

The Essential
Guide to
**Profound
Practices
of Tibetan
Buddhism**



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Featuring the wisdom of several great dharma teachers, including a number featured in the Lion's Roar online learning series, *Open Heart, Vajra Mind: Profound Practices of Tibetan Buddhism*.

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You Are The Great Perfection

Rest in your true nature without effort or distraction—Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche teaches the renowned practice of Dzogchen.

You are already perfect. You are already a buddha. In fact, there's no difference between your true nature, right now as you sit reading this, and the true nature of the buddha, or any enlightened being for that matter.

That's the view of Dzogchen, a Tibetan word that means “Great Perfection.” Dzogchen is treasured above all other practices in the Nyingma school of Vajrayana Buddhism because it helps us connect directly with our own enlightened nature.

Your essence, and the essence of every living creature, is pure, whole, and complete. There's nothing missing, and that's why we call it the Great Perfection. YOU are the Great Perfection. Don't forget that. Dzogchen is talking about you. This Great Perfection is you right now, right here in this moment, not some fully developed you after you do a lot more meditation.

In Dzogchen, we call this enlightened nature rigpa, or pure awareness. Unlike some approaches in which buddhanature is taught in a more theoretical way, and you need to study and meditate for a long time to figure out what it is, Dzogchen is experiential. You get introduced to pure awareness directly, right on the spot.

A traditional way to describe Dzogchen is in terms of the ground, the path, and the fruition.

The Great Perfection is our true nature, whether we realize it or not. That's the ground of Dzogchen. It's the reality of our experience and who we are.

But that doesn't help if we don't experience it for ourselves. The way to do that is by having this pure awareness introduced to us, and then getting familiar with it until it becomes stable and enduring. That process is the path.

Then, once we're familiar with our own true nature, once we've realized it fully and integrated it into every aspect of our lives, we will fully manifest the enlightened qualities that were there all along. That's the fruition.

The Ground of Dzogchen

It might be a little unclear what this “true nature” really is, so let me explain a bit more about the ground.

When we use all these fancy terms like “buddhanature” and “pure awareness,” what are we actually talking about? Well, there are three main qualities to look for here. We refer to these as the “empty essence,” “luminous nature,” and “all-pervasive compassion.” That’s the ground, your true nature.

“Empty essence” means that the true nature of mind, the essence of pure awareness, transcends all our ideas, concepts, and beliefs. It is utterly beyond all our suffering and problems. It is completely free. The term for this is “innate purity”—the essence of who we are was, is, and always will be perfect. It’s completely pure, and nothing can change that.

This empty essence is ungraspable, beyond our ordinary way of seeing things, but it’s not nothing. There is also a luminous, knowing presence. This is what we call the “luminous nature.” Sometimes it’s called “self-clarity,” because this clarity is spontaneous and natural. It’s just there, all the time. Even when we’re asleep, distracted, or completely neurotic. It’s there.

The empty essence and clear nature are one and the same. They’re inseparable. This inseparability is the third quality of the ground, which we call “all-pervasive compassion.” This open, spacious clarity manifests as all our thoughts, feelings, and

perceptions, just like the sun radiates light. These experiences, in fact all of our experiences, are none other than the manifestations or play of pure awareness.

The Path of Dzogchen

But what good does just knowing this do us? Not much. That's why we need a path. We need to translate this from nice words and ideas to an actual experience.

The Dzogchen path is really quite simple. That's not to say it's easy, but it is simple.

The only thing we need to do is to recognize this pure inner nature. We need to experience it for ourselves. That's it. If we want to make it a little more complicated, we could say that first we need to have pure awareness introduced to us, and then we become familiar with it.

So, how does that happen?

This is where a teacher becomes important. There's a lot going on in our minds. We have all sorts of memories and reactions, emotions and expectations. In short, we have monkey mind.

Seeing the subtle quality of empty clarity in the midst of all this mental activity isn't easy. If it were, we would have recognized rigpa a long time ago! But a skilled teacher who has recognized

pure awareness in him or herself, and who holds an authentic lineage, can point it out to us. They can help us find our way through all the complexities of the mind to see this simple, ever present reality.

You might think that because you are already perfect, because this awakened nature is fully present as the very nature of your mind, then you don't need to meditate or practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. The trick is how you practice. You still need to meditate, but meditate effortlessly. You still need to practice, but practice naturalness.

Rather than practicing with the notion that there's some level to achieve beyond where you are right now, the main practice is learning to trust that this original purity is always present, especially when it feels like it isn't. Every step you take on the path should reinforce your trust that pure awareness is right here, right now. Until your recognition is unshakeable, you still need to do formal practice.

The Fruition of Dzogchen

As I said, the core of the path is simply recognizing the nature of mind and coming back to that recognition again and again, until it's as familiar as an old friend. If you do that, there will come a time when you've experienced this pure awareness so thoroughly and completely that you never lose touch with it. When you're

meditating, you're meditating in pure awareness. When you're eating, you're eating in pure awareness. Even when you're sleeping, you're still resting in the recognition of pure awareness.

That's what we call "full realization," the fruition of the path. At this point, all the qualities of the ground, your true enlightened nature, become manifest. These were there all along, but because you didn't know they were, it was almost as though they didn't exist. But now you know them. You know them thoroughly and completely. Perfect wisdom, boundless compassion, the spontaneous capacity to benefit others—all of these manifest.

This fruition is simply the full expression of your true nature. It's as though you go out and travel the whole world, looking and searching high and low for some peace of mind. But in the end, you come home and realize that everything you were looking for was right where you started. That's the Great Perfection.

Practice: Dzogchen

The trickiest part of Dzogchen practice is that it is not something we can do. The whole point is that we are learning to recognize what is already there, while our “doing” impulse is based on the assumption that who and what we are in the present moment needs improvement. So how do we put this into practice?

Dzogchen meditation involves three important qualities: effortlessness, presence, and naturalness. In traditional terms, these three are called non-meditation, non-distraction, and non-fabrication.

To connect with effortlessness, we shift from a mode of “doing” to one of “being.” We let go of the impulse to fiddle with the knobs of experience and give ourselves permission to simply be. We rest in effortless awareness.

But while we rest in effortless awareness, we are not lost or distracted. We are fully present, alert and aware. This presence is the second quality. It’s not something we need to make happen. It’s already here, with us all the time. When we drop the effort and simply rest, we’re giving ourselves the opportunity to recognize the open clarity of awareness, to be this open clarity.

Nothing can diminish this effortless awareness. All our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and impulses arise from this knowing presence, and dissolve back into it. For this reason, we do not need to create any special state of mind to experience the mind's innate purity. We don't need to block our thoughts and emotions or control the movements of our attention. Just be as you are. This is the third quality—naturalness. We let everything unfold without trying to correct, alter, or improve anything.

As we grow more comfortable with resting in awareness, these qualities of effortlessness, presence, and naturalness will emerge, and we will slowly come to see that this spacious awareness is who we truly are.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche is a meditation master in the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. He is the guiding teacher of the Tergar Meditation Community, a global network of meditation groups and centers.



Madhyamika: Investigating Reality

When you look at things closely, says Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel, you discover the truth of dependent arising, the middle way between existence and nonexistence.

The Madhyamika, or Middle Way teachings, lie at the heart of all the Buddha's teachings. The Middle Way, when fully understood, refers to the unshakeable wisdom and confidence of buddha-hood. We might associate it with those moments of insight we encounter when everything extraneous to natural being falls away, revealing a fathomless, uncontrived brilliance. The Middle Way also describes the path of insight, through which we question the many unexamined assumptions that bind us to false certitudes and spiritual vagueness. The Middle Way is not a dogma to adhere to but a process of direct investigation that moves us toward sanity as we navigate life.

At the core of the Middle Way, we find *pratitya-samutpada* (pra-tee-tya-sam-ut-pada), a Sanskrit term often translated as “dependent arising.” The teachings on *pratityasamutpada* challenge us to find anything that stands on its own, independent of other elements. Can you find anything—either in the realm of consciousness or of matter—that does not come into existence, express itself, and fall away contingent upon other elements?

To illustrate *pratityasamutpada*, the Buddha used the example of two bundles of reeds leaning up against each other. If someone were to knock over one bundle, the other would naturally fall to the ground. Everything stands by virtue of support. In the sutras the Buddha said, “This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that becomes not; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.”

The teachings of dependent arising have deep implications. Since everything arises in dependence upon other factors, we can't identify where one thing ends and another begins. We can't find the edges of anything, and we begin to see that the world resists definition. This doesn't mean our perceptions or thoughts are muddled. It's just that, as much as we attempt to reach definitive conclusions about ourselves, others, and our world,

life continuously bursts from the seams of our beliefs and ideas. Because all things rely upon the ever-shifting nature of other elements, they will always remain uncapturable, beyond our ability to fathom them.

We may wonder how, and even if, we can function without definitive truths. But capturing truth is not the function of discernment. Discernment describes an ability to perceive, be aware of, or take in our world. Do we ever actually “arrive” anywhere when it comes to knowing? We wake up each morning not knowing what the day will bring; our world keeps changing—and we change right along with it.

That life resists objectification is called emptiness in the Middle Way tradition. In other words, because life is open to interpretation and always a work in progress—because everything leans—we will never find anything that possesses its own independent identity. As the great Middle Way scholar Nagarjuna said, “Whatever arises interdependently, that is explained to be emptiness. That being a dependent designation is itself the Middle Way.”

The Middle Way helps us understand who we are in relationship to our world. Because everything leans, we can never be right or in total command. This protects us from

fundamentalism and eternalism. Yet because we are a part of the great nature of interdependence, everything we do influences life—everything matters. This protects us from meaninglessness and nihilism. The Middle Way describes the open mind that is free of clinging to views—the insight that can bear the fathomless and unknowable nature of things yet responds clearly and compassionately to life.

Elizabeth Mattis Namgyel is a Vajrayana teacher and retreat master with Mangala Shri Bhuti, based in Crestone, Colorado. She is the author of *The Power of an Open Question*.



Sacred Slogans

Judy Lief provides an introduction to learning The Seven Points of Training the Mind.

The Seven Points of Training the Mind is a list of fifty-nine slogans, which together form a pithy instruction on the view and practical application of Mahayana Buddhism.

The study and practice of these slogans is a practical and earthy way to reverse our ego-clinging and cultivate tenderness and compassion. Through slogan practice we begin to realize that our habitual tendency, even in our smallest gestures, is one of self-centeredness. The slogans provide a method of training our minds through both formal meditation practice and using the events of everyday life as a means of awakening.

The seven points of mind training, or *lojong* in Tibetan, are attributed to the great Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha Dipankara Shrijnana, who was born of royal heritage in Bengal in 982 C.E. Having renounced palace life as a teenager, Atisha studied and practiced extensively in India

and Sumatra, where he received the instructions on *bodhicitta* [“awakened heart”] and mind training from his principal teacher, Dharmakirti.

Later invited to bring the teachings on mind training to Tibet, Atisha taught there for some thirteen years until his death in approximately 1054. He transmitted this body of wisdom to his closest Tibetan disciple, Dromtonpa, the founder of the Kadampa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

Mind training, or slogan practice, has two aspects: meditation and postmeditation practice. In Tibetan, the meditation practice is called *tonglen* and is based on the seventh slogan: “Sending and Taking should be practiced alternately. These two should ride the breath.”

Tonglen is based on putting others before self. Based on a strong ground of mindfulness-awareness meditation, the core of this practice is to breathe in whatever is undesirable and breathe out whatever is desirable. The essential quality is one of opening your heart—wholeheartedly taking in and wholeheartedly letting go. In tonglen nothing is rejected: whatever arises is further fuel for practice.

The post-meditation practice is based on the spontaneous recall of appropriate slogans in the thick of everyday life. Rather than making a heavy-handed or deliberate effort to guide your actions in accordance with the slogans, a quality of spontaneous reminder is evoked.

If you study these seven points of mind training and memorize the slogans, you will find that they arise effortlessly in your mind at the oddest times. They have a haunting quality, and in their recurrence they can lead you gradually to a more and more subtle understanding of the nature of kindness and compassion.

The slogans have a way of continually turning in on themselves, so that any attempt to rely on these sayings as crutches to support a particular moral view is undermined. The approach to moral action here is one of removing obstacles of limited vision, fear and self-clinging, so that one's actions are not burdened by the weight of self-concern, projections and expectations. Whatever arises in one's mind or experience is let go into the greater space of awareness that slogan practice generates. It is this openness of mind that becomes the basis for the cultivation of compassion.

The view of morality presented through the Atisha slogans is similar to that of Shakespeare's famous lines, "The quality of mercy is not strained, it falleth as the gentle rain from heaven." The traditional Buddhist image for compassion is that of the sun, which

shines beneficently and equally on all. It is the sun's nature to shine; there is no struggle. Compassion is a natural human activity, once the veils and obstacles to its expression are removed. In their earthiness and simplicity, these teachings inspire us to cultivate kindness and compassion, and not to give up on ourselves or others. They provoke fearlessness in overcoming the tenacious grip of ego. They enable us to put into practice our most heartfelt aspirations to benefit all sentient beings on the path of awakening.

Judy Lief is a Buddhist teacher and the editor of many books of teachings by the late Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. She is the author of *Making Friends with Death*.



Discovering the True Nature of Mind

Geshe Tenzin Wangyal teaches us a five-stage Dzogchen meditation that begins with contemplating our worst enemy and culminates in the discovery that mind is empty, clear, and blissful.

Vision is mind.

Mind is empty.

Emptiness is clear light.

Clear light is union.

Union is great bliss.

This is the heart instruction of Dawa Gyaltsen, a Bön meditation master who lived in the eighth century. Bön is the native, pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, which has incorporated many Buddhist elements. This teaching is a direct introduction to the nature of mind and is not elaborate with ritual. The pith instructions of these masters—their heart advice to their students—are often only a few lines, but these few lines can guide the fortunate practitioner to recognizing his or her own true nature as Buddha.

Vision is mind

How do we work with Dawa Gyaltsen's instruction, which begins, "Vision is mind"? Vision includes everything we perceive, but I suggest that you use what bothers you as an entrance to this practice. Do you have a famous person in your life? The famous person is the one who seems to be born to create a problem for you, as if that were his or her number-one mission in life. Sometimes we feel there are people like that. Such people can make trouble for you not only with their presence, but with one single postcard sent to you. When you see the postcard with their handwriting on it, you are immediately disturbed.

So we begin our meditation practice with this famous person as our starting point. Create a protected environment and sit in a comfortable upright position. Now invite the image of your famous person to come into your awareness. They always come anyway, but this time you are inviting them so that you can look more deeply into this experience. What exactly is this famous person composed of? See the image of the person, the character of this person who bothers you so much. Sense the energetic or emotional presence of this person. When your famous person was born, he or she did not show any physical signs or marks of what you now see. And not all people share your view of this person. What you perceive is your mind, your karmic vision, which is more karma than vision.

So in this moment, instead of looking out and focusing on that person, look inward. Step back and let the experience come in. Do not step forward but step backwards. Don't go to your office and make phone calls and send emails. Just sit and close your eyes and reflect on this person, and experience what you're experiencing at this very moment. This is your vision. It is very much in you, in your mind. That famous person is now an image or a felt sense. Perhaps you have a sense of being contracted, closed or agitated in the presence of this person; feel this fully, not simply with your intellect. Sit with the image of your famous person, and with the resulting feelings and sensations, until you recognize that this experience is in you, and you conclude, "Vision is mind."

Mind is empty

The next question is, "What is this mind?" Look for your mind. Look from the top of your head to the soles of your feet. Can you find anything solid? Can you find any permanent color, shape or form that you can call your mind? If you look directly, you come to the conclusion that your mind is empty. Some people come to this conclusion very quickly; for others it requires an exhausting search to discover this clear awareness. But this is what mind is. You can obviously pollute that clarity in any given moment, but by continuing to look directly, you can discover that mind itself is just clear. Clear means empty. "Empty" is a philosophical term, but as experience it is clear and open.

So what began as the famous person is now clear and open. If this is not your experience, you are grasping the image and holding on to the experience in some way. Just be. Relax into the experience. Simply be. Mind is empty. When we arrive at the experience of emptiness and vastness through the doorway of the famous person, it is possible to have quite a strong experience of emptiness.

Emptiness is clear light

Our next question is, “What is this emptiness?” Sometimes emptiness is scary to the point where someone may prefer even their famous person to this nothing where one experiences the absence of self. But this experience of open space is essential. It clears the identity that creates the famous person. In order to clear the obstacle of the famous person, you have to clear the identity that creates that famous person. There is an expression, “The sword of wisdom cuts both ways.” Don’t be scared by this. Remember: “Emptiness is clear light.” It has light. It is possible to feel the light in the absence of the stuff.

Usually we accumulate a lot of stuff in life. Then we have a big yard sale in order to get rid of that stuff. For a moment we might feel “Ahhh . . .”—a sense of relief at getting rid of our old stuff—but soon we are excited again about all the new stuff we can accumulate to decorate and fill the open space. In your meditation, when things clear, just be with this. Don’t focus on the absence of the stuff, but discover the presence of the light in that space. It’s

there. I'm not saying it's easy to recognize and connect with the light—clearly it will depend on how much you are caught up with appearances and with the famous person. I'm not talking about the clear appearance of the famous person; I'm speaking of the clear appearance of the space.

So when you look at appearance and discover it is mind, and then discover that mind is empty, clear light emerges. When you look for the mind, you don't find the mind. When you don't find anything, the Dzogchen instruction is to “abide without distraction in that which has not been elaborated.” What has not been elaborated is that space, that openness. So you look for mind; you don't find anything. What you don't find is pure space which is not elaborated. So don't do anything. Don't change anything. Just allow. When you abide in that space without changing anything, what is is clear light. The experience or knowledge of emptiness is clear light. It is awareness.

Clear light is the experience of vast emptiness. The reason you have a famous person in the first place is that you experience yourself as separated from the experience of the vast, open space. Not recognizing the vast space, not being familiar with it, you experience visions. Not recognizing the visions as mind, you see them as solid and separate and out there—and not only out there, but disturbing you and creating all kinds of hassles for you that you have to deal with.

Perhaps you say, “Well, I am very clear about the direction in my life.” Here, you are clear about something. The clarity Dawa Gyaltzen points to is not clear about something; it is clear in the sense of being. You experience your essence, your existence, your being as clear. That clarity is the best. Through experiencing that clarity, you overcome self-doubt.

Clear light is union

From this experience of vast emptiness we say, “Clear light is union.” The space and the light cannot be separated. Clear refers to space, and light refers to awareness; awareness and space are inseparable. There is no separation between clear presence and space, between awareness and emptiness.

We have a lot of notions of union: yin and yang, male and female, wisdom and compassion. When you pay close attention to the experience of emptiness, you experience clarity. If you try to look for clarity, you cannot find it—it becomes emptiness. If you don’t find it, and you abide there, it becomes clear. The experiences of clarity and emptiness are union in the sense that they are not separate. Clarity is the experience of openness. If you don’t have the experience of openness, you cannot be clear. What is clear is that openness, the emptiness. What is empty and open is that clarity. The two are inseparable. Recognizing this is called union.

This means that our experiences do not affect our relation to openness. It is usually the case that experiences affect our connection to openness because immediately we get excited and attached. Then we grasp, or we become agitated, conflicted and disturbed. When that doesn't happen, when our experience spontaneously arises and does not obscure us, that is union: the inseparable quality of clear and light. You are free; you are connected. You are connected; you are free.

This combination experience, whether in deep meditation or in life, is rare. Often, if you are “free,” that means you are disconnected. So this sense of union is important. Having the ability to do something and the ability to feel free, having the ability to be with somebody and still feel a sense of freedom, is so important. That is what is meant by “clear light is union.”

Union is great bliss

If you recognize and experience this inseparable quality, then you can experience bliss. Why is bliss experienced? Because that solid obstacle to being deeply connected with yourself has disappeared. You can have a strong experience of bliss because you have released something. Bliss spontaneously comes because there's nothing that obscures you or separates you from your essence. You have a feeling that everything is complete just as it is.

So you begin with the famous person, and you end up with bliss. What more could you ask for? This is the basis of the whole Dzogchen philosophy in a few lines. The famous person you project is great bliss, but you must understand this as your mind, and that very mind as empty. From there, emptiness is clear light, clear light is union, union is great bliss. You can experience this in an instant. The moment you see the famous person, you can instantly see light. But sometimes we have to go through a longer process to see this. It is a question of ability. So this progression, this process, is our practice. It takes time. But there is a clear map.

These five principles can be applied in daily practice. You can do this practice anyplace, in any given moment, and especially when the famous person is bothering you. When a difficult circumstance arises, of course you could just live with it, or you could try to find one of many solutions. But as a Dzogchen practitioner, this practice of the Fivefold Teachings is what you do. Perhaps you lost a business deal and you feel bad. What does “lost” really mean? You look at that; that is vision. Whether fear-based vision or greed vision, you look directly at that experience. Be with that experience. Then you realize it is mind, and you look at your mind and discover that mind is clear—just clear. Even when we have a lot of problems, the essence of mind is always clear. It is always clear. There is always the possibility to connect with the essence of mind rather than the confusion aspect of it.

How we conclude

I love this practice very much. On the one hand, it is so practical. It gives you a tool to deal with a very specific situation. On the other hand, it guides you directly into the essence, to the root of yourself. It always amazes me when people fight with one another and say, “Oh, that terrible person. We have been good friends for a long time and I always thought that person was so honest. It took me a long time to discover that that person is really terrible.” So your conclusion is that that person is terrible. Have you heard people say things like that? This is not really a healthy solution. It’s like going to therapy and realizing, “My dad was really a bad guy. Now I feel much better.” Of course, you might realize some difficult aspect of your situation, but realizing that is not the conclusion. You need to conclude into the essence, conclude into the root, to come to the place in yourself where you realize your mind is clear and blissful and the image that was bothering you has finally dissolved through your meditation.

What is the conclusion here? The conclusion is bliss. “Union is great bliss.” What better conclusion would you want than that? And it will be like that if you open your mind to learn, trust with your heart, and pray. It’s really important to pray, and to pray for a deep experience. Because if what you think is not that deep, the result won’t be that deep either. Through prayer, you open your heart and receive the blessings of effortlessness. The quality of effortlessness is a quality of heart, and devotion and prayer open

the heart. So praying is wonderful. It sets up the intention and puts you in the right direction, so when you do the practice of meditation—of directly looking and being with your experience—it will work.

I encourage you to practice this heart advice of Dawa Gyaltsen, to look directly into what is disturbing you and discover the nature of your mind. Through the profound simplicity of these five lines, not only can you heal your day-to-day life and make it lighter and more pleasant, but you can recognize and connect with your innermost essence, the nature of your mind as Buddha.

Questions and Answers

Question: In terms of the experience of “vision is mind,” it seems that our grasping mind, our small mind, is different from the natural state of mind which is clear light. I don’t know how to bridge the gap between the grasping mind and emptiness, because the grasping mind doesn’t seem empty.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: It doesn’t seem empty, but it is. If you look at the ocean you might find it calm and peaceful, or with small ripples, or bigger ripples, or small waves, or bigger waves. All these appearances – from calm to ripples to waves – have the quality of wetness. All are water in every appearance. The appearance of the ocean can never be anything other than water, no matter how terrible or peaceful the ocean appears. In the

same way, no matter what vision appears, it is always empty. The essence is always there. The only question is, “Am I able to see it or not?”

Question: It is wonderful when the famous person dissolves, but I still have an obligation to him or her, a responsibility. He or she is my child. So the “famous person” situation may keep recurring. Do I keep dissolving in the same way?

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: Sure. The famous person can still be famous without disturbing you as much. The reason we call him or her “famous” is that they really bother you. Do they really need to bother you? No. He or she can be as they are or they can be different, but they don’t have to bother you. We have expectations that things need to be a certain way. Do they really have to be a certain way? No.

Let’s take a situation in which I’m trying to help my child. How am I trying to help? I want him to go to school and study well. So what’s the problem? Well, the child has some difficulty learning. O.K. So I’m trying to do the best I can under the circumstances. If I’m doing that, then what am I worrying about? Some people learn faster, some learn slower. Right?

But the problem is not about the child learning too slowly; it's that I can't accept the situation. It's not about the child; it's about me. I have some fixed idea about what would be good for my child. This is usually the case. I think, "What I want is good for you." The child probably doesn't agree. He might be interested in a completely different thing than I am. But I feel like I'm the boss, and of course I am: I have a moral responsibility and so on. But there is someplace where it is just fine. I need to realize that.

Question: Is it just the lack of practice of recognizing that "vision is mind" that makes me feel there is a hook that draws me back to, "Yeah, but that famous person really is mean"?

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche: I am not suggesting that this is the only way to deal with life. This is one of the Dzogchen ways. It is not a samsaric way, and sometimes we have to deal in a samsaric way. If somebody is trying to cheat me, of course I don't like that. If somebody asks me for something, I don't mind giving. But if somebody is taking something from me, then I don't want to give. If that aspect of me seems to be who I really am in this moment, then I will fight or do whatever needs to be done. It's not a question of one approach being more valid than another. Who I am and what realization I have determines how skillfully I am able to work. In the end, the real sense of victory is the practice. But in the conventional sense, we do whatever we have to do. We naturally

defend and we fight. Sometimes, you defend, you fight, and you still lose. Then maybe you don't have any other choice but to see it as emptiness! That is a forceful way of discovering emptiness.

Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche is a lineage holder of the Bön Dzogchen tradition of Tibet. He is the author of *Spontaneous Creativity: Meditations for Manifesting Your Positive Qualities*.



Overcoming Ego With the Practice of Chöd

Lama Tsultrim Allione looks at how the traditional Buddhist practice of Chöd – offerings one’s own body to frightening demons – can inspire us to let go of ego and practice joyful generosity.

There is a story of a rich man who said that he could not practice generosity because he was unable to give anything away. The Buddha’s advice to him was to begin by simply taking a piece of fruit and passing it from one hand to the other. The Buddha told him to notice how it felt to let the fruit go and how it felt to receive it. Using this method, the man began to experience both the joy of giving and the pleasure of receiving. Eventually he became a great benefactor.

Like that rich man, we may find that giving does not arise spontaneously and that we need to train in it. The ego-clinging mind always feels a sense of scarcity, so you might think, “I barely get along with what I have. How can I possibly give anything to anyone else?”

There are, however, many ways to practice giving that transcend monetary and material means. You could give something simple like a poem, words of encouragement, or an act of kindness. True generosity brings the giver a feeling of openness, along with the enjoyment in the happiness of others.

Even imagined gifts can be powerful. There is a story about the great Buddhist king Ashoka that illustrates this. The story goes that a poor child was playing by the side of the road when he saw the Buddha begging for alms. The child was moved to make an offering, but—with nothing else to give—he spontaneously collected some pebbles and, visualizing them as vast amounts of gold, placed them in the Buddha's alms bowl. Due to this act, in his next life the child became the powerful, wealthy King Ashoka and benefited countless beings.

To take the practice of generosity a step further, you can infuse generosity with the view that there is no inherent separate existence in the giver, the gift, or the receiver. This view, known as the threefold emptiness, turns practicing generosity into something beyond simple virtuous action. It helps us not be attached to the outcome of giving, thus setting us free from any expectations.

In *Chöd*, a Tibetan meditation practice developed by the famed eleventh-century yogini Machig Labdrön, generosity is practiced for the purpose of severing ego-clinging. *Chöd* practitioners

deliberately go to frightening places, such as a cemetery at night, and visualize making their body into an offering. Since these places provoke fear and clinging to the body, the offering is a direct confrontation with the ego. Many kinds of guests are invited to this imagined banquet, including personified forms of diseases, fears, and demons. As the guests arrive for the feast, chöd practitioners keep the view of three-fold emptiness and offer their body, which they visualize as nectar that satisfies all desires. The intensity of making the body offering in a frightening place is designed to push the practitioner into a state free from all clinging.

Although we may not be a chöd practitioner who deliberately goes to scary places, we still meet plenty of frightening inner demons, such as depression, anger, and anxiety. When this happens we have the opportunity to feed, not fight, these demons with the nectar of love and compassion. This goes against the grain of ego-clinging and allows the inner demons to transform into allies.

Here's an idea: choose a day to devote to the practice of generosity. Maybe one Saturday from the time you get up until you go to bed, see how many opportunities you can find to be generous. Start by passing an object from one hand to the other mindfully. You might cook someone breakfast, offer your seat on the subway, make a donation, or spend some time with a child or someone having a hard time. See how many ways you can give in one day.

Notice your motivation, how it feels to do it, and the reactions of others. At the end of the day, recall all the ways you were generous. Notice how you feel and what happened as a result of your generosity.

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Meditation Only Goes So Far

If you want to connect with the open, spacious quality of mind, says Willa Blythe Baker, at some point you have to stop trying to meditate.

One hot summer evening several years ago, I found myself listening to a teaching in a meditation hall in upstate New York, an activity that had become far too rare at that point in my life. A hush came over the crowd as the diminutive teacher entered the room and took his seat. “Do you want to know the secret to meditation?” he asked.

Vigorous nods answered his question. Who doesn’t like to be in on a secret?

“Okay,” he said, “but first we need to prepare to meditate. Get comfortable on your cushion. Straighten your back. Lower your gaze. Relax your shoulders. Take a few slow, deep breaths...” He demonstrated.

There was a shuffle around the room as people shifted, pushed cushions into place, straightened up, sighed deeply. After a minute or so, the fidgeting settled.

“Okay, now—” The teacher paused for effect. “Listen closely. I am going to share a secret with you.” A palpable sense of anticipation settled over the room.

“Are you sure you’re ready?” He was teasing us a little. Glancing up, I could see that he was smiling, enjoying our expectation.

“All right. The secret to meditation is—”

He paused again to heighten our anticipation.

“Don’t meditate.”

He drew out the word “don’t” slowly.

After pausing again to let the instruction sink in, he added, “Instead, just be present, as you are, right here, right now. No grasping. Nothing more needs to be done.”

I’m not sure what others in the room experienced, but for me there was a sudden shift. I felt myself falling into a space of being acutely, vividly, and simply aware.

Dropping the Meditation Project

The instruction to not meditate may sound a bit scandalous in the Buddhist context we inhabit, but it is in fact nothing new. The hermeneutic of nonmeditation has roots as far back as the tenth century and the Indian master Tilopa, the founder of the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. He sings about non-meditation in his dohas (spiritual songs) and other instruction manuals. “Meditate alone in the forest and mountain retreats. Remain in the state of non-meditation,” he teaches in the Mahamudra instruction to Naropa.

How can one meditate and not meditate at the same time? While it sounds like a paradox, it begins to make sense when you consider that non-meditation is a kind of meditation—but in this practice we leave behind complicated notions of what we are doing on the cushion. In non-meditation practice, there is no call to become extraordinary, no urge to change what is. Instead there is permission to accept your experience of the moment and drop the project of meditation.

Mahamudra, or “the great seal”—along with Dzogchen, “the great perfection”—is one of the simplest forms of meditation in the Tibetan tradition. In its most essential form, it is the art of just being. It is also one of the most difficult practices to successfully cultivate precisely because it is so simple.

We are naturally complex creatures, prone to taking a simple moment of experience—a sensory experience, a thought, or a feeling—and spinning a web of concepts around it. It is a real challenge, for example, to simply observe a thought without getting involved in its orbit. We tend to follow, resist, or judge our thoughts. Pretty soon, what started as a simple thought becomes a complex network of concepts and ideas accompanied by a swirling eddy of emotion and reactivity.

The same goes for our relationship to meditation. It is challenging for us to take a simple instruction such as “meditate on the breath every day” and just do it. Instead, we get involved in a vortex of thinking about the practice, framing the practice, resisting the practice, and comparing and judging our practice against a perceived ideal. Sometimes we even create a new identity around meditation practice. Whereas before we called ourselves a nurse, a teacher, a barista, or a jogger, now we are—in addition—a meditator, with all the self-concepts that accompany that label.

Meditation, in other words, is not only a practice; it is also a conceptual construct that carries weight in our life. That construct may have surprisingly little to do with the practice itself, yet we bring it with us as a subtle companion when we sit on the cushion.

The practice of non-meditation hastens recognition of this kind of conceptual baggage. It helps us see that concepts about what we are doing can sometimes inhibit the actual practice. When we drop the very thing we think we should be doing, suddenly the weight of everything we've been carrying becomes apparent. Ideas, we discover, can be heavy.

The instruction “Don’t meditate” invites us to shine a light around and through the construct of meditation. As we explore non-meditation as a way of being, we might even suspend our meditation practice for a while and cease to live by its rules. Meditation is a doorway to freedom, but it will always be a doorway, not the destination. When we drop the project of meditation and suspend allegiance to a construct, we can rest in our immediate experience, just as it is, free from the filter of interpretation. This is important, because immediate experience holds the key to our freedom.

Non-Meditation Practice

The first time I heard the term “non-meditation” was in 1987, in a packed room near Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, when Kalu Rinpoche introduced the “Three Gates to Liberation,” three key instructions on how to practice Mahamudra. They are not instructions for what to do but rather for what not to do. The practice, he told us, was this:

Do not fabricate

Do not meditate

Do not be distracted

In essence, Rinpoche explained, authentic practice is discovered when we let go and stop trying so hard. He taught that the heart of these three is nonmeditation, which involves the discovery of non-volitional space—a place where we drop striving and trust the fullness of what is already present.

When practicing non-meditation, we are not trying to accomplish a task or tether our mind to something, such as the breath. But we are not giving up either. So what are we doing? The short answer is that we are not doing—we are being. The initial task of non-meditation is to find a home in the present moment and let go of holding on to anything whatsoever. If there is a mantra of non-meditation, perhaps it is let go, let go, let go. We let go of intentions, schemes, expectations, projects, and grasping.

When we practice letting go again and again in this way, a spacious quality of mind that is naturally open and free emerges from the background of our consciousness into the foreground of our experience. If we can stay with the freshness of what is unfolding, aspects of our being conditioned by grasping and reactivity are gradually able to release.

Honing the skill of becoming a consummate non-doer does not mean becoming passive. It also does not mean our cognitive constructions—about meditation or anything else—vanish. Being, we discover, is not the antithesis of doing. Doing exists in the womb of being. So the practice of non-meditation is not so much an escape from constructions as it is a practice of noticing there is a great deal more to our experience than the constructions alone.

In non-meditation, our projections, beliefs, and opinions are held lightly, and the vibrant space around and within them becomes the refuge. In everyday life, we focus on the content of the mind's activity. In non-meditation, we focus on the energy of the mind's activity. From that vantage point, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and so on are just pure dynamic energy, neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong. When we notice this, we ease up on ourselves. We become more aware of the relativity of our thoughts and are able to disentangle ourselves from them, which enables us to be less reactive to whatever is happening, inside or out. We trust the energy of thought more than its content and can therefore have a sense of humor about the antics of our own mind.

Natural Awareness Is Already Present

One of the assumptions I long carried with me as a meditator was that I am not good enough as I am. As a result, for many years I operated under the notion that meditation would fix me and make

me a better, more peaceful person. Many of us carry this notion deep down; we tend to come to the spiritual path wanting to make our lives and ourselves better.

In other words, when we embark on a project of meditation, we do so with a belief that it will lead us to a future state of peace. In Mahamudra practice, however, the goal is not a future peace. While the aspiration to attain inner peace or to be free from suffering may seem perfectly natural, there is a subtle kind of violence—and also a deep misunderstanding—in the notion that we are not sufficient as we are.

A basic tenet of Buddhism is that our innermost being is already aware, clear, and unwavering. Not in the future, but right now. In some traditions, this fully wise, awake aspect is called buddhanature. In Mahamudra practice, it is called natural awareness. Natural awareness is not a state; it is fundamental to who we are. We meditate in order to witness this clarity, spaciousness, and compassion as our innermost being.

When we first sit on the cushion, we may have trouble believing there is anything of that nature in a chaotic mind full of churning thoughts and feelings. But as we sit more and more, eventually we discover that a very subtle, quiet awareness is watching the chaos. Natural awareness is not thrown off by the chaos of the relative

mind. It remains grounded in every moment of experience, not separate from what it sees; it is a selfless, nondual watcher. It is completely ordinary and present in the now.

To experience this quiet watcher, we practice carefully observing the fundamental ground of present experience, the home and essence of the watcher. To the degree that meditation supports this reflexive gaze, it supports the recognition of natural awareness. But to the degree that meditation is future- or goal-oriented, it takes us away from natural awareness.

Right Here in This Wild Mind

In order to stay with a process of subtle self-observation, a commitment to tolerance is necessary. We have to become okay with our mind just as it is. Awakening is not found anywhere other than within this wild mind—not in the future nor in the past. So we need to find some friendliness toward everything arising in the mind. We cannot explore the truth of the mind while judging or reacting to it.

Non-meditation involves letting everything—the messiness and chaos—be there, creating a holding environment for the mind's gymnastics without suppressing, fixing, judging, or getting carried away by them. The practice of non-meditation is a practice of deeply accepting the truth of our present experience. This requires a great deal of patience and love.

This love and friendliness is well worth cultivating because as it turns out, the messiness itself is not a problem in need of fixing. Our messiness harbors the essence of natural awareness. We tend to believe that chaos is not fundamental to who we are, but in fact our chaos cannot be separated out from its ground and distilled into something more “pure.” Natural awareness saturates it. So the practice is not to escape, suppress, or fix our mind but to see natural awareness within our wild mind.

If our practice is to simply notice natural awareness, a quality of mind that is already present right here and now within every moment, then it is counterproductive to try to make something special happen—even to bring about a meditation state (jhana) or meditative stability. Those practices, so prevalent in Buddhism, draw us toward thinking about a before and an after, pursuing special states of being.

Natural awareness has no before and after; it is already awake. It is already happening. It cannot happen later. There is no special event, other than noticing with increasing depth and intensity what is happening right now. Sometimes natural awareness is also called “ordinary awareness,” emphasizing that it is nothing exotic or special. It is ever-present and ordinary, a constant reality. And yet to witness something this subtle directly is extraordinary and the essence of awakening.

So there is nothing to be cultivated in Mahamudra except this subtle turn of attention to what is already there, to something that we already are. Adding something onto our already present awareness, something that is labeled “meditation,” becomes a distraction.

Always a Fresh Experience

The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom*, which essentially means “to get used to something by repeating it.” When we meditate, we return to a technique again and again. This familiar return can be comfortable, but it can become repetitive or even boring, resulting in resistance to the practice itself. What can we do about this boredom and resistance?

Just as meditation carries the implication of repetition, the term “non-meditation” carries the implication that every time we sit we are not repeating the same thing again and again. We are observing something totally new in every moment. Every time you sit down, there is an encouragement to consider this meditation session as your very first. Simply by reframing our practice as non-repetition, we can acquaint ourselves with the uniqueness of each meditation session.

In Mahamudra meditation, the present moment of awareness becomes our meditation “object.” Instead of doing something, we practice dropping effort and just resting in the here and now. If

we are really in the present moment, a sense of adventure will often spontaneously arise, because anything can happen. There is an unpredictable unfolding of experience—feelings, perceptions, sounds, thoughts—as we ride the wave of now.

The past cannot be found anywhere. The future is also a fiction. This moment is indeed the only moment that has ever happened. In the practice of non-meditation, when you sit down it is the first and only time you have ever practiced. In the Mahamudra tradition, we find the term *soma*, which means “fresh,” and it refers to the truth of the newness of our present experience. If we can find freshness in our sitting practice, it remains dynamic, adventurous, and joyful. We can reclaim that sense of discovery and excitement that we began with as practitioners.

What About Meditation?

With all this talk of non-meditation, you might wonder if there is room for a practice of meditation in this alternate universe. The answer is most definitely yes. If we can step out of the construct of meditation, enter the present moment of experience ‘with deep acceptance, and dwell in the territory of natural awareness, that is excellent. But can we stay there? Most of us cannot remain in the open ocean for long without needing a life raft. Shamatha and vipassana practices serve as a life raft, allowing us to develop focus and relaxation that we can bring to open awareness.

In Mahamudra, distraction does not mean straying from focus on an object. Distraction means straying from the relaxed, non-conceptual freshness of our present experience. When we get enmeshed in the past or future, we are distracted. When we grasp, we are distracted. Being undistracted in Mahamudra practice is a very subtle skill, much harder to master than the non-distraction of conventional shamatha. Fortunately, shamatha can strengthen the muscle of mindfulness, focus, and relaxation, helping us recognize what it means to be distracted and what it means to be focused before we work on the subtle art of staying grounded in wakeful presence.

What this means in daily practice is that focused shamatha is frequently used within a session as a kind of “tune-up” for the mind’s attention. After focusing on the breath for a while, we then open up to a panoramic awareness of our present experience. From there, with more powerful attention, we can begin to explore the subtleties of innate natural awareness. In this way, on the heels of focused meditation, we can often stay in non-meditation with more focus and stability, and for a longer duration.

In Mahamudra training, this alternation continues for a long time. Therefore, while nonmeditation is classified as the main practice in the Mahamudra tradition, meditation is an important supportive practice. We might say that meditation and non-meditation need each other.

Non-Meditation as Fruition

This mutual reliance of meditation and non-meditation is reflected in descriptions of the fruition of Mahamudra practice, which is often expressed as a gradual refinement of consciousness unfolding as four stages of development called “the four yogas of Mahamudra.” The four yogas are essentially four phases that a yogi progressively goes through when engaging in long-term practice. These stages are one-pointedness, simplicity, equal taste, and non-meditation.

One-pointedness is a state of focus in which the mind can stay with something without wavering for a long period of time. Simplicity is a state in which the mind’s tendency to complicate things begins to dissolve naturally. At the stage of equal taste, the highs and lows of meditation, and of life generally, lose their volatility. Non-meditation is a level at which a yogi no longer needs to engage in meditation at all. The state of non-grasping and open relaxation is the yogi’s baseline.

In the fruitional schema of Mahamudra, it becomes apparent that there is a difference between the practice of nonmeditation and its full blossoming. Fully blossoming non-meditation seems to be a developmental achievement, requiring time and a great deal of commitment over the long term. To really experience this blossoming, the mind needs to learn how to focus (one-pointedness) and release the tendency to grasp at the content of the

mind (simplicity). The practitioner also needs to develop stable equanimity toward all experiences (equal taste). When the meditator has mastered those skills to the point where it changes their ongoing conscious experience, there is a possibility for authentic non-meditation to blossom.

A Paradigm Shift

Lately I have been tempted to answer the question “Do you meditate?” with the answer “Yes and no.”

Do I sit? Yes. Do I watch my breath? Yes. Do I meditate? I hesitate to answer this question in the affirmative anymore because it is only a part of the picture.

This feels sacrilegious. How improper to be a dharma teacher who does not meditate! But this is the truth. I cannot answer “Yes” in good faith, because what the asker means by “meditation” is quite possibly not my main practice. I like to think of practice in other terms, as a kind of homecoming—a way of being present, of being in my body, of being in sacred relationship.

If we can find freshness in our sitting practice, we can reclaim that sense of discovery we began with as practitioners.

At a retreat I attended recently, Tsoknyi Rinpoche shared an old Mahamudra saying: “Sentient beings are not enlightened because they don’t meditate. Yogis are not enlightened because they do.” In other words, we need meditation to develop concentration, focus, calm, and simplicity. We need it to become more awake. But we do not need it forever. Eventually we must let go of technique and commit to the freedom it represents. Otherwise, like the yogis in the saying, we may interfere with our own enlightenment.

In a similar vein, in the *Alagaddupama Sutta*, the Buddha famously compares the dharma to a raft. You need the raft of dharma, he says, to get to the other shore of enlightenment. But once there, it makes no sense to carry the boat on dry land. Applying the same logic, meditation stabilizes states of concentration, relaxation, and ease in our mind. But once there, it may not serve to carry techniques beyond their useful life.

But how do we know when it’s time to let go? The answer, the masters say, is found in innate natural awareness. Natural awareness, when we glimpse it, requires a paradigm shift: we must relinquish control and trust in natural awareness to drive the practice, rather than the other way around. At that point, while we may indeed continue to sail the waters and even—Buddha willing—reach the other shore, we will discover that we have always been standing on the same old ground.

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Mahamudra: Looking Directly at the Knower

The true nature of mind is empty but knowing. It can't be identified, says Andy Karr. So look for it.

Mahamudra is the perfect practice for lousy meditators like me who haven't been able to pacify our minds with more basic practices. In Mahamudra, the Vajrayana meditation system emphasized by the Kagyu lineage of Tibet, thoughts and emotions are regarded as aids to realization rather than obstacles. In this approach, you don't discard your inner chaos; you bring it onto the path to investigate its nature.

Mahamudra is nothing other than the direct realization of the nature of your own mind. And, since the mind encompasses everything you experience, it also is the nature of all phenomena. The word Mahamudra means "great seal" or "great symbol" because the true nature of mind marks or seals everything in reality.

The way to practice this is to look directly at whatever arises in your mind and rest naturally within it. “Looking directly” means to look nakedly, without thinking about what you are doing or what you are seeing. “Resting naturally” means letting go into your present experience, just as it is, without seeking to improve it in any way.

The past mind is gone; you can’t find it anywhere. The future mind has not come into being. The current mind cannot be identified as anything. It is empty from the beginning. Yet it is also knowing. How could that be? Look directly at the knower to see for yourself. Don’t accept any assumptions or suppositions or theories. Look.

Ask yourself: What is the knower like? What is its shape? Where exactly is it located? What color is it? These silly questions will encourage you to look further. Don’t settle for any answer that you can verbalize, but look at the verbalization itself. Is that thinking the knower?

When you get tired of investigating, rest naturally settled within the expanse of your mind. Alternate short periods of looking and resting. Repeat frequently. Don’t expect a big transformation, but stick with it and glimpses of insight will dawn. Gradually, they will add up.

There are countless methods for practicing Mahamudra, but an essential instruction is: have fun!

Andy Karr is the the author of *Contemplating Reality: A Practitioner's Guide to the View in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. He is a longtime student of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche and the late Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche.



How to Practice Lucid Dreaming

Andrew Holecek teaches us how to be awake when we're asleep.

You know that magical moment when you wake up within a dream and know you're dreaming? That's lucid dreaming. It's a skill you can develop and a beneficial meditation practice you can do.

A nonlucid dream is a distracted dream, a mindless dream, a forgotten dream—you forget that you're dreaming. A lucid dream is a nondistracted dream, a mindful dream, a remembered dream—you realize you're dreaming and can control much of the experience.

Studies have shown that meditators have more lucid dreams, and for a true meditation master, all their dreams are lucid. We're nonlucid to the contents of our mind at night to the extent we're nonlucid to the contents of our mind during the day. Become lucid to your thoughts during the day by practicing mindfulness meditation and you'll naturally become lucid to your dreams at night.

Dream yoga, which some scholars trace back to the Buddha, is when lucid dreaming is engaged for spiritual purposes. Some meditation masters proclaim that practicing in a lucid dream can be up to nine times more transformative than practicing in waking

life. This is because lucid dreaming is a unique hybrid state of consciousness in which the conscious mind faces the unconscious mind directly. When you transform the unconscious ground of your experience, you can transform everything above.

In general, lucid dreaming is used for purposes of self-fulfillment, while dream yoga is used for self-transcendence. Dream yoga transcends but includes lucid dreaming. Both practices create a fruitful “night shift” that can add years of awareness to your life. We spend about six years of our lives in the dream state. Dream yoga allow us to enter an exclusive “night school,” offering an opportunity to practice in our dreams. Think about how much you could learn if you had an additional six years!

Here are some instructions to get you started with lucid dreaming.

1. Setting Your Intention

Setting a strong intention during the day to wake up in your dreams is like setting an internal alarm clock. Say throughout the day, “Tonight I’m going to have many dreams, and I’m going to become lucid in my dreams.” Put your heart into it. I’ve attended dream yoga teachings where the only induction method offered was intention.

Add some octane to your intent by adding some emotional charge. That is, set the intention to dream whatever it is that you specifically want to dream. For example, you might say to yourself, “I’m going to wake up in my dreams and feel the thrill of flying through space!”

Intent is also used to seed your nocturnal spiritual practice. You might say to yourself, “For the benefit of myself and others, I’m going to wake up in my dreams so that I can practice meditation while I dream.”

2. Last Thought, Best Thought

The last thought on your mind before falling asleep has a big effect on how you sleep and dream. If you go to bed stressed out, you’ll tend to have stressed out dreams.

Calm your mind with meditation before going to bed. Then reset your intention to become lucid in your dreams. This final push will project lucidity deep into your unconscious mind and far into the night.

Lie down in bed and place your hands on your belly, which helps you unwind. Because we tend to just flop into bed nonlucidly, install some lucidity by counting twenty-one breaths. Notice

how your breathing (wind, *prana*) slows down as your mind slows down. After twenty-one breaths, let everything go and allow yourself to drop into sleep.

3. Wake and Back to Bed

The first part of the night is devoted mostly to non-REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is when we get the restoration and rest we need. Practitioners of lucid dreaming put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on this part of the night, so as not to interfere with resting. As the night progresses, non-REM sleep is replaced with REM sleep, which is when we dream the most, so the last few hours of the night are prime time for lucid dreaming.

The wake-and-back-to-bed method is when you set your alarm to go off about two hours before you normally wake up. Stay up for twenty to forty minutes. Don't check your phone or turn on any electronic device. Meditate, reset your intention, or engage in light reading about lucid dreaming. Then go back to bed. This simple method has been shown to increase your chances of lucid dreaming by up to 2,000 percent.

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The Heart of the Buddha

Thubten Chodron on how to develop *bodhichitta*, the aspiration to attain buddhahood in order to benefit others.

At times like these, when society is polarized and people feel insecure emotionally and financially, we long for connection with others—to know that we’re in this together and that we will take care of one another. Despite this longing, our self-centered mind interferes and keeps us separated.

In order to break down the walls of fear and alienation, we can practice what are called the seven cause-and-effect instructions to develop *bodhichitta*, the aspiration to attain buddhahood in order to benefit others. This meditation practice helps us see we’ve always been connected to others and that we can open our hearts with love, compassion, and altruism.

Before undertaking the first of the seven instructions, we must generate equanimity. That is, we must free ourselves as much as we can from our attachment to dear ones, antipathy toward enemies (people we don't feel comfortable around), and apathy for strangers.

One way to do this is to see that people change roles in our lives constantly—no one is a fixed dear one, enemy, or stranger. A second way is to see that we create these categories and fit people into them according to how they relate to “me,” as if that determines their worthiness.

Once we've cultivated equanimity, we can practice these seven steps to help us develop our compassion, wisdom, and bodhichitta.

Meditation

1. RECOGNIZE THAT ALL LIVING BEINGS HAVE BEEN YOUR PARENTS

Our ability to recognize that all living beings have been our parents at one time or another in beginningless samsara is based on our accepting rebirth and releasing the notion that everyone has always been whoever they appear to be now. If these ideas are new to you, for the sake of this meditation put your hesitation to the side.

2. RECOLLECT THE KINDNESS YOU HAVE RECEIVED

Recall the immense kindness you have received from all living beings when they were your parents by using the example of your parents in this life. They gave you this body, protected and fed you when you couldn't take care of yourself, made sure you received an education, taught you manners and how to get along with others, and encouraged your talents. They loved you and took care of you as best they could, given their own problems and limitations. Forgive their failings for, just like you, they are living beings under the influence of ignorance, attachment, and anger.

3. WISH TO REPAY THEIR KINDNESS

When you are aware that you've been the recipient of tremendous kindness from others, a wish to repay their kindness will naturally arise.

4. EXPERIENCE HEARTWARMING LOVE

Your wish to repay the kindness of others will lead to the experience of heartwarming love. You will see others with affection and want them to have happiness and the causes of happiness.

5. LET COMPASSION ARISE

By contemplating the suffering of all beings, let compassion arise and wish for them to be free from all the unsatisfactory circumstances of samsara and its causes. You'll know your meditation on compassion has been successful when you feel for all beings the same way a mother feels for her only child when they are sick.

6. CULTIVATE THE GREAT RESOLVE

By strengthening your love and compassion through repeated contemplation, generate the intention to free others from suffering and its causes and to bring them happiness. The stronger our awareness of their kindness and misery is, the easier it will be to generate this great resolve. Think: "How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of suffering and its causes. May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. May all beings have happiness and its causes. I shall bring this about."

7. GENERATE THE ALTRUISTIC INTENTION OF BODHICHITTA

At present we're limited and cannot free all beings from suffering. It's only by becoming a buddha that we'll be able to actualize this deepest aspiration. Therefore, make the decision to attain buddhahood in order to benefit beings most effectively. This is the altruistic intention of bodhichitta. The first six steps of the seven cause-and-effect instructions are usually considered the causes, while this last one—altruistic intention—is the effect. This intention sets you on the path to fulfill your magnificent human potential and is the cause of happiness for all beings.

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