

## Recognizing the nature of the mind

We have been constantly searching for the mind. But if we try to do or correct something while concentrating, restlessness will disturb us and more and more thoughts will come. But we should try to see what the state of mind is, where it is and what it has to do with. Is it material or not? Material things have size, shape and color. Does the mind have these qualities?

We're trying to find the mind. However, success in this search for the mind depends on the ability and capacity of the practitioner. If we try to follow the teachings but think that the mind must be one way or the other, that thinking itself becomes an obstacle.

Searching for the mind is just looking; it does not mean thinking philosophically or speculating. If we find any of these, then we should discuss it with the Lama. But just reading what is said in the texts or hearing explanations and then thinking the mind is this or that is not enough, even if we utter the right answers.

Why? Because these explanations, no matter if right or wrong, are just thoughts made by the mind; they are not the mind itself. Indeed, the teachings say that the mind is like this or that, and we may think the right answer and verbally articulate it, but that answer is just something created by the mind.

Here, in Dzogchen, we do not think or create concepts; we are simply looking directly at our own immediate experience. If we discover this experience for ourselves, then we can compare it to what the texts say. Searching for the nature of mind is not simply thinking about the nature of mind.

We are looking for the truth what is really there. Thoughts are secondary; they are one step or more removed from our immediate experience. They are about the past, but our immediate experience is here and now in the present. What is our immediate experience? Not thinking about it; just to look how it is. What do we find?

Through these Rushan practices, we come to know experientially that everything of Samsara and Nirvana is created by the mind. But knowing this is not good enough. We see these thoughts arising, whether good or bad, but now we should look for the nature of the mind that is beyond thoughts.

There is no necessary to seek thoughts, because thoughts are always there; they arise incessantly. Now we are looking for the nature of mind that is beyond the

thoughts and beyond the mind. We must know through our direct, immediate experience what mind is, what the ceaseless arising of thought is, and what the nature of mind is.

If we do not recognize the introduction and nature of Dzogchen and cultivate only small virtues, it will bring us temporary happiness, but we will not realize the ultimate result. That's because we didn't go to the root of the matter. We'll just come back and wander around in Samsara again.

So the practitioner must understand the need to do the practice. According to the Dzogchen teachings, we must first recognize the nature of mind. Once we recognize these, there is no need to keep examining our nature of the mind to see if this is correct or not. Examining is the work of the mind, and any work of the mind interferes the abiding in the natural state.

The act of checking or testing immediately changes the whole situation, making it no longer to the natural state. Therefore, any thinking or examination is done after the session and not while we are in contemplation.

When we practice, there may be interference. We can use different methods to get rid of them and through this our meditation will become more stable. But we cannot check this meditation, whether it's a normal meditation (according to the Sutra system) or whether it's Dzogchen? Is it just a state of meditation generated by the mind, or is it real contemplation, a state beyond the mind?

We look back at the mind and at the same time at the observer and what has disappeared from the observed. But is this statement correct or not? Is there anything behind it? When the thought dissolves, we leave everything as it is until the next thought arises. Is there an empty space or gap between these two thoughts? Is it really empty? Is it clear? In the moment when the thoughts dissolve, is the space then bright and clear?

When our presence in that gap is very clear, even if there is no thought, then we are aware and alert. We don't sleep. At this moment we have the possibility of realizing the Natural State. But if we think that it must be so because the text says so, then that is just a thought generated by the mind.

It's not the immediate experience. Once we know what the natural state is, then we don't need to examine to decide whether we are in the natural state or not. If we do that, we have fallen out of the natural state.

So we should just observe thoughts without trying to change or transform them. We just leave everything as it is and the thoughts go away on their own. This is self-liberation. They have arisen themselves and they free themselves. But we should not think «empty» or «dissolved» because that is the thinking that is the operation of the mind.

The natural state is beyond the mind and when we start thinking we lose it. So just let everything as it is. This state that we discover is unimaginable and unspeakable. There is nothing to create here, nothing to develop or visualize.

It is completely complete and perfect just as it is. That's why we call it Dzogchen or the Great Perfection. There is nothing here that is added or taken away; nothing to be changed or corrected. It is absolutely perfect the way it is. Everything is already there. So let's just leave it as it is. There is no problem here; so we don't need to create any problems.

Shortly after a thought resolves, we may have an experience of no thoughts and of the emptiness that is unspeakable. After the session is over, we can examine and reflect on this experience; we can also discuss and examine whether our mind is like this or not. We have a memory of the experience so we are able to examine it.

But when we're in contemplation, in the natural state, we don't do any investigation or inspection, because that's the mind-work. Each of us likes to have our individual experiences of this. We look into our mind to the thought and then it dissolves. Did this happen or not? Do we find that gap between the thoughts?

If we recognize the natural state for a moment, then there is no particular description to be made of the state of stillness or movement of thought. There is only this present, whether it is still or moving makes no difference.

But this natural state of Rigpa is not the same as just relaxing and having an empty mind with no thoughts present for a little while, or like sleeping soundly without dreaming, or like unconsciousness in general. This is because there is a bright clarity here in the Natural State. We are aware and we are alert, but we don't think. It's nothing out of the ordinary and it's normal, but normally we're not aware that we're conscious.

It is also normal for thoughts to arise and we should recognize this process as well as the gaps between the thoughts. And in those gaps we find an awareness or presence. This is Rigpa and it gives us the opportunity to see the nature of the mind directly and nakedly, without the interference of the mind and thoughts.

But we don't normally recognize this, just as we don't recognize the sun's presence in the sky when it is completely filled with clouds. Even though we don't see the face of the sun, the sun is there all the time. If it wasn't there, we wouldn't have light. So we shouldn't reflect about anything, just stay in that state of presence as long as we can. This is the actual meditation.

If the next thought arises, we don't try to do anything or change anything. We just let it arise and leave it as it is. But we are very aware. It's like a mirror that reflects whatever it is when it's in front of it. The mirror doesn't have to do anything; it is only to reflect its inherent quality and this makes it effortless, natural and spontaneous.

And if we don't disturb the mind through the means, the thoughts only liberate by themselves. We don't have to do anything. It's like the wind that blows the clouds from the sky; they dissolve into space without us having anything to do. We only see the thoughts in a way as we observe the clouds in the sky. We don't give a damn if they come or not. Thoughts clear away and we remain in a state of awareness. We have no expectations and no regrets.

At the beginning of the meditation practice, we wait for the thoughts to dissolve. This is an introduction by it; later we don't need to do this. Dzogchen means that we leave everything as it is. We don't need to wait, focus, or expect. We do none of these things, but we are aware and present worldwide. So there is nothing special here; we are just like the bright empty sky.

## **Meditation**

Normally, meditation means the mind is functioning, and there are stages in the process. We begin with «Shamatha» or the calm state of the mind and eventually this evolves into «Vipashyana» or the higher insight. Things are explained in this way in the Sutra System.

The mastery of «Shamatha» brings a comfortable feeling in the body, a feeling of bliss. There are also experiences of clarity and the absence of thoughts. These experiences appear naturally as the result of our meditation practice. When we meditate successfully for a long time, we realize four consecutive stages as the result of the meditation.

These are known as the Four «Dhyanas» and as a consequence of realizing them we have the possibility of rebirth in the «Brahmalokas», the higher mental planes, which are the dimensions of the Brahma Gods.

There are sixteen planes or mental planes called «Brahmalokas» and they belong to the «Rupadhatu» or the world of mental forms. Three of these levels, or «Brahmalokas», are associated with the first «Dhyana», the next three with the second «Dhyana», three more with the third «Dhyana» and the seven highest levels with the fourth «Dhyana», for a total of sixteen, although some traditions count seventeen.

The highest among all these planes is the «Brahmaloka», called «Akanishtha» or «Ogmin» ('*og-min*), and here the gods of pure light ('*od lha*) dwell. These Brahma Gods are superior to the Devas and the Hindu Gods who dwell on the astral planes of the «Kamadhatu» or Desiring World.

The craving world is so called because all beings with the experience of sense desires dwell in it, while the Brahmas live in a pure abstract spiritual existence, though having subtle light bodies.

Beyond the «Rupadhatu» is the «Arupadhatu» or the formless dimensions, which are made up of four «Samapattis» or planes of cosmic consciousness. There are also gods here, even higher than the Brahmas, who dwell in these dimensions, but they have transcended any form and are invisible.

But all these planes of existence belonging to the «Kamadhatu», the «Rupadhatu» and the «Arupadhatu» are still part of Samsara because they are caused by causes and are impermanent. The cause of the «Dhyanas» and the «Samapattis» is meditation.

The first «Dhyana» is characterized by examination, analysis, bliss, rapture and one-pointed concentration. These factors are progressively reduced as we ascend through the «Dhyanas» until only the one-pointed remains. Nevertheless, the mind is quite at work and the duality of subject and object remains.

The four «Samapattis» are far more abstract because there are no concrete objects of meditation, but only open, free space. With the first «Samapatti» our meditation becomes empty and wide like the infinite space. At the second «Samapatti» our consciousness becomes infinite.

But in both cases there is still duality and grasping, whether in an infinite empty space like the sky or in the consciousness itself. On the next two levels there is

nothing specifically to grasp or comprehend, as only a very subtle consciousness exists. It is concentrated as a single point and yet, at the same time, it is infinite.

But the consciousness is still there because we are alive and the body is not dead. It's concentration and understanding, so there's still duality here, and it's not the same as Rigpa or the natural state.

The «Dhyanas» and «Samapattis» are conditioned states that have brought us beyond causes. Therefore they are impermanent and belong to Samsara. But the natural state of Dzogchen is without grasping or duality. It's a state beyond the mind and beyond meditation because it's totally unconditioned.

But otherwise, in our development in meditation, we have these four stages of «Dhyana» or concentration, and these bring experiences of pleasurable feelings to the body and bliss to the mind.

We should have some experience in this area. We are trying to gain a realization of the nature of mind, but these «Dhyana States» are not the nature of mind. It's a mistake to think like that. Rigpa is not meditation. Meditation is the work done by the mind.

It is not simply a question of having an empty mind or no thoughts; such a state alone is not the natural state. Just being empty like the sky is not the natural state. Emptiness as such, or the concentration on emptiness, or being as empty as the sky, or nothing existing, or concentration on consciousness only; none of these «Samapattis» is the natural state. They are experiences generated by the mind; they are conditional and impermanent.

In these «Dhyanas» and «Samapattis» a very subtle consciousness still exists and we focus and comprehend this, but that is not the natural state after the Dzogchen. We must find for ourselves that natural state which is beyond the mind, and then remain in it for as long as possible. This is what is known as «Trekchö» and it's not meditation but beyond meditation. It's non-meditation.

When we practice Dzogchen, even if we don't understand everything, our state is clear and luminous. We are just aware. This non-meditation is the right meditation. And so we discover the nature of mind. Now in our practice we can allow thoughts to dissolve, but then we can find that our awareness or sense of presence is not clear.

We can find that we can stay in this state of an empty mind. This just looks like unconsciousness. This dull, empty state of mind is called «Lungmaten» (*lung rna*

*bstan*) and it's not proper meditation. Some practitioners are able to remain in this «Lungmaten Condition» for hours without distraction, but this state is just an experience; it is not the natural state or Rigpa.

Certainly it's a very deep state, but it is not true Samadhi, true Samadhi is without grasping and it's also luminous and clear. Ordinary «Shamatha» is just a calm state of mind; it's just an experience. In this dull state of «Lungmaten» we can't even move us, so it's like sleeping. It's a deep but dull meditation. Confusing this with Dzogchen is a mistake.

When we practice in this way, we can suddenly experience a very strong grasping like «mine» or «myself». This appears in a very inappropriate way. This event represents grasping for the inherent existence of a self as something independent.

If we allow ourselves to follow it and identify with it, we will mix it into everything and it will come to bother us. We develop a sense of self, the self-identity, and it will permeate all of our experiences. And if we continue to meditate and develop deep levels of concentration, then when we die we will find ourselves reborn with the long-lived gods in the «Brahmalokas» of the «Rupadhatu».

Nevertheless, this result is inconsistent even if it lasts for an inordinately long time. Being born again in heaven does not represent the liberation from Samsara.

Or, on the other hand, we can practice and have an experience of emptiness and no thought, and then we might conclude that ultimately nothing exists. All thoughts, all bliss, all Karma, and so on, just disappear. In pursuing this experience it's possible that we fall into a nihilistic view. That is not right.

Or we watch thoughts arise, then grab onto them very hard and think: «my country», «my family», or whatever. This will not bring us into actual practice of Dzogchen in the meditation. But at other times we can meditate and find ourselves in the pure Dzogchen view.

Thoughts can arise, but we don't want to be disturbed by them or grasp them in our minds, and so they go away on their own. They liberate themselves (*rang grol*). But even when they dissipate, our awareness or sense of presence, our feeling, remains very bright and clear. All senses function optimally and yet we do not move out of the natural state. This is the right Dzogchen practice and the right view.

Sometimes we feel like we don't want to just stay in the natural state, we want to practice the visualizations of the deities and mandalas and so on. So at this time it's better to do some kind of tantric practice.

In fact, some people are not at all satisfied with the Dzogchen view and want to do a visualization practice. Let them do it, by all means. But if we want to be a «Dzogchenpa», we should realize that there is nothing here that is created by the mind. When something is created by the mind, it's artificial and temporary; it is not the natural state.

If we haven't discovered the nature of mind and the inseparability of clarity and voidness, then all of these visualizations of deities and mandalas will only prove to be a disturbance and we won't be in the natural state.

### **Continue in view**

We have described some false meditations where we are actually not in the natural state. What is it that we can do? Just staying in a bright sense of presence continuously, without grasping for anything, brings us a feeling of unspeakable bliss.

We will continue to see all the mountains, lakes, trees, houses, people and so on that exist in the world, but we will not be distracted by anything we see or hear. We stay in a sense of presence (*rig-pa*) that is bright and clear, like a mirror reflecting all these same things in the world, but not affected by or changing what it reflects. We become like this mirror.

It will be the same whether we reflect something in the human world, as we do now, or the hell realms reflecting the «Pretaloka», the «Asuraloka», the «Devaloka» or whatever. All of them are just reflections and they make no changes or modifications to our natural state.

No matter what circumstances or worlds we find ourselves in, we are without expectation or changes. We are what we are, the natural state that is like a mirror. It is clear and empty and yet it reflects everything, all possible existences and all possible lifetimes.

But it never changes and it doesn't depend on anything else. It's just itself and nothing special. Even if the mind finds itself dull, sleepy, or restless, the natural state is in no way disturbed or altered by it. So there is nothing here that needs to be removed and nothing that needs to be cleaned in a special way.



This is, for example, like the sun in the sky. She appears natural; no special work or effort is required. She is like a lamp illuminating a dark room; she does that effortlessly. It is simply the nature of the sun or lamp to illuminate. There is nothing special to do to remove the darkness. This is the pure view of Dzogchen.

## How is the meditation practiced

In the previous part we have provided a direct introduction and tried to correct some misconceptions. Now that we have discovered and realized the true nature of Dzogchen, which is the natural state, how should we practice it? If we are beginners, when we try to do long sessions of practice in the beginning, we become restless at first and develop other problems, such as headaches, pain in the eyes, and so on. We get tired and screw up the meditation.

Therefore, instead of trying to start long sessions, we should practice in many short sessions with breaks in between. This will keep us in good shape and so we will become familiar with the practice. Later, as we become more familiar with her, we can gradually expand the sessions. In this way, the meditation becomes more of a habit. But we have to judge it by our feelings for ourselves because every practitioner is different.

**What is the time to practice?** It's best to start in the morning. It's also best to stop around lunchtime otherwise we will get tired. Then it will be very difficult to make progress in the meditation. Noon and midnight are not good for practice. If we remain in meditation at these times, sleepiness will tend to overcome us. It's also not a good time after drinking wine or after hard physical labor, for the same reason. If we try to meditate at those times, our feelings will be like a fever.

Before meditating, we should not eat too much, too rich or too heavy foods, especially onions and garlic, they make us too warm and heavy. Early morning, afternoon and evening are the best times to practice because our clarity is at its peak at these times.

So, in these times, we stick to practicing the contemplation. We should make and keep a strict schedule to make it to a habit. But sometimes we can change the time because if we remain too rigid it will create problems and we will not want to meditate.

**What do we do during the sessions?** Our normal position is to sit cross-legged, with our two hands in the gesture of balance, our neck arched and our gaze, not

too open and not too closed, directed down towards the nasal plane. Sometimes we should move or shake our body.

If we sit for too long without moving, we will feel very uncomfortable. Our eyes stare into emptiness. But when practicing the contemplation in the natural state, it's also possible for us to practice in other positions such as lying down or sometimes standing and moving slowly or even walking. One who is truly competent in contemplation can also be in the natural state while eating or speaking with others.

But the point is always that you don't get distracted. One who is competent can even walk into a crowd and still practice. Such a person can practice while in the four activities of sitting, standing, lying down and eating, and this will not disturb the natural state. This is a sign that our meditation has become stable.

**What is a suitable place for the practice?** The best is a lonely place that is pleasant and very quiet. A mountain shouldn't be too high and a valley shouldn't be too narrow. The water should be clean, and it will be good if a lot of flowers bloom nearby and a lot of herbs grow. It's a place with few distractions; no people, no tourists, no robbers, no television, no cars and no planes.

Here we settle into a comfortable seat in the shade and with all the necessary protection. The food we eat is nutritious and light, not too heavy. We can practice at any time in our hermitage, tent or cave. Once we are comfortable with the meditation we can change the area; we can go higher in the mountains or in the rocks, to the lake or to a place where water flows.

Basically, we choose pleasant places that do not bother us. But sometimes we can use a difficult and uncomfortable place. Wherever we meditate, we should look for the signs that show we are comfortable with the practice.

## Disorders in Meditation

When we meditate, there are several types of disturbances that can occur. For example, we can be in the meditation, but we lose the awareness and it seems as if we are asleep. This is a sign of energy loss. We should renew our strength and clarity, but not to counteract drowsiness to such an extent that we are then disturbed by the movement.

We need these three things: strength, clarity and calm. When we notice that we have lost the awareness and the things are not clear, what can we do? There are several methods we can use regarding the cause of the disturbance.

If we suffer from drowsiness, we go to a high place where the air is fresh, in an open room to practice, or open the window and let more light into the room if we are indoors. If this is not enough, let's go to a place where there is a strong wind. If we notice that we are still disturbed then we can wash our head and face, hands and feet. The cold water will refresh us. Changing the area of practice can also help.

We try to practice without a backrest or pillow. We get up, move and do some deeper breathings and yoga exercises.

Or we may find that we are disturbed by restlessness.

We can try to concentrate us, but the concentration is too weak and we find ourselves disturbed by thoughts. Or external sights and sounds can disturb us. Go to a quieter, secluded place, or try practicing in a relatively dark room. When our physical health is not good or our nutrition is bad, it can bring agitation.

In this case, we can have some nourishing meat broth and some chang (beer or wine) to make us feel warm, relaxed, and comfortable. But these are to be used as medicine. Nevertheless, we must judge these questions for ourselves.

Sometimes when we meditate, thoughts will come automatically. For example, thoughts to money, personal matters, or sex, and so on, come up and these can also upset and disturb us. But we should remember that all these thoughts, good and bad, from friends and foes, only expand a dream. We have no inherent existence and so there is no reason to grasp and follow them. Remember that everything is like an illusion. Do not support this thought; just let them go.

Also, when we meditate, we can have thoughts like «Is this the natural state or not?» and «Is that the pure Dzogchen view or not?» and «Is that clear or not?» and «Am I really meditating or is this just my delusion?» And other types of doubts can also arise in our mind.

All of these doubts represent the self-restraint we create and encourage. This is a sign that we don't know much about the Dzogchen view, so we should read and study the Dzogchen teachings more to overcome the lack. It is also good to discuss your doubts with the Lama if possible. These doubts, very subtle at first, can grow in us and cause great excitement.

We should examine them to see and decide whether our meditation is good or not. Continue meditating for some time and then examine it. But there is no control or testing here while we are in the natural state, otherwise we fall out of it.

Or we may have many subtle thoughts moving subliminally. Try to recognize these when they appear. These thoughts are like thieves and there is no specific antidote for them. Just let them free by themselves without clinging to them. If we do this, the disturbances will become less and less.

Sometimes our body spontaneously shakes or we feel like we don't have a head, our bodily channels shake, our mind feels light and spacey, or we have pain in our joints. At this time we do some self-massage. Maybe we hear loud sounds in our ears. In this case we eat slightly heavier food and massage ourselves with oil. But in any case, don't try to force yourself.

Sometimes we start the practice and we find that we are not satisfied with it and lose the interest in it. Our eyes hurt, we have headaches and we cough a lot. These are all signs that we are trying our concentration with too much effort. Just relax and look freely into the room. Don't hold the mind too tight. And always practice in many short sessions, none of them should be too long.

We can have a desire to do something with our hands, to sing, or to watch TV; this is a sign that we are not paying enough attention to the Dzogchen view. So we need to study this view more and reflect on the unique opportunity to have a precious human rebirth, the impermanence of life and so on.

Remember that everything in the world is a delusion and we cannot depend on it. Think of the hell realms, the Preta worlds, and so on, and the suffering that is experienced in all of them. These thoughts motivate us to devote ourselves to the practice of the Dharma. If we don't know these things, we don't need to study them.

### Signs of proper Meditation

Proper meditation means that we will grasp things a lot less and that our clarity will increase. There is no specific way of grasping clarity or emptiness here. We should just stay in a relaxed state with no grasping. But our awareness (*rig-pa*) is very present and bright, and we let it this way.

Thoughts arise spontaneously and free themselves spontaneously. And the thoughts become less and less, while our awareness is stable and clear. As we practice, there is no special feeling to explain. However, when this immediate sense of presence is very bright, we call it «Vipashyana». These are all signs that we are practicing the proper meditation. Nor is it possible to explain whether a particular sign is a sign that it's the right meditation.

If we meditate and our tiredness goes away, that is also a sign. If, while meditating, we suddenly think: «My master is so nice, I am practicing so well and I am satisfied», that is also a good sign. If we practice meditation during the day and then dream at night that we are meditating, that is also a good sign. If our appearance stays young, that's a good sign. If our thoughts stay calm, that's a good sign. Not having strong thoughts when our relatives come to visit is a good sign.

These are all signs that our meditation is good. If others insult or praise us and we don't care, that's a good sign too. Even if we receive teachings from the Buddha himself, we should not have any expectations. We are not disappointed if there are no results here. These are good signs.

We can see in our bodies, see omens, or practice telepathy; these forces come naturally. We can see the six realms of rebirth and see the sufferings of beings within them. At night it is no longer dark for us and we can see clearly. This is a sign. These are all good signs and there is nothing better than them.

We meditate and these results come spontaneously and effortlessly. We feel us comfortable and undisturbed. We always remain at the same level of even determination. We are not disturbed by happiness or sadness.

If we continue in a sense of comfort and happiness, it is a sign that our body's earth element has been brought under control. If we meditate and we feel as if we are sinking into the water, this is a sign that the water element is now directing our meditation.

Sometimes our meditation is clear and strong and we feel us warm; this is a sign that the fire element is now directing our meditation. Sometimes we feel us light and experience a fluid sensation; this is a sign that our air element is guiding our meditation. Sometimes our experience is very bright, the distractions of the senses do not bother us and we feel us clearer and emptier; this is a sign that the space element is now directing our meditation.

When these signs appear, we don't need to worry or speculate about them. There's no need to do anything against it. Just leave everything as it is. And little by little our normal illusions will lose their solidity and disappear.