

*A Guide to  
Shamatha Meditation*

*by*

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This teaching is taken from the much longer *The Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice* by Thrangu Rinpoche. The teachings are based on Pema Karpo's *Mahamudra Meditation Instructions*.

This teaching was given in Samye Ling in Scotland in 1980.

These inexpensive booklets may be purchased in bulk from Namo Buddha Publications. If it is translated into any other language, we would appreciate it if a copy of the translation.

The technical terms have been italicized the first time to alert the reader that they may be found in the Glossary.

## *Dorje Chang Lineage Prayer*

Great Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa  
Marpa, Milarepa, and lord of the dharma Gampopa  
The knower of the three times, the omniscient Karmapa  
The holders of the lineage of the four great and eight lesser schools.

The lamas Trikung, Tsalung, Tsalpa, and glorious Drungpa and others  
To all those who have thoroughly mastered the profound path  
of mahamudra  
The Dagpo Kagyu who are unrivalled as protectors of beings  
I pray to you, the Kagyu gurus, to grant your blessing  
So that I may follow your tradition and example.

The teaching is that detachment is the foot of meditation;  
Not being possessed by food or wealth.  
To the meditator who gives up the ties to this life,  
Grant your blessing so that he ceases  
to be attached to honor or ownership.

The teaching is that devotion is the head of meditation.  
The lama opens the gate to the treasury  
of the profound oral teachings,  
To the meditator who always turns to him,  
Grant your blessing so that genuine devotion is born in him.

The teaching is that unwavering attention is the body of meditation,  
Whatever thought arises—its nature is empty.  
To the meditator who rests there in naturalness,  
Grant your blessing so that meditation is free from conception.

The teaching is that the essence of thought is dharmakaya,  
Thoughts are nothing whatsoever, yet they arise.  
To the meditator who sees the play of the mind unobstructedly,  
Grant your blessing so that he realizes  
samsara and nirvana are inseparable

Through all my births may I not be separated from the perfect lama  
And so enjoy the glorious dharma  
Accomplishing the good qualities of the path and stages,  
May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara



## *Introduction*

Traditionally, it is said that to achieve enlightenment which is a state of complete freedom from suffering one has to first listen to or study the dharma, next one has to contemplate it, and finally one has to actually practice what has been learned through meditation. All Buddhist schools share an emphasis on meditation, particularly on tranquillity and insight meditation. These are often called by their Sanskrit names: shamatha and vipashyana meditation. These basic sitting meditations have slight variations in different Buddhist schools, but they have always had the same goal; namely, to tame the mind so that true understanding of the world can develop.

This book is an important teaching given by Thrangu Rinpoche, one of the greatest living Buddhist teachers, on how to do shamatha and vipashyana meditation. Since Thrangu Rinpoche is from the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, he presents shamatha and vipashyana meditation from the vajrayana perspective. This style of meditation is extremely effective and has produced thousands of enlightened individuals over the last thousand years.

The meditator eager to get exact instructions on how to meditate may be tempted to breeze through the paragraphs on devotion, faith, the lineage prayer and focus on the very practical techniques of meditation. To do this is to miss the whole essence of meditation, which is an all-encompassing way of viewing the world and a method of developing one's individual relationship to oneself and to others. To get the most out of these instructions, therefore, one should read each sentence as if it were embossed on the page in gold, which is how some of the early sacred texts were produced.

Since each person's mind is different from that of every other person, each person's meditation is also different. This is why individual instruction is so necessary. It is very important before beginning to practice meditation, to seek advice from a qualified meditation instructor. Fortunately, Karma Triyana Dharmachakra maintains a list of Tibetan meditation centers

around the world. From them one can obtain information on a center offering meditation instruction.

The address of KTD as it is called is 352 Meads Mountain Road, Woodstock, NY 12498. The phone is 914-679-5906. You may also consult Thrangu Rinpoche's web site ([www.rinpoche.com](http://www.rinpoche.com)). If the reader wants more detailed information on meditation, he or she should consult Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Practice of Tranquility and Insight Meditation* published by Snow Lion.

Clark Johnson, Ph. D

# Chapter 1

## *Shamatha Meditation*

### *Studying the Dharma*

We begin by examining our mental disposition, which means turning our mind inwards and examining whether our attitude is pure or impure. Because we are just ordinary beings, sometimes our attitude will be pure and at other times it will be impure. There is nothing surprising about this. When we find our attitude is pure, we can rejoice and let it remain pure. When we find our attitude is impure, there's no reason to become disheartened, because we can change it. If we change it, again and again, little by little our negative attitude will naturally become pure. To develop this disposition for enlightenment, we should think that whatever we are doing, we are doing it to help all beings reach Buddhahood.

### *The Need for Meditation*

When we do a physical action, this action can have either a positive or a negative result. When we say something, it can be either good or bad. So with words and actions we can see tangible results, but with thoughts there is no concrete action expressed. The mind, however, determines all of our physical and verbal actions because whatever we do, there is thought behind it. When that thought is positive, the actions that follow are good; when that thought is negative, the actions that follow are negative. The starting point of changing what we do is to change the way we think.

When we try to change a mental disposition, we must modify our habits. We can do this through meditation; that is, by using our mind in a more concentrated, controlled way. What is troubling the mind can be removed with meditation so our mind can exist in its purity. If our mind is distracted, we can change it

into an undistracted mind through meditation. We can change bad habits into good habits through meditation. Then when we manage to change our mental habits, we can change our physical actions and verbal behavior. Once we have changed these, we can reach the ultimate goal of our practice, Buddhahood.

### ***Faith and Devotion***

The one thing common to all meditation practice is having the right motivation of wanting to benefit all persons, not just ourselves. Besides this, we also need to have very strong devotion to our guru and all the gurus of our lineage. If we pray to them with really sincere devotion, we can receive their blessings which lead to a very quick growth of our meditation. It is said that the source of the growth of the four main and eight lesser schools of the Kagyu lineage was the blessings created by these meditators praying to their gurus with true devotion. They received the blessings and were able to develop their meditation and understanding quickly.

With the practice of meditation, we can actually get the mind to rest on what we want it to rest on and the mind becomes clearer and more peaceful. The Vajrayana tradition<sup>1</sup> has developed a practice that makes it possible to go through this process much more quickly than in other meditation practices. In this practice one prays to one's guru and to all the gurus that have come before and develops a very strong devotion—an openness to receive their blessings. If one prays to the gurus, one receives the blessing, and through this blessing one's meditation progresses rapidly and naturally.

How is it possible that blessings are not felt by some? It is *not* because the Buddhas and the gurus feel, "Well, he doesn't pray to me, so I'm not going to give him blessings." The Buddhas and gurus look upon all beings with the same kindness and love as a mother has for her only son, but only persons open to these blessings can feel them. For example, if we have a hook and try to catch an egg, we can't do it. However, if we try to catch a ring with a hook, it is easy. In the same way, the compassion and the blessings of the Buddhas are there constantly, but there has to be something in beings that is open to receive the blessings. Faith and devotion are like a ring for the

hook of the Buddhas' compassion and blessings to pull us out of samsara. No matter how much compassion the Buddhas have, without devotion nothing will happen.

### ***The Lineage Prayer***

To develop devotion we imagine our guru as the embodiment of all the Buddhas in the form of Dorje Chang (Skt. Vajradhara).<sup>2</sup> The prayer to Dorje Chang is of special value. It was composed by the guru of the seventh Karmapa.<sup>3</sup> For eighteen years he lived on a very small island in the middle of a lake in Tibet and meditated on the mahamudra.<sup>4</sup> He spent all that time just meditating until he reached full realization of the mahamudra. At this point he spontaneously composed the Dorje Chang prayer, and so this prayer has a great deal of blessing connected with it.<sup>5</sup> When we say this prayer, we should be aware of the meaning of the words. We should do this prayer trying to really concentrate on what we're saying, to be very attentive, and not to let our mind wander to other things, all the time praying with sincere devotion remembering all the qualities of our guru.

When we begin meditation, we should put our mind in the disposition of enlightenment so that the other conditions for true meditation will arise in us. In the vajrayana teachings it is said real meditation will arise naturally if we receive the blessing of our guru and the gurus of the lineage. This is why we say the prayer to Dorje Chang, who is visualized in the space in front of us surrounded by the lamas of the lineage. If we cannot manage to visualize that many objects, we can just imagine the form of Dorje Chang, but think of him as a condensation of all the qualities and essence of the lamas of the lineage.

The Dorje Chang prayer has four parts. The first part is to turn our mind away from samsara so that we can see its illusion and develop disgust with samsara and want to practice the dharma. The second part is to cultivate devotion towards the lama and the dharma so we will be able to receive the blessings of the lamas and develop true meditation. The third part is that we pray to achieve peace of mind and not be distracted so we will develop true meditation. The fourth part is trying to understand that the essence of our thoughts is the dharmakaya. When we have understood this, we actually become Dorje

Chang. After that we just remain in meditation. Whatever thought comes up, we just rest within the essence of that thought.

When we imagine Dorje Chang, we think of him as being blue in color, with one face and two arms, holding a dorje and a bell. He is sitting in the vajra posture.<sup>5</sup> We can either think of him as being on top of our head or being in front of us in space. We usually visualize him in front of us and if it is possible with all the gurus of the lineage around him. We imagine that the lamas are not in their ordinary form with a solid body with flesh and blood, because if we did, they would arouse ordinary thoughts in our mind. Having ordinary thoughts during this meditation is a sign that we do not have much devotion. So we visualize our guru in the form of Dorje Chang to develop a pure vision in us and to see him not as ordinary flesh and blood, but in a pure way. We know that it is our guru, but in the form of Dorje Chang. If we cannot visualize all of these lamas, we simply imagine Dorje Chang and think that he represents all the aspects of the three jewels.<sup>6</sup> While praying, we try to remember all the good qualities of our lama and the lamas of the Kagyu lineage and try to feel genuine devotion from the bottom of our heart. Feeling this, we say the lineage prayer. When this happens, we think, “I have received all the blessing of body, speech, and mind of all the Buddhas and the guru.” At the end of the prayer, we imagine that our guru and all the other gurus melt into light and this light is absorbed through the top of our head and goes into our heart. At that particular moment we think we have received all the blessings of the body, speech, and mind of our guru and all the other gurus. We think we have received exactly the same qualities that they possess because our mind and their minds are now one. So all their qualities of complete freedom from obscurations and their complete realization are now ours; it is as if they had imprinted a picture of their enlightened qualities on us. We think we’ve obtained the full blessing and whatever realization is in the mind of our guru is now in our mind.

### ***The Posture in Meditation***

There are two important points in meditation—the body and the mind. As far as the body is concerned, it is important to keep the body straight so that the subtle channels<sup>7</sup> of the body will be straight, too. If these subtle channels are straight, then the subtle energies within these channels will circulate freely. It is said that the mind is like a horse riding the circulation of the subtle energies of the body. When it is riding this energy freely, it is relaxed and peaceful.

There are many descriptions of good meditation posture and we will use the five-point description. The first point is that the body should be straight and upright. It should be “as straight as an arrow” which means one’s back should be straight and one shouldn’t lean forwards, backwards, or to either side. The second point is that the throat should be slightly bent downwards like a hook. There are two subtle channels inside the throat, and if they are bent slightly forward, the energy will circulate in them reducing mental agitation in one’s meditation. The third point is that the legs should be crossed in “patterns of latticework” which means that the legs should be kept in a crossed position. If one can put them in the full lotus posture, good. If not, simply cross them in the half lotus posture. The fourth point is the body should be “gathered together like chains.” After straightening the body, lock it in that position as with iron shackles. The way to do this is to join the hands, placing them the width of four fingers below the navel. The fifth point is to keep one’s mind and body reasonably tight, exerting a certain amount of effort so the body and mind are composed and focused. This is compared to one’s tongue when one, for example, pronounces the Tibetan letters “*li*” and “*ri*” which requires a certain amount of tension in the tongue. In the same way, one should always maintain a certain amount of effort and alertness in the body and mind.

The great teacher, Marpa, said that there are many different instructions on meditation posture,<sup>8</sup> but he preferred this five-point posture saying that if one could keep the body in this posture, the subtle energy circulating in the body would be ideal and would actually circulate through the central channel of the body.

***The Mind in Meditation***

When one meditates, do it for a short time; but do it again and again and again. The whole point is to develop a habit of meditation. If one meditates at first for too long, the mind just becomes more and more agitated and difficult to control. If one meditates for a short time and renews the session many times, then each time the mind will be fresh and clear and able to settle down more easily. So meditate again and again until the habit of meditation grows stronger.

It is important to control the mind in meditation. The uncontrolled mind is very strong and dangerous like an angry elephant. Not only can it not be controlled, but the mind just goes its own way. If a very strong negative feeling of anger or desire arises, we are normally not able to control it. But it is our mind, so we can control it if we use the right tools of mindfulness and awareness. Awareness is knowing exactly what we are doing while we are doing it. Mindfulness is having control of our mind and not letting it run out of control.

When meditating, we should not follow a thought about the past, we should not anticipate the future, and we should not be involved with thoughts of the present. Thoughts of the past are like what we did yesterday; thoughts of the future are like what we are planning to do tomorrow and thoughts of the present just pop up. In all cases we shouldn't follow the thread of these thoughts. We should just relax and leave them alone by not following them one way or another. For instance, in our meditation we may think of something that happened a month ago or think of a thought we just had and think, "I've been thinking about this." We then just end up following *that* thought. So we should not follow any of these thoughts. Similarly, we may be planning something for next week and immediately think, "I shouldn't be thinking of this!" We must avoid following thoughts in our meditation because meditation is simply leaving things just as they are without being too relaxed or too tense. If we manage to do this, we will find that the mind calms down quite naturally by itself.

### ***General Obstacles to Meditation***

During meditation the mind must have the right tension. For example, if we have a cat and we lock the cat up in a room, the cat will go crazy. Not finding a way to get out, it will start running up and down, meowing, and tearing things apart. But if we leave the door open, the cat will go out and take a little walk and then just come back in and fall asleep in the room. Similarly, if we begin our meditation thinking, “I really must stop thinking and keep my mind very concentrated and peaceful,” we will constantly be worried and think, “Oh, I’ve had a thought!” or “Now I’m getting too tense.” We will then work ourselves up so much that we can’t stop thinking. So relax, just let the mind go and think, “Whatever comes, it just comes and goes.” If we sit there very relaxed and let it all happen, we won’t have very much trouble meditating.

If we use mindfulness and awareness properly in our meditation, our mind will become tranquil. There are two main obstacles to the tranquility of the mind. One is becoming too relaxed and the other is becoming too tense. When we become too relaxed, we start to follow our thoughts and become absorbed in them. When we are too tense, we make too much effort focusing on the idea of concentrating and being tranquil so that in the end our mind cannot remain tranquil and we become distracted. We have to constantly try to find the balance between being too tense and too relaxed by finding just the right amount of effort to put into our meditation. Saraha, a great mahasiddha, said that when we meditate, the mind should be like a thread of the Brahmin. In India the Brahmins used to spin a lot of thread. If one puts too much tension on it, the thread breaks. If the thread is too loose, then it won’t be strong enough. In the same way, when we meditate, the mind should maintain the right amount of alertness, neither too tight, nor too loose.

### ***Meditating on an Outer Object***

There are three main techniques of meditation: concentrating on an outer object, concentrating on an inner object, and concentrating on no object. The goal of meditation is to reach the point of not needing any object in meditation. But to prepare

for this goal we need to gain familiarity with meditation using outer objects and then inner objects.

In the beginning it is useful to meditate on an outer object such as a statue of the Buddha. Meditating on an outer object is not to examine or think about its shape or composition or color, but to simply remain aware of the statue in front of us and not become distracted by other thoughts. When looking at the statue, our eyes shouldn't strain and we should just register the picture of the Buddha in our mind. If other thoughts arise, we should try to become aware of these thoughts as quickly as possible and immediately drop them and return our awareness to the statue.

For the beginner this meditation is difficult to do for a very long time because we become lost in our thoughts very easily. So we meditate for a brief time with good concentration so our meditation doesn't become entangled with thoughts all the time. We do it for a short time in the beginning, and when we find that it is becoming a little easier, we can extend the duration of the meditation session.

Tilopa said that one should abandon all physical activity and just remain very quiet when meditating. One should stop talking and stop thinking; just leave the mind at rest. If we meditate on a statue of the Buddha, we should not stare at it with a forced or fixed gaze because this will just give us a headache and eye strain. We must relax letting our eyes rest on the statue, merely registering the image. Whether our sight is sharp or blurred makes no difference. And when we look at it, we don't think, "Statue, statue, statue." We just look at it and try not to let the image drift out of our mind. If we start having an important thought that is taking us away from the statue, we just gently bring our attention back to the statue because if we follow the first thought, then another will come, then another and we will completely forget about the object of our meditation. When the thought comes, it is important to acknowledge its presence. If our mind starts to follow the thought, just recognize this fact and bring the mind back to the statue.

We should always focus on what is called the "support" of the meditation which is the statue or other object we are focusing on. If we develop the habit of trying to avoid the two defects of being too tight or too loose in our meditation, our meditation will improve. If we practice this kind of meditation

more and more, we will then gradually have more and more mental peace with the mind being able to concentrate and there will be increasing clarity of one's meditation.

### ***Insight Meditation***

In the practice of dharma, we have to work with our body, speech, and mind. The mind determines the quality of our physical and verbal activity. We are trying to free ourselves from problems and suffering and thus go beyond samsara. The root of samsaric existence is the defilements and as long as these are present, we cannot expect to have any lasting happiness.

There are two ways through which we will be able to gain freedom from the defilements; both involve meditation. Through meditation we will first gain some mental tranquility which leads to having fewer thoughts. With fewer thoughts, we will have fewer negative thoughts leading to fewer defilements. But the seed of the defilements is still present, so we must develop an understanding of the non-existence of "self." We therefore meditate on the actual nature of phenomena.

The second aspect of meditation that can clear the defilements away is insight meditation (vipashyana meditation). But to develop strong insight meditation, we must first develop strong tranquility meditation. Without tranquility meditation the mind just goes everywhere and we are not able to control it. Once we have developed tranquility meditation, we are able to use the mind in a controlled way. So if we decide to let it be at rest, we can do that. If we decide to focus it on something, we can also do that. The ideal way to gain tranquility meditation is to just let the mind rest naturally without any thoughts. This is extremely difficult to achieve because we have become so used to having thoughts and being involved with them. Because we have always turned our minds towards objects outside of us, it is easier to use an external object for our meditation when we first begin to meditate. So the first step is to meditate on an outer object such as a small Buddha statue.

***Obstacles to Tranquility Meditation***

In meditation there are two main obstacles to actual tranquility meditation. The first obstacle is “thinking” which means that when the mind starts thinking, it becomes heavy and lethargic and we start feeling sleepy. It’s a feeling of apathy and wanting to sleep but we can’t, so there’s no clarity in the meditation. The other obstacle is agitation in which the mind becomes wild and one has many thoughts and follows these thoughts in all directions—into the future, the present, or the past—so that the mind cannot rest at all.

The way to correct this dullness is to think of the qualities of the Buddha and the dharma and how much we can gain through meditation. Thinking this will create a feeling of happiness, and our inspiration and enthusiasm will be renewed so we will automatically correct our sinking mind. To do this, we think that through meditation we will become free from defilements and emotional difficulties and gain freedom. Even before achieving complete freedom, meditation will bring peace of mind, which will help us gain more happiness. Remember, we have so many difficulties and tension and frustrations because we have so many thoughts and are involved with these thoughts. If we start thinking, “I want this” or “I need this” our mind will expect these things and there will be a constant tension from this wanting. Then if we can’t have or achieve what we want, there will be the constant pain and frustration of being trapped. If, however, we can pacify the mind, there will be fewer thoughts which means our craving will diminish and this constant thirst will be reduced. So meditation has the short-term effect of creating tranquility and the long-term effect of making one free from the defilements, the cause of all unhappiness.

Mental agitation is caused by distraction, which can come from pride or desire. The remedy to this problem is to think of all the suffering that is inherent in conditioned existence (samsara) and to become aware of the drawbacks of being distracted. We’ve been wandering in samsara for a very long time because we have allowed our minds to be continually distracted and this generates only suffering. By allowing the mind to be distracted, we gain nothing. Also, if we are distracted in our daily life, we can’t achieve very much. So when we think

of the drawbacks of distraction and wandering in samsara, we will automatically work on calming the mental agitation in our meditation.

The way to eliminate drowsiness in meditation is to imagine that there is an eight-petalled lotus in our heart which is facing upwards. Then we imagine there are very white, very bright little light dots on the lotus. We send these white dots up to the top of our head at about the level of the hair. We should also straighten our body a little more and generally make it move a little upwards. To eliminate agitation in meditation, we should imagine a black lotus which is turned upside down (facing downwards). In this lotus we imagine a black dot and send it downwards to the ground. At the same time we should relax our posture, letting the body stoop a little.

### ***Developing Clarity in Meditation***

If we want our meditation to be clear, we should cultivate a feeling of great joy towards the meditation. That feeling can be developed by thinking of all the qualities that come from meditation. The opposite of these qualities comes with distraction. What is the harm in distraction? The harm is that whatever we do is of poor quality when we are distracted and therefore is a waste of time. If we are distracted when we are meditating, or studying, or visualizing a deity, then that time is wasted. However, if we leave our mind in a natural state without following thoughts, then what we do is very precise, very clear, and very efficient. When distracted, we are wasting some of the time of our precious human existence which can never be recovered.

We might think that it may be nice to let ourselves just follow our thoughts and this will bring about mental comfort. But if we fall under the influence of negative feelings such as passion, aggression, pride, or jealousy, it is not very pleasant. Once one of these emotions gets started, it is very hard to stop it and it only brings about suffering. For example, once we start feeling anger, it brings about a lot of mental discomfort and if that feeling remains for a long time, it can actually make us feel physically and mentally ill. Similarly, the negative feeling of desire is constant craving. We are always looking for something

which we think is going to give us pleasure, satisfaction, or contentment. But somehow we never seem able to get this something, so we keep wanting constantly. It becomes very painful because we never seem to achieve what we are aiming for. So if we look carefully at these negative feelings and thoughts, we see that their nature is basically suffering.

However, by practicing meditation, we can eliminate pain because our mind will be under control and peaceful. By developing concentration through our meditation, we can attain tranquility. It is taught that once one reaches a certain degree of mastery in meditation, it automatically brings great physical and mental comfort. This is because meditation reduces thoughts that are constantly distracting us and this reduces our negative feelings. Meditation will also bring a very great feeling of happiness because little by little, we will be able to gain control over our thoughts and feelings.

### ***Post-Meditation Practice***

As our concentration gets better little by little through the power of meditation, we will be able to expand this natural concentration to the rest of our life. Whether we are walking, sitting, talking to other people, or working we can learn to stop our mind from wandering. If we are distracted while working, we can't do our work properly. If we can eliminate distractions and develop better mental concentration, our life will automatically be better, which will also improve our worldly as well as our dharma practice. If we had to depend on other people to modify our state of mind, it might be a very involved process. Controlling our mind is entirely up to us. This is something we can do ourselves with a little mindfulness and awareness. Little by little as our concentration improves, we can turn our mind inwards more easily.

### ***Sending and Taking Practice***

Our goal is the birth of true meditation. So we have to try to arouse devotion in ourselves, which doesn't necessarily arise very naturally in most people. So we have to work on it by praying to Dorje Chang, the dharmakaya, who is the union of

our guru and all the other gurus and all the aspects of refuge. If we want the blessing to come, our meditation has to be supported by the right kind of motivation. This motivation should be that of enlightenment, thinking that we are doing this for the sake of all beings; that we may reach Buddhahood in order to help all other beings. This motivation is known as “basic motivation,” and we have this before we start to practice. There is also “immediate motivation” which is what we have from instant to instant when we are actually practicing.

Normally, we are not very concerned about others. Because of this, we have developed this very strong belief in the “I.” From this arises all our emotional negativity. To eliminate all our emotional negativity and thoughts of “I,” we have to learn how to train our mind which can be done by sending and taking meditation. Sending and taking (Tib. *tong len*) meditation is meant to help us develop a pure attitude by diminishing our involvement with ourselves and increasing our thoughts of others. Sending and taking meditation will help us develop bodhichitta,<sup>9</sup> the aspiration to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. In this practice we exchange our happiness for the unhappiness and suffering of other beings. This meditation is also connected with breathing. When we exhale, we imagine that we send a very bright light which goes out to reach all beings. This white light represents all our happiness, everything that is good in our life. We also think that it contains the seeds of happiness, which are all our virtues. So this white light reaches all beings and as it reaches them, it brings them great happiness and joy. In return, when we inhale we imagine that we are taking in a very dark, black light which carries with it all the suffering, problems, difficulties and all the causes of those problems. We do this meditation just following the natural rhythm of breathing. We know we want happiness and with sending and taking practice we realize that others want this happiness also. So whatever we have, we offer it to them. Whatever unhappiness and suffering they do not want, we imagine taking it. So sending and taking meditation is an excellent tool to further the growth of bodhichitta, the motivation of enlightenment.

It is a very good thing to think in terms of accepting our suffering and trying to really be open to others in a compassionate way. But to do it properly, we have to train our

mind first. We try to think that we really want to give something to others and really want to take on and relieve their suffering. It is only through training ourselves that really pure motivation can be born in us. Once we have this pure motivation, then we can really help others. We can't change another person's karma, but we are able to change the immediate conditions that are affecting them. If we have true compassion, we will be able to do a great deal. What is most important is to have pure motivation. Once we have the genuine wish to help other beings, we will really be able to help them. We find that if we try to help others when we're not ready, we will regret it afterwards. For example, when Shariputra took the resolution to reach enlightenment for the sake of all beings, he decided to give anything that was asked of him. One day a demon wanted to make trouble so he came along and said, "Give me your hand." Because Shariputra didn't want to refuse, with much courage he cut off his right hand and gave it to the demon. The demon just laughed at him and said, "I didn't want your right hand. I wanted your left hand." Then, of course, Shariputra thought it was a bit too much and regretted it.

When doing Sending and Taking practice, we shouldn't fear that we will receive the difficulties of others because we are imagining that we are taking the troubles of everyone. But we shouldn't think that there is no point in doing the meditation because we are not really taking on any real suffering or sending any real happiness. This practice is important because while we are doing sending and taking meditation, we are training our mind to gradually change our very selfish attitude to a more open and loving relationship to others so we can develop the true disposition of enlightenment.

### ***Inner Meditation***

In the beginning our mind is not stable and this is why we can fall under the influence of our emotions so easily. We begin meditation by stabilizing our mind with the help of an external support. When we become more proficient, we can concentrate the mind inwards. With meditation we try to refocus the mind by focusing on something that is fairly small, but not too small. So we learn how to focus using a statue of the Buddha. Little by

little our concentration improves, and we can then focus on a letter representing the Buddha's speech.<sup>10</sup> Later on we concentrate on a symbol of the Buddha's mind which is a small dot. In the beginning our attention is scattered over hundreds of objects, then gradually it becomes centered on something much smaller such as a statue of the Buddha. The statue has a face, arms and hands, etc., and when we have developed more concentration, we focus on a single letter and still later a single dot. In all cases, the technique is the same with the object of our concentration becoming more and more focused producing a finer and finer type of concentration.

The Buddha taught six different points of shamatha meditation.<sup>11</sup> There are three main meditations based on breathing, such as counting the breath, following the breath, and so on.

The first method is counting the breath. We should, first of all, breathe quite naturally. When exhaling, we think, "Now the air is coming out, now I'm exhaling." When inhaling, we are aware of this air entering our body. Each time we are aware of the air going in and going out, we count this as one. We count it mentally. This becomes easier when we develop the habit of this meditation. Just keep a very clear count of how many times one is breathing.

The second method of meditation is called "following the breath." We breathe normally, but when we are inhaling, we imagine the air being taken in fills up our whole body. When we are exhaling, we imagine all this air inside us going out through the nose and dissolves in space. As we are doing this, we are following this movement with our mind so our mind and the air are connected continually during the meditation. This is a very good way to develop mental tranquility.

The third method is to combine the counting of the breath and following the breath, so first we count our breath up to twenty-one with each inhalation and exhalation being counted as one. This keeps our mind concentrated on breathing and not forgetting to count. As soon as we finish counting up to twenty-one, we begin doing the following breath meditation.

While meditating on the breath, we may find our mind has a tendency to grow a bit dark and not be very clear. When this happens, we should sharpen our attention. To make meditation

clearer, we can do “the three cycle meditation.” First we take the air in (first cycle) and keep it inside us (the second cycle) and then exhale (third cycle). When we are inhaling we think of the sound OM. When the air is inside of the body think of an AH. And when the air is going out of the body think of HUM. All three cycles should be natural and not forced and one should try to make the three cycles equal. If we do this, we will find that we don’t become too agitated or too drowsy. This meditation keeps the mind clear so when we find the mind becoming agitated or drowsy, we can just switch to the three cycles of breathing.

As with other shamatha meditation when we practice breathing meditation, we should practice it in very short sessions, but multiply the sessions. While we actually meditate, we should do it with much care and with as much precision as possible.

### ***Mahamudra Meditation***

Receiving the blessings at the end of the Dorje Chang prayer is the way that true meditation will be born in us and we will achieve the realization of the true nature of phenomena. This true nature is both voidness and clarity. In an ordinary being this clarity is called Buddha-nature (Skt. *tathagatagarba*). When Buddhahood is realized, this clarity is called the dharmakaya. On the path to Buddhahood, Buddha-nature is the gradual realization of all the good qualities and the gradual elimination of all the bad qualities. This is why it is so important to meditate on the true nature of phenomena and on the nature of the mind. First one gains a theoretical understanding of this through the great teaching such as the *Uttara Tantra*.<sup>12</sup> Then through mahamudra meditation, one comes to the direct recognition of the true nature of phenomena by looking at the true nature of the mind.

## *Glossary of Terms*

- bindu** (Tib. *tig lee*) Vital essence drops located within the body and visualized in vajrayana practices.
- bodhichitta** (Tib. *chang chup sems*) Literally, the mind of enlightenment. There are two kinds of bodhichitta—absolute bodhichitta which is completely awakened mind that sees the emptiness of phenomena and relative bodhichitta which is the aspiration to practice the six paramitas and free all beings from the sufferings of samsara.
- dharmma** (Tib. *chö*) This has two main meanings: Any truth such as the sky is blue, and secondly, as it is used in this text, the teachings of the Buddha (also called buddha-dharma).
- dharmakaya** (Tib. *chö ku*) One of the three bodies of Buddha. It is enlightenment itself, that is wisdom beyond reference point. See kayas, three.
- dorje** (Skt. *vajra*) Usually translated “diamond like.” This may be an implement held in the hand during certain vajrayana ceremonies or it can refer to a quality which is so pure and so enduring that it is like a diamond.
- insight meditation** (Skt. *vipashyana*, Tib. *lha tong*) Meditation that develops insight into the nature of mind. The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.
- Kagyü** One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet. It is headed by His Holiness, Karmapa. The other three are the Nyingma, the Sakya, and the Gelupa schools.
- kayas, three** (Tib. *ku sum*) The three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya and dharmakaya. The dharmakaya, also called the “truth body,” is complete wisdom of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form which manifests in the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” is a realm in which the Buddha manifests only to bodhisattvas. The Buddha manifests in the world as an ordinary being as the historical Buddha.
- mahamudra** Literally means “great seal” or “great symbol.” This meditative transmission is especially emphasized in the Kagyü school.
- mahasiddha** (Tib. *drup chen*) A great practitioner who has achieved great realization.
- nadi** (Tib. *tsa*) Subtle channels through which the subtle energies (vayu) flow.

**shamatha** or tranquility meditation (Tib. *she nay*) This is basic sitting meditation in which one usually follows the breath, while observing the workings of the mind, while sitting in the cross-legged posture. The main purpose of shamatha meditation is to settle or tame the mind so that it will stay where one places it.

**samsara** (Tib. *kor wa*) Conditioned existence; ordinary life suffering which occurs because one still possesses passion, aggression, and ignorance. It is contrasted to nirvana.

**sambhogakaya** (Tib. *long chö dzok ku*) There are three bodies of the Buddha and the sambhogakaya, also called the “enjoyment body,” is a realm of the dharmakaya which only manifests to bodhisattvas. See the three kayas.

**tathagatagarbha** (Tib. *deshin shekpai nying po*) Literally, the seed or essence of tathagatas which is usually translated as Buddha-nature or buddha-essence. It is the seed or essence of enlightenment possessed by all sentient beings and which allows them to have the potential to attain Buddhahood.

**vipashyana meditation** (Tib. *lha tong*) Sanskrit for “insight meditation” This meditation develops insight into the nature of reality (Skt. dharmata). The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.

## *Notes*

1. There are three main traditions in Buddhism: the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. The Vajrayana is practiced principally in Tibet.
2. Dorje Chang is a dharmakaya form of the Buddha.
3. The Karmapa founded the Karma Kagyu lineage which is the lineage of Thrangu Rinpoche. Each lifetime, the Karmapa would write a letter before he died giving the name and location of his next rebirth. The present Karmapa is the 17th reincarnation of the Karmapa.
4. There is shamatha meditation which is training the mind to stay or rest wherever we place it such as on the breath and there is vipashyana meditation which is actually discerning the nature of reality and then there is mahamudra meditation which is looking directly at mind to see its inherent emptiness and the emptiness of outside phenomena. Mahamudra, the primary meditation of the Kagyu lineage can only be done when shamatha and vipashyana meditation have been thoroughly mastered.
5. The vajra or full-lotus posture is sitting cross-legged with the soles of the feet touching each thigh.
6. The three jewels are the Buddha (who originated the Buddhist teachings), the Dharma (or the teachings of the Buddha), and the sangha (or the Buddhist practitioners).
7. These are channels that carry subtle energies. These are not anatomical structures, but more like the meridians in acupuncture.
8. The most common instruction of posture is the seven points of Vairocana are: (1) Straighten the upper body and spinal column, (2) look slightly downward into space straight across from the tip of the nose, (3) straighten the shoulder blades evenly, (4) keep the lips touching gently, (5) let the tip of the tongue touch the upper palate, (6) cross the legs in either half or full lotus position, and (7) place the back of the right hand on top of the palm of the left hand and have the thumbs touch gently.

9. Bodhichitta is universal compassion in which one aspires to help all sentient beings achieve true and lasting happiness.
10. This is the Tibetan letter AH which looks like ཨ
11. These points are: (1) having correct posture, (2) holding the mind on any visual object, (3) cutting the stream of conceptual thoughts and chatter, (4) eliminating dullness and agitation in meditation, (5) not keeping the mind too tight or too loose, and (6) not breaking the continuity between meditation and non-meditation.
12. See Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Uttara Tantra: A Treatise on Buddha Nature* from Nammo Buddha Publications for more detail on this topic.

## *A Brief Biography of Thrangu Rinpoche*

Thrangu Rinpoche was born in Kham in 1933. At the age of five he was formally recognized by the Sixteenth Karmapa and the previous Situ Rinpoche as the incarnation of the great Thrangu tulku. Entering Thrangu monastery, from the ages of seven to sixteen he studied reading, writing, grammar, poetry, and astrology, memorized ritual texts, and completed two preliminary retreats. At sixteen under the direction of Khenpo Lodro Rabsel he began the study of the three vehicles of Buddhism while staying in retreat.

At twenty-three he received full ordination from the Karmapa. When he was twenty-seven Rinpoche left Tibet for India at the time of the Chinese military takeover. He was called to Rumtek, Sikkim, where the Karmapa had his seat in exile. At thirty-five he took the geshe examination before 1500 monks at Buxador monastic refugee camp in Bengal, and was awarded the degree of Geshe Lharampa. On his return to Rumtek he was named Abbot of Rumtek monastery and the Nalanda Institute for Higher Buddhist studies at Rumtek. He has been the personal teacher of the four principal Karma Kagyu tulkus: Shamar Rinpoche, Situ Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Gyaltsab Rinpoche.

Thrangu Rinpoche has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Far East and the USA; he is the abbot of Gampo Abbey, Nova Scotia, Canada, of Thrangu House, Oxford, in the UK. In 1984 he spent several months in Tibet where he ordained over 100 monks and nuns and visited several monasteries. He has also founded the monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling in Boudhnath, a retreat center and college at Namo Buddha, east of the Katmandu Valley, and has established a school in Boudhnath for the general education of lay children and young monks. He built Tara Abbey in Katmandu. In October of 1999 he consecrate the College at Sarnath which will accept students from the different sects of Buddhism and will be available to western students as well.

Thrangu Rinpoche has given teachings in over 25 countries and is especially known for taking complex teachings and making them accessible to Western students. Thrangu Rinpoche is a recognized master of Mahamudra meditation.

More recently, because of his vast knowledge of the Dharma, he was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be the personal tutor for the recently escaped 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa.

***Paperback Books by Thrangu Rinpoche***

*The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice.* This book gives an overview of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as it was practiced in Tibet. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1998.

*The Open Door to Emptiness.* This book goes through in a easy-to-understand way the arguments made to establish that all phenomena are indeed empty. Vancouver: Karme Thekchen Choling, 1997.

*The Practice of Tranquillity and Insight.* This book is a practical guide to the two types of meditation that form the core of Buddhist spiritual practice. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1993

*Buddha Nature.* This book is an overview of the whole concept of Buddha-nature as it is presented in Maitreya's *Uttara Tantra*. Katmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1993.

*The King of Samadhi.* This book is a commentary on the only sutra of the Buddha which discusses mahamudra meditation. It is also the sutra that predicted the coming of Gampopa. Katmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1994.

*The Songs of Naropa.* This book tells the story of the life of Naropa and analyzes in detail his famous Summary of Mahamudra which lays out the path of mahamudra meditation by the guru whose succession of students went on to found the Kagyu lineage. Katmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997.

*The Differentiation of Wisdom and Consciousness.* This book, which includes the original text of the Third Karmapa and Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary, describes in detail the eight consciousnesses and how these transform into the five wisdoms at enlightenment. [Soon to be published by Namo Buddha Publications]

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