

THE PATH

DEDICATED TO THE REALIZATION OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION

Bodhi Path Karma Kagyu Buddhist Centers ♦ Fall 2004



Shamar Rinpoche

Calming our minds is the first step

By Shamar Rinpoche

Today, I will give you instructions about mind nature that will be helpful for your meditation. And, I will give you reasons for doing the shamatha or calm-abiding meditation practice. To meditate, you first need some understanding about your mind. Our normal concepts about mind, which really are not accurate, can disturb your meditation. Therefore, it is very important to have a correct understanding about the nature of mind.

Generally, people today view mind from a scientific perspective. Perhaps they equate mind, which is a process, with the brain, which is a bodily organ. In this case, it is easy to see mind as no more than a collection of nerves transmitting and processing electronic signals, like a computer made of flesh.

I should tell you that if mind functioned in this way, then there would be no need to meditate. In fact, you could not meditate at all with such a mind. However, for Buddhists, mind is not like this. In Buddhist terms, we say that mind is clear. Clarity here means mind can understand itself. We can understand things because the mind's true nature is self-understanding. Otherwise, we could not learn anything. To learn in the Buddhist sense means to gain self-understanding.

♦ Continued on page 2

◆ Calming our minds: Continued from page 1
All conceptual knowledge comes to us as pictures in our minds. The physical objects that we comprehend are not themselves of the same material as our minds. Physical objects have atoms, while minds do not. This makes physical objects different than mind.

Mind itself is not made of atoms. Thus, mind has its own, separate nature from physical objects. If we reason this out, it means that in reality, there is no contact between mind and matter. **When you understand that objects are just reflections in the mind, then you realize that what your mind comprehends are not objects themselves, but merely images or pictures.** Through this concept of mind you can then approach the more difficult idea that mind-nature is defined by self understanding and self-realization.

Every moment mind is working, it is moving. Mind is not a fixed thing with some permanence, but a process; a true mind-stream. So, as thoughts pass through mind, they themselves ensure mind's continuance. If mind were to remain always

on one thought, then it would get stuck. It would be frozen. But because mind is always moving, because it is dynamic, then you can perceive the outside world through ever-changing sense data. You can see, hear and feel.

For example, we might compare the mind-stream to reading a series of words quickly. Each word is connected to a thought. The only way you can comprehend a series of thoughts is because your mind is not a fixed, unchanging entity. If your mind was not dynamic, then it would get stuck on "A," and never able to get to "B." So, in every moment, the mind is moving; it is passing by its former position.

When we are fully awake, mind is free of the object with which it connects to through thoughts, perceptions and feelings. Mind is unobstructed. You neither have a single thought nor many thoughts. Mind does not exist substantially. Mind is no longer ignorant or stupid in the deepest sense.

But we should understand that self-realization is not like being in a coma. Instead, there is clarity and

power. Self-realized mind is free from the influence of phenomena. It is mind free from all need to occupy itself; it is now an independent mind. This, we might say, is good mind, nondualistic mind. Of course, this kind of mind is not easy to obtain. Our habits are strong, and the unrealized mind is easily carried away by the flow of thoughts.

If you examine your own mind, you will understand this. **Mind does not exist in tangible substance; it is not a physically existing thing. Mind is not limited by any size, any shape, or any color. It is boundless and spacious.**

When you can realize an open state of mind—and keep it stable—then you can develop this state without limit. You can call this state enlightened mind, but enlightenment is difficult to realize. You may be able to realize this state of mind through examination or analysis. But your mind won't stay in this state for long. It quickly disappears because of your mental habits. I'm talking primarily about the mental habit of confusion and agitation. This habit of agitation is very, very strong. Our minds and those of all living beings are nothing if not restless.

While the basic nature of our mind is clear and limitless, our present mind is restless because agitation is a mental habit. Therefore, meditation is the natural antidote. Systematically organized meditation techniques are available to solve this problem of mental agitation.

In other words, we have to train our minds. Right now, our minds are wild and agitated, like a confused hurricane. To realize our full potential, we must tame our minds. And the good news is that we can use the mind to tame itself.

We need to develop new mental habits. Among the many varieties of methods used to tame the mind, one of the most powerful is taught at Bodhi Path Centers—the practice of shamatha meditation. You should concentrate on practicing shamatha a great deal.

Shamatha is the best tool to pacify



K. Rama Lakshmi

your mind. It will help you develop the habit of mental concentration, and help you keep your mind from wandering. And, if you can remind yourself from time to time about the concept of mind that we explained earlier, you will be able to meditate better. If you forget the true nature of your mind is calm, peaceful and radiant, then you may create unnecessary stress in your meditation. You may try to force your mind to stay focused. This will make you tense and will impede your progress. Relax, and you will do better.

As I explained earlier, mind is very spacious. As you concentrate, you need to be relaxed. It's much easier to concentrate if you aren't tense. In anything you do, like swimming, for example, you will not do well if you're too tense. You should be relaxed as you meditate. You will be successful if you have a proper concept of the mind and then apply the method of shamatha.

Initially, shamatha meditation is very useful. But don't push yourself too hard—you will need patience to get used to this practice. *Just remember, meditation is something that you can do right now to achieve peace of mind. Everybody is looking for peace of mind, and meditation is the way to achieve it.*

Why do you need patience? If you're not patient, then you won't continue to practice once you've started, and then you won't get anywhere. You get as much as you put into it. If you don't meditate, you won't gain anything. So, please be patient.

Generally, people today spend a lot of time working and cannot just sit down and meditate whenever the mood strikes them. So, at least in the early stages, it usually helps to schedule a time in your day for

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meditation practice, either in the early morning, the evening, or after work, when you can be alone in a quiet, peaceful place.

However, once you learn to meditate well, you can meditate anywhere. You can schedule a specific time to meditate, but if you meditate whenever you have free time, you will get used to it quickly. While you're in the office, if there's spare time to do a little bit of meditation, maybe at the end of your lunch hour, why not try a little meditation? Wherever you are, do some meditation. Often meditation teachers advise their students to be like a cow eating grass; just as the cow is always chewing on her cud without thinking about it, so we should develop the habit of continuously, almost automatically, meditating. Whenever you can, meditate in this way. Then it will really become part of your everyday life.

When you start to meditate, you may want to focus the mind by using some kind of external object of concentration. It need not be a physical object—the most common meditation "object" is the breath—but it should be something simple and still. If moving, then it should be something repetitive, like the breath. A good practice is to count to 21 breaths in and out, and then rest your mind by letting your attention wander for a bit. Then, gently bring your attention back to your breath, counting to 21 again. Rest again, and then repeat this cycle for the duration of your meditation session. You will develop quickly if you focus on counting your breaths in this way.

After a while, once you are accustomed to concentrating, you can stop using an external object of focus. Instead, you can then start to

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◆ Continued on page 5

View from the cushion



Trinlay Tulku
Rinpoche

Trinlay Tulku Rinpoche's fall teaching tour

Trinlay Tulku Rinpoche, a reincarnate lama born of French and American parents and given a traditional Tibetan monastic education, as well as a western education, will visit Bodhi Path Centers in the U.S. this fall. He will begin his tour in September with programs in Potomac, MD, Natural Bridge, VA, and New York City. In early October he will head to California for programs in Los Angeles, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. For more information contact the individual centers (telephone numbers on the back page of this newsletter) or visit our website at: bodhipath.org.

Lama Rinchen Palmo teaches in Washington and Virginia

Lama Rinchen Palmo, director of the women's retreat center Dhagpo Kundreal Ling at Le Bost in the Auvergne area of France, spent six weeks on the East Coast during April and May. During that time, she gave teachings at the Washington, DC and Virginia cen-

ters on Lojong, or Buddhist mind-training. Lama Rinchen chose to teach this practice specifically because of its efficacy for people today with busy lives. In our attempts to juggle families, homes and jobs and still find time to practice, Lojong teachings can help us turn ordinary obstacles into opportunities for practice. Lama Rinchen was born in England and studied with Gendun Rinpoche until his death. At the beginning of May, she returned to France to prepare the women for the new year retreat.

Au revoir Washington, DC, from Lama Chony

At the beginning of June, Lama Chony completed several months in residence at the Washington center, and returned to her home in France. Lama Chony taught at the center in 2003 and 2004, and her warmth and enthusiasm helped attendance grow. On leaving, Chony urged members to continue to visit the center for regular practice, even in the absence of a teacher, saying that it would strengthen the community and help it grow. The center was without a teacher during the summer, but in September Trinlay Tulku visited and give teachings on several weekends.

Lama Yeshe Drolma teaches in the Northeast

Lama Yeshe Drolma, trained as a lama with Shamar Rinpoche and Jigme Rinpoche, gave teachings at our center in Martha's Vineyard and to students in New York City. Her teachings continue to inform and inspire.

Growth in San Luis Obispo

The California Central Coast Bodhi Path center in San Luis Obispo (located halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles) continues to grow and thrive. At the end of April, Shamar Rinpoche visited the center to give the Bodhisattva Vow and present a teaching on how to eliminate obscurations that keep us from seeing things as they truly are. Rinpoche returned in July to give teachings on Amitabha Buddha. On every other Wednesday from April to June, Khenpo Ngawang Gelek hosted discussion sessions

called "Everything you ever wanted to know about Buddhism...and now you can ask." In these sessions, the Khenpo, a professor of Buddhist studies who has taught at Rumtek's Nalanda Institute and at the Karmapa International Buddhist Institute in New Delhi, put his encyclopedic knowledge of dharma at the disposal of newcomers and avid readers alike.

Outreach in Martha's Vineyard

The center on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, has been engaged in several outreach activities. First, they have secured a regular spot on the new local cable-access channel, MVTV, to offer Buddhist teachings weekly. Then, based on the success of their fall art show and public education program, they held a spring show in May. The fundraising and outreach event took place at a local community center and featured food from the Lotus Café. Guests could take meditation instruction, receive teachings from Lama Yeshe Drolma and view works by local artists. Thanks to the organizing efforts of Sharon Gamsby and Patricia Kent

CD's of dharma teachings available

The Martha's Vineyard group has produced four new CDs of dharma teachings recorded at the center during the last few years:

Lama Yeshe Drolma

The Buddhist Path—A Brief Introduction

Applying Meditation to Daily Activity

Understanding Our Mind

Lama Rinchen Palmo

Mind and Reality

Each CD is \$15 plus \$3 P&H. Please send your check for \$18 per CD, payable to "Bodhi Path" to:

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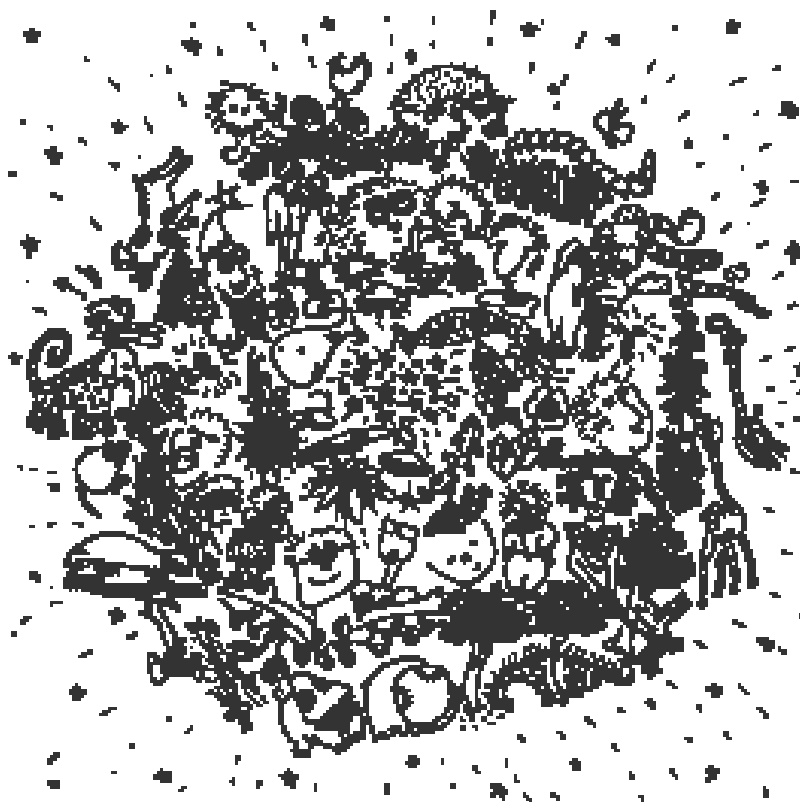
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Call the center at (508) 696-5929 with questions. DVDs will be available in the coming months.

and the hard work and dedication of many volunteers, the event was very successful.

Summer in Virginia

The regular program in Virginia was greatly enriched by Shamar Rinpoche's visit this summer. He concentrated on Amitabha, giving several teachings on practice and theory and getting us started with an extraordinary empowerment ceremony. We were coached in correct ritual techniques for Amitabha and other practices by Lungrig Gyaltso, a monk who is an authority on rituals, and are conducting daily group practice. Erik Curren along with his former professor of philosophy, Dr. Harry Pemberton from nearby Washington and Lee University, have gone to India to help Rinpoche with several projects and to teach H. H. Karmapa and students at his college of higher Buddhist studies in Kalimpong. Amanda Hood has taken over from Eric leading the book study group in his absence.



A human being is **part of a whole**, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of **optical delusion** of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of **compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.**"

—Albert Einstein

- ◆ Calming our minds: Continued from page 3 focus on mind itself. At this point, you can also focus on the passing moments of mind.

Before starting this more advanced practice, you should first go through the concentration training of shamatha. Later, once your concentration is stable, then you can begin to meditate on mind itself.

What else is there to consider in shamatha? Most of you have heard your sitting position is important. You want to be comfortable, but alert; either on a cushion on the floor or in a chair. Also, look at your diet. Eating a lot of rich food can create drowsiness, making you feel sleepy during meditation. However, becoming too weak from not eating isn't good either. If your body is weak, then you won't have the energy to focus your attention and remain alert. **In meditation, as in all things, seek the middle way.**

Teaching given at the Washington, DC area center in spring, 2004. Thanks to Brian Worthy for transcription.

Drawing: C.J.G.

BODHI PATH Karma Kagyu Buddhist Centers

Shakyamuni Buddha taught the path of wisdom and compassion for all beings. This path leads to the understanding and realization of ultimate reality or enlightenment. His teachings have been preserved in an unbroken lineage through the Karma Kagyu, one of the major schools of Himalayan Buddhism. Bodhi Path Centers are founded and directed by ShaMar Rinpoche, a current Karma Kagyu lineage holder. Rinpoche and many other highly qualified teachers provide meditation and philosophy instruction, and guidance to learn and practice the great compassion of the mahayana.

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bodhipath.org

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