find the causes of the conditions. This means you will be able to build a better future. In fact, this is why so many people come here to listen to the Dharma teachings. You wish to seek answers to your experiences of human suffering and dissatisfaction. This kind of concept starts you off looking for solutions.

The human existence does have some experiences of fully ripened karma, but they are far from the very grave and serious karmas. For instance, some human beings are nevertheless born with a very dull mind. They have very little capacity to open to new ideas restricted by their limited capacity to understand. Then there are others whose fully ripened karmic veils obscure and prevent them from truly understanding the world around them. However, overall, the human life has far fewer karmic veils and so its situation is not hopeless. The many tiny veils in the human mind are curable; unlike that of a mind established as a scorpion.

### ***the veil of karma just ripening***

The third kind of veil, which may cause us difficulty during meditation, is the veil of karma that is ripening. These are the effects of past actions, which are coming to the surface. If the veils of karma are particularly strong, then when we meditate, we might, from time to time, go through a period where we feel obstructed in our meditation. Obstacles, or difficulties arise in our meditation and we are not able to recognize their sources. These then are likely the ripening of our previous actions. As a result, our insight meditation cannot be successful, or it is slow to develop. These kinds of karmic veils are in fact the currently ripening karma. Unlike the veil

of ripened karma, they are karmic seeds not yet fully ripened but are just about to, and are just now surfacing. When the current fully ripened karma is finished, or exhausted, then it will be this next karma which will come to the surface and start to make itself felt and to take over.

During this lifetime, then, we can start to detect the effects of this karma just about to ripen. Particularly when we do meditation practice, naturally, the ripening of our bad karma is hastened or quickened. This is why we may experience some obstacles during this life. For this kind of veil, there are in fact a very vast number of remedies. Opportunities abound to overcome this kind of ripening karma. We may develop the enlightened attitude, Bodhicitta. We may develop our practice of generosity. We may develop compassion, or the quality of patience. And particularly, to overcome this kind of karma, the practice of give and take to cultivate compassion is quite effective. We can also do prostrations, which is effective against the kind of obstacle that ripens in the form of drowsiness.

### ***the veil of positive karma***

As explained already, karmic seeds may be positive or negative. Furthermore, positive seeds, which are just surfacing and are in the process of ripening, and yet have not been dedicated to enlightenment, are called worldly positive karma. They ripen into experiences of being happy, content, and having a comfortable life and so on. That in-itself is not overtly or directly harmful to meditation. However, if we are not careful, they can be distracting and problematic to insight meditation. The aim of insight meditation is to discover the true nature of mind while on the path to enlightenment. And on that path, if positive karma ripens in the form of a very comfortable, or happy life experience, then we may become attached to the happiness, or comfort that we're enjoying. As a result, our enjoyment of positive karma forestalls our progress in insight meditation. For this reason, one of the qualities of the path of a Bodhisattva is to convert all positive karma into activities beneficial to others. Then, there will be no risk of being carried away by good karma. A Bodhisattva reincarnates constantly for the benefit of others, and therefore he is always sharing all positive life experiences with others, making them equally available and beneficial to others. Only in this scenario does positive karma not harm meditation. For instance, the good karma might lead you to be reborn as someone very fortunate, and very powerful – as a king, for example. On the surface, it looks good but it may also drive you away from vipassana. This is effectively driving you away from enlightenment. This is why we call it a veil and should also be targeted for purification. There is a proverb, which reflects the danger of positive karma exacting a negative effect:

*Before a life as a human is a life as a dog.  
Before a life in hell is a life as a human lord.*

This means that if you are a lord now, then in your next life, you will most likely be going to hell. If you are a dog now, you will most likely be a human the next life.

The three veils of the emotions, of fully ripened karma, and of positive or negative karma, are called the three worldly veils. For those of us who are not yet on the superior spiritual path of development, nor have yet developed any realizations, then

these three veils must be overcome and purified. Otherwise, they will obstruct our ability to meditate.

*the two superior veils*

Beyond the three worldly veils, there are two other possible veils. They apply only when we are on the superior path of realization — when we have made considerable progress and are in the advanced stages of realization. The first is the veil of the tendencies. These are the inherent tendencies that keep us repeating the same thing. They will arise and will have to be purified. The second is the veil of absorption, which is the risk of attaching to the pleasant experiences of meditation. We stop to enjoy them and subsequently get stuck rather than progressing on the path. These two are then known as the two superior veils, which will occur at the higher levels of the Path. They will have to be purified when the time comes. At the moment, they do not pose a concern for us. We do not have to worry too much about these two. And the practitioners on that level of the path will know how to clear them away through the force of their meditation practice.

Having explained the veils of mind, we have thus presented a complete cycle of teaching on meditation covering all aspects of it.

### **Question (Q) and Answer (A)**

**(Q):** You're traveling along in your meditation, and then you've pacified your mind, and then your mind is becoming more pacified, and then you see...you're getting to a place that is very restful or is it like that?

**(A):** Yes, very restful. The calm is very stable and profound, and there is a danger of being distracted by this joy of contemplation. If you attach to it, it will then turn into ordinary thoughts. So it depends very much on whether you know how to support your meditation, how to maintain the calm without attachment.

**(Q):** That place that you get to where you have this insight is truly restful?

**(A):** Yes, truly restful!

**(Q):** Do you mean when you see the true nature of the mind, then you can rest there for some time?

**(A):** No, what have been explained are the methods as to how to meditate and how to develop the meditation. As explained, there are two phases to meditation. When you come to a phase where you could experience the shapelessness and the sizelessness of mind, what we call the mind's nature, and you are at the same time not disturbed by many thoughts, then you try to rest on that. By doing that, you are developing that state of mind, and making it stable and clear to you, so it is a method.

**(Q):** That is very restful because you do not have the confusion there?

**(A):** For now, you follow the method and practise as described. Actually, it will not be that restful for you because in any moment, you are disturbed by many thoughts. It is what we call a flame in the wind. In this scenario, rest means to stabilize. It does not mean for you to have a rest. Nevertheless, you just do it. Follow the methods and try to become more and more stable. And in this way you maintain your meditation, and it will progress gradually.

**(Q):** Did I understand rightly that there are two aspects to the analytical meditation: one, the form aspect in which one looks at the nature of phenomenon – where they are, what they look like, do they have shape and form etc? The second is just sitting within the natural state of mind itself, and realization without the form of questioning process?

**(A):** Yes, there are two phases. First is an investigative probe, simply a method to enable us to discover the true nature of mind. Once we have discovered it directly for ourselves in our meditation, there is no need to continue to investigate. We can then pass directly into the resting in the essence of mind that we already know, because we have discovered it. In other words, the investigative process is kept up till we recognize that the nature of thought and the nature of mind are identical. And once we have reached that point, there is no need to interfere with the mind when it is meditating. We let the mind rest in a state, which we call non-artificial, or not fabricated. This means that when a thought arises, we do not try to encourage it, nor stop it. We just leave it. And this is because we already know that thought and mind are the same. At that point, there is no need to investigate any more. In

general, this is the process. You do not have to be always analyzing. We train ourselves to rest in the mind at ease in its own nature. When we say rest the mind at ease, this does not mean that the mind is dull, or switched off, or just resting in a vague sense of doing nothing. The mind in that state is actually extremely clear, extremely precise. It is extremely aware of its own true nature. This is what we cultivate in the main practice of lhagtong. The investigation is just a temporary method to discover the true nature of mind.

**(Q):** ... if you arise spontaneously within that...?

**(A):** Not fully, but a reasonably clear state will be there. Then, sometimes it will become duller, and that is when you again analyze the thoughts and mind to make it clearer.

**(Q):** Rinpoche, on the path of meditation, do we have to have a teacher to guide us, otherwise, we might get lost?

**(A):** True, this is why we, who are the teachers, travel from time to time to the different centers to try to meet with the students so they would have the opportunity to ask questions. The many questions you have you should ask the teacher as to how to maintain your meditation especially when you have problems, and you do not know how to handle them. You should always seek the advice of your teacher concerning your meditation. The tapes of Dharma teachings that are now made available to students should be listened to again and again. You reflect on their meaning and in this way, you can increase greatly your understanding by yourself.

**(Q):** I have two questions. About what you call mind, is there a finite, or infinite number of minds in the universe? And secondly, you mentioned that there is a kind of thought realm or world that you can be born into – like a formless world where the body form is minimally perceptible. You also mentioned the hell realm. How many other realms are there like that that you might be born into, and are any of them like this one?

**(A):** Since karma itself is unlimited, then the effects of karma are correspondingly unlimited, and so are the possible varieties of effects. The formless realms, and the very subtle form realms are both results of contemplative states of mind. Those states of contemplation are then the causes and it is quite possible for you to go on continuously in those states. At first, you do contemplation meditation with force, which is what you do now. But once you have achieved the result, as explained already, you do not have to force it any more. Your mind can naturally go into that. A person dies, but the state of mind does not die. Your mind can continue on in formless or form realms for millions of years. There are so many different forms of fetuses, eggs, or larvae that will grow into forms of different characteristics, and life spans. Some forms are very aggressive, while others are beautiful and peaceful. Karma is limitless and so the forms of beings are limitless.

**(Q):** ...You were saying this morning that thoughts and mind are the same. That seems to be some contradiction there because in meditation, we don't want to have the thoughts but rest in the mind?...

**(A):** No, no, no. During shi'nay meditation, you are not doing the vipassana practice. Counting the breath is a form of thoughts but and it is alright to have it

during shi'nay. You are using it in order to reduce the many thoughts that are normally passing through. Shi'nay is shi'nay. Lhagtong is lhagtong. During lhagtong, or vipassana, you are going inside the meditation where you examine the view of thoughts. Shi'nay trains you by using counting as thoughts to make your mind stable. This is so that your mind is stable enough to do lhagtong. The counting of the breath is very effective to reduce thoughts, though counting is thoughts but okay.

**(Q):** In vipassana meditation, we somehow become aware, and we have this awareness. And this awareness is of thoughts. So there's a kind of a separation and...

**(A):** If you are aware of mind's nature, you will also realize the nature of thoughts, which is inseparable from mind. So awareness of mind, or awareness of thoughts is one. If your awareness is stable, then the arising of disturbing thoughts will be overcome by the view of the awareness. This means thoughts then become clear, and at the same time, making you clearer sometimes. Thoughts and mind are the same. A thought is not a particle that exists. Thought is mind. Thought means the mind is busy, isn't it? When you could keep the awareness of the mind, you have no thoughts. When mind is busy, thoughts arise. But if your habit of awareness is strong, it will quickly overcome the thoughts.

**(Q):** [inaudible]

**(A):** As long as you are in vipassana, you treat them equally – positive and negative thoughts both get equal treatment. You have to go into the awareness of them. You do not stick to the positive thoughts and try to make more of them. That would be disturbing the mind and its awareness. The same applies to negative thoughts – you do not try to suppress them. Positive and negative thoughts both are let be within your awareness. If you continuously go towards positive thoughts, then you would be like the monk in the cave retreat, busily making projects such as making the cave more livable for all retreatants. That monk thought that he was acting positively and so allowed his meditation to be interrupted. Therefore, during vipassana meditation, positive or negative thought are viewed equally in the nature of the mind, which is emptiness. There is no difference. But from the point of view of karma, then yes, positive thoughts are good. They will not create the bad seeds.

**(Q):** Are we not creating more thoughts with all the questions about thoughts – where do they come from, what is their nature, etc?

**(A):** That is the way to analytically examine thoughts. That is method. But when you could realize the face of the mind clearly, then you do not have to depend on that method any more. You simply try to continue in the restful mind. During post-meditation, try to develop positive thoughts as much as you can, and contribute to activities in helping others to generate good merits. Positive thoughts will have an influence on your activities. If you have many positive thoughts, then you will act positively and accumulate good merits. Every action is deemed good or bad depending on the motivation behind the action. If the motivation is pure, then the aim is pure. Whatever tactics you use will be based properly on what is necessary rather than on personal gain or ambition, and so the whole process becomes positive.

**(Q):** Could you briefly mention the difference in method between the two traditions of Maha Ati, and Mahamudra?

**(A):** On the shi'nyay level, there exist many different methods. In Maha Ati, there are methods that relate to the bindu. You imagine or visualize the bindu and concentrate on it quite extensively. As far as the vipassana meditation is concerned, there is no difference.

**(Q):** Once you reach the experience of one phase, then basically you want to be able to sit in that experience gained?

**(A):** Yes.

**(Q):** About thoughts, I want to understand their effect on the mind. When we start they are very fast like a fast running river. Then as you do more meditation, and learn more, the mind becomes like a slow long river, and then, it is like an ocean. Can you explain the different kinds of mind with respect to the flow of thoughts?

**(A):** Yes, but now is not the time to explain. There is the danger that the practitioners might imagine what has been explained, which is not good. For example, some teachings describe an effect of thoughts like a waterfall. But it does not mean at all that you should imagine your thoughts like a waterfall. You should also not imagine your thoughts running through like a river either. You should not imagine these metaphors. Often, having studied, or read in books or having listened to Dharma talks, you will try to realize such concepts in your own meditation. The result is you will be kept very busy during your meditation! Results have to happen from the meditation, and then you will say, "Yes, this is what the teachings mean!" But until the result is actually happening naturally from your meditation, thinking about the different scenarios is just adding to your own confusion of mind. By doing the meditation, you will come to the waterfall level as an effect of your meditation. To prevent the students from making this kind of mistake, some explanations are deferred till later when they become appropriate for the students.

**(Q):** What you mean by unstable, is it when one day the meditation is calm and on the next, busy?

**(A):** Yes, this shows that the meditation is at an early stage.

**(Q):** There was a first philosopher who said, "I think, therefore I..."

**(A):** ...I exist.

**(Q):** And so when you talk about thought and mind being the same, there's a tendency then to think, okay there *is* something. But, . . . experience affecting thought, and if mind and thought are the same then they can/cannot exist in some way.

**(A):** Thoughts and mind being the same does not mean two glasses. This glass is here and then there is another. They are of the same manufacturer, so you say the two glasses are the same. Here, in our context, it is not that sense of *same*. Thought does not exist means when mind is distracted, then mind became thought. When mind is peaceful, then there is no thought. Mind is within itself. Like when I stay sitting like this, I'm not moving. But when I move — then I am moving. Thought means mind is busy. That is all.

**(Q):** So, it is not a result of mind, it is an actual...mind?

**(A):** Yes! When the mirror is faced to the forest, then the forest's reflection appears in the mirror. But the reflection is still mirror.