

The Second Teaching

Mahamudra Practice

The subject we're talking about this evening is something called Mahamudra, so I should explain first of all what this means for those of you who may not know.

This is a Sanskrit word. Maha means great and mudra has several meanings. It can mean a gesture. For example those of you who know any Sanskrit will know that the gesture the Maitreya Buddha is making is called the dharmachakra mudra. Mudra means a gesture, but it also means a 'seal'. And the Tibetans translated it as chag gya. Chag means hand and again gya means a seal, but it can also mean a gesture. So in Tibetan they could play the same game the Sanskrit play, being ambiguous. But in English we don't have a word which means both a seal and gesture. For this reason, because we don't really have a good equivalent, mostly we just say Mahamudra.

This system was introduced primarily into Tibet during the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries when a whole renaissance was taking place in Tibet. Many Tibetan scholars and practitioners were going to India seeking masters and bringing the teachings back into Tibet and starting new lineages, new traditions. Of the many traditions which were started at that time, only a few

are still existent today. But one of them which traces its lineage back to the Indian masters Tilopa and Naropa is called the Kagyu.

Now the Kagyu is mostly known outside of Tibet because of Milarepa. This great Tibetan yogi of the 11th century extemporaneously sang many songs and these have been translated into English and, I think, Chinese. Many people know about the Kagyu lineage and about Mahamudra, through his songs and his teachings.

The lineage was brought from India in the 11th century. It was taught to someone called Marpa the translator, who was the direct master of Milarepa. And Marpa's teacher was called Naropa.

Naropa had been one of the chancellors at the great university of Nalanda in India. Then he had given up all his titles and honours and, in a way, his respectability as a monk and a professor at this great university. He went looking for a teacher who would convey to him the real essence of the practice.

The story goes that at one time Naropa was a very great pundit, a great scholar. He was sitting one evening reading his commentaries on the sutras and a shadow fell over the books. When he looked up he saw a very ugly old woman standing there. She said to him, "Do you understand the words you are reading?" And he said, "Yes, of course I understand the words." He was a professor, right? And she said, "Well, do

you understand the meaning?" And he thought, "She looked so pleased when I said I understood the words; naturally I'm a professor, you know, so of course I understand the meaning."

He said, "Yes, I understand the meaning." The old woman began to cry. Naropa said, "What's the problem?" and she replied, "When you said you understood the words, that's true. When you said you understood the meaning, that's not true." So he said, "Well then, who understands the meaning?" "My brother, Tilopa," she replied.

And Naropa had the humility to understand that she was right, that he had never experienced the meaning of the texts which he intellectually understood very well. So he gave everything up and went to Bengal seeking this Tilopa, who he eventually found living like a beggar by the side of the river and throwing live fish into a hot pan and eating them. Which you know, to a Brahmin, a very respectable college professor and Buddhist monk, must have been hard to take. Who throws live fish into a hot pan? And so that was the first challenge, to believe that this dirty old beggar eating fish by the river was actually going to be his guru.

How would you have come to terms with that? Because we discriminate, we have ideas about what a perfect guru should be like. We have our own ideas about what a teacher is, how they are going to conduct themselves, how they're going to be. And if they don't

come up to our pre-conceived ideas, then we will reject them, right? But if Naropa had rejected Tilopa at that point, there would be no Kagyu lineage today and I wouldn't be here giving you this talk on Mahamudra.

So what is Mahamudra? Basically it's a form of meditation which is simply learning how to observe the mind. As with all these meditations on the mind itself, they are so excessively easy to talk about that people think it cannot be this simple. We always imagine that a practice must be extremely complex and difficult—otherwise, how can it work? But in actual fact, the essential practice is very simple.

Tilopa said to Naropa, Naropa said to Marpa, Marpa said to Milarepa, Milarepa said to Gampopa, and Gampopa said to everybody, just observe the mind without distraction. Now, if you think about it, that's the one thing we very rarely do. How often during the day do we actually observe the mind?

We are so fascinated by the input from our senses, and our senses here include the sixth sense of the mind with its thoughts, memories, conceptions and emotions. We are so caught up in what we see, what we hear, what we taste, what we think, what we feel—but we never observe. Very rarely do we stand back and question the knower, because we're so fascinated by the known.

If we look at the mind, it automatically will split into two. There is the observed and then there is the observer.

Now normally we are so fascinated by the observed that we don't turn the spotlight round and look at who is observing. We're not even conscious of that.

In the moment that we are conscious of being conscious, it's as if there's a light turned on in our minds. But in that moment of being conscious of consciousness, again the problem is that we begin to think, "Oh right, now I'm aware, now I'm really aware, now this is really awareness." And we've lost it. Again we are thinking about being aware, so we are no longer actually aware. Because genuine awareness is non-conceptual, it's not thinking. It's that consciousness prior to thinking, do you understand?

The Essence of the Practice

You see, this is the essence of the practice. That's why I'm talking about it first. If you don't get this bit you won't get anything else. It's that level of consciousness which is always above and behind all of our thinking and feeling. Without it, we would not be conscious. It is consciousness itself.

Normally when we think, we are totally immersed in our thinking. When we have emotions, we are totally immersed in our emotions. This is 'me'. Right? When we have memories, when we have thoughts, we are totally immersed in our memories. These are 'my' memories, this is who I am, this is what happened to

me. This is what I think, this is how I feel we completely identify with that. Do you understand?

When we are angry, when we are excited, when we are depressed, when we are elated, we are completely submerged in and identified with those thoughts and feelings. This is why we suffer. We suffer because we are completely identified with our thoughts and feelings and we think this is me. This is who I am. And because we are completely submerged in our emotions and our thoughts and our ideas, because we believe in them so much, they become very solid, very opaque.

And so if they're sad thoughts, sad memories, sad feelings, then we think, "I am a sad person". If they are happy thoughts, happy memories, happy feelings then we think, "I am a happy person". So we go up and down like a bottle slapped around on the ocean. Sometimes we're up, and sometimes we're down. Because it's the nature of the mind that the thoughts are like waves and waves go up and then they crash back down again, and then another lot come up and another lot go down.

Because we have no control, because we are so completely swept away by our feelings and our thoughts and our memories and we're so completely immersed in them, therefore we suffer.

Now it's not a matter of having no thoughts, no feelings, no emotions, no memories. The thoughts, the feelings and the memories are not the problem. The prob-

lem is that we identify with them and we believe in them and so we are controlled by them.

There is a T-shirt from Malaysia showing big waves. On the surface of the waves there's a surfboard, and on the surfboard there's a figure sitting in meditation, smiling. The logo says, "Riding the waves of life, be mindful, be happy". Now that is actually a very profound little T-shirt. Because the point is not that there are no waves. That surfboard is not riding on a still lake. There can be waves.

It's the nature of the mind to produce thoughts and emotions. What we need is the surfboard so that we can ride on these waves and have a good time. I mean, if you are a skilled surfer, you don't want a calm lake. The bigger the waves the more fun, right? But only for a skilful surfer. An unskilful surfer will just go sploosh straight back into the water again, and that's mostly what we do. We cannot ride the waves of our emotions and our thoughts and therefore we are submerged again and again.

For this reason, we have to practice first on a calm lake. The surfboard is this quality of awareness, of knowing when we are standing back and observing the thoughts and the emotions as just thoughts and emotions instead of 'my' thoughts, 'my' emotions. Just as mental states which like the waves rise up, stay a little bit and go down. When we have that quality of detached observance which is non-judgmental and

non-conceptual, then whatever happens in the mind is just part of the display.

The Four Yogas

In the Mahamudra system, there are four levels which are called the four yogas. The first one is called 'one pointedness'. The second one is called 'non-elaboration' or 'simplicity'. The third one is called 'one taste' and the fourth one is called 'beyond meditation' or 'no meditation'. I will explain these.

The first one, 'one pointedness', is identical to what in other systems is called shamatha, or peaceful abiding. The second, which is called 'non-elaboration' or 'simplicity', corresponds to what is called vipasyana.

Traditionally it is considered that the mind is like a lake. Imagine a lake up in the mountains, surrounded by snow mountains all around. Now there are winds blowing across the lake, so the surface of the lake is very disturbed by many waves and ripples. Because the lake is disturbed by these outer winds, the mud from the bottom of the lake is churned up, so as we look into the lake, the reflection appearing in the lake is very distorted. We can't see very far into the lake because of all the mud and disturbance on the surface.

This is like our minds. Normally our minds are very churned up, very disturbed by the input coming

from the senses, by what we see, what we hear, what we smell, what we touch and taste, by the thoughts and emotions in our mind. This disturbs the mind the whole time. So the surface of the mind is very churned up with thoughts and chatter and emotions and memories. Chatter, chatter, chatter... Our commentaries to ourselves the whole time.

Now, because the surface of our minds is so busy and churned up, we cannot reflect accurately on what is happening around us. Right? We only have our own interpretation. Everybody has had this experience. If something happens and five different people tell you about that event separately, it's like they are describing five different things because each one sees it completely from their own subjective experience. They don't really see what is happening. They just see their own interpretation of what is happening. We live our whole life like this, each one convinced that we have the true story and everybody else completely has misinterpreted it. Right?

Because the surface of the mind is so churned up, when we try to look into the mind, we don't get very far. There is too much external noise going on.

So then the waves are calm, the winds die down, the surface of the lake becomes calm, it becomes like a mirror. Many of you must have seen those photos of mountain lakes surrounded by snow mountains and when you look at it, it is difficult to know what is the

surface of the lake and what is the actual mountains. Because the lake mirrors the external so accurately, it's hard to know which is the reflection and which is the actual mountain.

When the surface of the lake is calm, then all the mud settles down to the bottom and as we look into the lake, we can see the stones, the weeds at the bottom, the fishes—we can see whatever is in the lake very clearly right down to the bottom.

Likewise with the mind, when it is completely calm, then first of all it reflects very accurately what is actually going on around it, because it's no longer interpreting. It's just seeing things as they really are, without all our projections and distortions which we quite unconsciously project onto everything. So first of all, we accurately see things.

But, of course, in the lake, the mud is still there, the rubbish is still there, the weeds are still there. Because the lake is now clear, we can see them more clearly, but they are still there. This was the Buddha's great discovery.

When the Buddha started training, he did very profound meditation practices under various teachers and he attained extremely rare levels of mental refinement which his teachers said were liberation. But he realized, no, this is not liberation, this is still within the realm of birth and death, this is still samsara. However refined the consciousness becomes, it's still within conceptual consciousness, it has not gone to the uncondi-

tioned. And that's why he started again looking into the mind itself. It's not enough just to still the mind, we have to look into the mind and examine it.

The first step is to look at the mind. Now in order to be able to look into the mind, it helps for the mind to be a little quietened down. So meditations on the in-breath and the out-breath are a good way to get the mind a little more calm, a little more manageable. Then, when the mind is a little more stable, we turn the attention to the thoughts themselves. First of all we do this just in order to get the mind to quieten down a little bit. This is the first stage, this one-pointedness.

There are two main ways in the Mahamudra for getting the mind to quieten down. The first one is that every time a thought comes, you very quickly chop it off, you stop it and you don't follow it. You just go... boom! Then another thought comes.... Boom! And then another thought... boom! If one does that very determinedly, after a while the mind begins to get exhausted and so it calms down. But this will also leave the mind quite tense, because you have to be very vigilant. And so to counteract the mind becoming too stressed, Singaporeans shouldn't do this one too much, this stopping thing—you already have enough problems!

The other one is just to let the mind flow. And this is the one which nowadays is mainly taught. But sometimes lamas think that it's good to alternate the two,

because when letting the mind flow, sometimes you get a bit too drowsy and relaxed. To let the mind just flow, observe it, but don't get caught up.

You see, what happens normally when we look at the mind is that we stand back. It's said to be like a man sitting on the banks of a river watching the waters flow by. That's the attitude. Normally what happens is for a few minutes maybe we can do that, then suddenly we think up a really interesting thought without even intending it. Next thing we know we are completely caught up in some memory, or some idea which we've suddenly caught hold of or some anticipation for what we're going to do when this session is finished, and we're not even conscious of it. And then suddenly we realize we have been swept away by the river, we're not on the bank any more.

So they say the instruction is not to think of the past, not to anticipate the future and not to hold onto the present. Just to know. Just to know what is happening in the mind at this moment, without any judgement, without any analysis, without any manufacturing of thoughts—good thoughts, bad thoughts, happy thoughts, sad thoughts. They're just thoughts, do you see? It's just a mental state which lasts for a moment and then changes, it's not 'me', it's not 'mine'.

And so we just sit and observe the flow of the thinking, without becoming fascinated, without creating thoughts, without thinking, "Oh, that's a pretty

good thought, that's really clever!" Or "God, how can I think this, I'm really a horrible person!". Forget all that! If we start to judge our thoughts, just realize that the judgement itself is just another thought, and let it go.

The essence of a good meditator is to have a mind which is totally relaxed and at the same time totally alert. It's very important not to get into a state of feeling very calm, very blissful and totally fogged out. You know, you can stay in that state for a long time and sometimes people think it's a state of samadhi, a state of deep concentration. But it's what in Tibetan is called 'sinking' and it is just a manifestation of the sleepy mind.

To know when one is really on the right track, the mind should be extremely relaxed, extremely spacious but absolutely poised, absolutely awake and vivid, the awareness should be very clear, as if for the first time you have woken up. Then, in that state, you're OK. But if you find you're just very peaceful, very blissed out, everything sort of foggy, then, that's very wrong and you should wake yourself out of that as quickly as possible.

The other extreme is to find yourself trying to be perfect, trying to see every thought, trying to be an achiever and then you just get extremely tense. So, be relaxed but very clear.

In Lahoul, the Himalayan valley where I lived, sometimes in the summer the shepherd would come up with his sheep and wander by or settle out in the meadow below the cave. At one time perhaps the shep-

herd was sick or he had something else to do. Anyway, a boy came up with the sheep, instead of the usual shepherd. And this quite young boy had obviously never done this before and he was very nervous. He probably thought if he lost a single sheep, he'd be walloped. So he was very careful not to lose any sheep.

He was in the meadow below my cave and I was watching him. And all day long, he kept the sheep very close together, and drove them here, then he drove them there, then he drove them there, then he drove them here, the whole day. So by the end of the day, the sheep were extremely nervous, they hadn't had anything to eat and they were exhausted. And the poor shepherd was also exhausted, because he spent the whole day driving them around and making sure that they didn't escape. And then they went down the hill, all of them extremely tired out from a very wearying day.

The next day, the old shepherd came back. He put the sheep in the same meadow and then he climbed to a little hillock that overlooked it. He had a bottle of beer and he just lay in the sun with his beer. The sheep scattered around and grazed and he kept his eye on them. At the end of the day, he rounded them up and took them back.

And that is a perfect example of how to and how not to look at the mind. The first method is the fear of losing a single thought, got to be careful of what

I'm thinking, got to be perfect, got to do this right, got to be a really good meditator... and so you just end up exhausted. You see this with meditators sometimes. They get very uptight. Buddhahood or bust!

But the skilful meditator is like the skilful shepherd. He just observes. The shepherd didn't go to sleep; he didn't go away. He was looking at those sheep. But he left the sheep to do their own thing and after a while, the sheep grazed and then they laid down. What else are sheep to do?

It is the same thing with the thoughts. If we just quietly stand back and observe the thoughts, then after a while the thoughts get a bit embarrassed. Because thoughts are used to us being completely with them and believing in them and identifying with them, so they can elaborate themselves and create these whole fantasy worlds in which we live. But if you're standing back and just looking, and seeing a thought as just a thought, they stand exposed.

Silly thoughts reveal themselves as being very silly thoughts. When we look at repetitive thoughts that we have had many times, suddenly we think "Oh god, I've done this one before, this is so boring". They cease to be so entertaining any more. Then, like staring at somebody to expose them, they become shy and just sort of sit down. We don't have to do anything. We don't have to force the mind to be still. If we are really observing the mind quietly, the mind of itself will

begin to get slower and slower. We don't have to do anything.

It is said that at the beginning, the mind is like a turbulent waterfall, rushing endlessly, then it becomes like a river in full spate, just moving but very sedately and eventually it enters into the ocean of samadhi. So as we are looking at the mind, not being involved in it, just seeing the thoughts as thoughts, just looking, the thoughts of themselves eventually will begin to just naturally slow down.

Now, as our awareness becomes more keen, more precise, the thoughts will become less opaque, less solid, more transparent. Thoughts are like a chain. And if we are very conscious, the thoughts will at some point create a gap and because we are very aware, we can see between the gap. And between the gap is actually the same quality of awareness as that which is aware. So at that point, there is this non-dual awareness which will manifest.

I will give an example. All examples are material and should not be grasped at. They are approximations just to give you an idea; you mustn't push them too hard.

You've all been to the cinema. We sit there and we watch this movie taking place in front of us. We have the hero, the heroine, and the villain. There's the girl—he gets her, then he loses her, but then in the end

he gets her again and it's all right. If he doesn't get her then it's a tragedy and we will cry.

We are totally caught up in this movie. Nobody thinks to turn around and look at the projector. Now, if you think about it, what is actually happening is that there are these separate transparent frames which are moving so fast, with light from behind streaming through them and a blank screen in front, creating the illusion of movement and reality. And we are all very fascinated, right?

And this is like the mind, exactly. It's exactly like that. There are these frames of mind moments, of energy impulses in our minds which seem so real, but actually are transparent. Because the light of our unconditioned awareness streams through them, we project out. And as long as we are looking outwards at this projection in front of us, or even just as far as the thoughts and emotions which are part of this projection, we are caught up in the plot and so we suffer, because we believe in it.

But if instead of that, we allow the film to start running more and more slowly, then we begin to see that actually they are in fact just separate frames. Then we can see that the screen in front on which they are displayed is a reflection of the light which is streaming out from behind. So our attention then is not with the separate frames but with this light which is creating the reality which we all cling to.

Sometimes we have a momentary glimpse of what is called the nature of the mind or the Buddha nature. This is not really spatial at all, but for the sake of speaking, one could say that it is behind the coming and going of the thoughts, using the same illustration as the projector or the camera. When one has a momentary glimpse of that, then it's as if the whole facade falls apart, at least for a moment. It's as if for one moment, one wakes up and realizes one has been dreaming the whole time. It's just a cinema show. Now, we can still enjoy the cinema show. There's nothing wrong with enjoying. Even though you know it's just a movie you can still enjoy it, but you don't believe it's real any more. So therefore you can have a little weep or a little laugh, but its not a traumatic experience, because you know it's not real.

After that first glimpse of the nature of the mind, the gap between the thinking process, then one moves to the next level which is called 'non-elaboration' or 'simplicity'. That is vipasyana. In vipasyana, you are asking, "What is a thought?" You have the stream of the thought, you have the movement of the mind, and then you have times when the mind is completely still, with no thoughts.

Then you have this knower that knows the movement, that knows the stillness. Are these the same or are they different? Is the knower separate from the known or another aspect of the known? Is the mind

essentially different when it's moving from when it's silent?

What is a thought? We say, "I think". We are ruled by our thoughts, but what is a thought? Where does it come from? Where does it stay? Where does it go? What does it look like? What is an emotion? I'm angry, I'm depressed, I'm happy. But where is this depression, where is this sadness, where is this joy, what does it look like? What does it feel like? And who is happy, who is sad? We say "I, I, I..." —who is this "I"? So we start to question. We don't take anything for granted any more. We look into the mind itself with a big question mark. What is a thought, and where is the thinker, who is the thinker?

Meditation isn't just about sitting and feeling blissed out. Meditation is really trying to get to the very root of our being and experiencing it. Sometimes people have a very powerful experience of the nature of the mind, or their essential Buddha nature, which again to change the simile, could be likened to the sky.

The sky is vast and infinite in all directions. Space, where is space not? And thoughts and emotions are like the clouds in the sky, right? Sometimes they are white fluffy clouds, sometimes they are big black clouds. But whatever the clouds may be, they do not essentially change in any way the nature of the sky. However black the clouds, the sky is not sullied. However white and pretty the clouds, the sky is not beauti-

fied. The sky is always there, and in fact, where is the sky not? Because it's here too. We think of the sky as something up there, but where does it stop? It's here, right? Where is space not? It's inside us also, its everywhere.

And so when we think of the nature of the mind, sometimes we think of it as something very remote, which only very high Bodhisattvas and Buddhas can realize. We think it is something very high and special, but it's not like that. Every single moment if we are conscious we're there. It's so close we don't see it. Because we always think it's something fantastic and wonderful and out there somewhere. That we have to spend years and years practising in order to be able to realize it, to be able to recognize it.

But actually in one moment, we are always in that state. We don't recognize it. This is our problem. This is why we have to do all this purification, and all this gaining merit and all this sitting practice. It's just to bring us to the point we have never actually left. Because as long as you can hear or see or think, that is awareness. Who knows that you are thinking?

That awareness is always with us but we don't recognize it. We don't have to attain it, we just have to recognize it. So all this sitting, all this analysis is very important only because it brings us back to where we have actually never left, to who we are.

One taste means that when one is completely habitualized to being in this state of non-conceptual awareness, then one integrates it more and more into one's life. When one's happy, when one's sad, whatever circumstances of life one sees into their essential empty nature.

"One sees" that it's all just the play of the mind, and then whatever happens, one is inwardly undisturbed. Because one sees it's just a dream. In a dream if we recognize we are dreaming, then whether they are bad dreams or good dreams it doesn't matter, because we know it's just a dream. As long as we do not know we are dreaming, then we are caught up in that dream. We suffer terribly if it's a bad dream and we experience all the emotions. When we wake up, we realize that it was just a dream. As long as we are dreaming, then we are completely involved in that dream. So in the state of one taste one understands continually this is just a dream and therefore one can play within the events of one's life, but one isn't caught up with them.

Sometimes people have the idea that very realized beings will be completely blank and emotionless and sort of cold because they are so detached and that they see the inherent emptiness of everything, so therefore they don't react. But I think any of us who has met a genuinely realized being will see that, on the contrary, they're the most alive people we have ever met. Many great lamas and other teachers who have

done much practice are completely awake and therefore they are more vivid in their personalities, more clear, more ready to laugh or to cry, even more than ordinary beings. But the emotion isn't sticky.

Somebody had this vision of us all as beings covered with little barbs, little hooks. We are swirling around and so everything which we touch with our senses sticks to us. Because we are covered with little barbs, everything catches on to us. So what we need to do is to withdraw these barbs. Then everything we touch just slides off us, right? It's not that we don't need to touch, it's that when we touch, we don't stick. The problem is not the touching, the problem is the sticking and most of us are stuck, we are attached. Actually that's the meaning of 'attached' — to be stuck.

Our minds are extremely unfree. And so these kinds of meditations are a way to get us to that level of freedom, a freedom of the mind. We need to have that open, spacious mind. Our minds are not spacious now, they are totally crowded.

The fourth level is called 'non-meditation' because at that point, one no longer needs to make any kind of effort to be aware. The mind has so completely merged into this level of non-conceptual awareness that it just naturally flows. It's a natural inherent aspect of the mind. One no longer needs to practice.

The important levels for us to concentrate on are the first two, which is first to get the mind very quiet

and calm, and learn how to observe the thoughts. Then when the mind has moments of great lucidity and stillness, turn the attention onto the thoughts themselves and start to bring back thinking, in the sense of this probing, this investigation, this curiosity about the mind itself.

Traditionally, Mahamudra is only undertaken after people have completed several rounds of what are called the preliminary practices . In the Kagyu tradition, these preliminary practices are 100,000 long prostrations; 100,000 recitations of the 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva for purification; 100,000 offerings of the mandala of the universe in order to gain merit; and 100,000 prayers to the guru for the mind blessings. These are usually undertaken about five times, so you do half a million of each.

Why? Because it is considered that our minds are basically like a huge rubbish dump, and every day we're taking in more and more garbage. We're not clearing away very much, but we are piling in more and more. Trucks are coming along shoving in more and more garbage from television, books, conversations, movies. Right? There's a huge junk pile.

Now if we take a little seed of the pure teachings and plant it in that extremely hard earth, covered up with all this garbage, what hope does it have? However pure that seed may be, it has very little chance of actually germinating and growing. Even if it does manage

to germinate, it will come up very spindly and weak, because the ground is hard, it has never been worked and there's so much garbage. So first we have to work at clearing away the garbage and digging down in this very hard soil and then spreading fertilizer, watering it, making the ground ready.

Once the ground is nicely prepared, then if we plant our seeds and take care, make sure they have the sunshine of the guru's blessing, and water them with constant practice, they will grow up to be very strong, firm plants.

Now, it's very boring to cart away garbage and to work on the soil. It doesn't look like anything much is happening. But actually that initial work is extraordinarily important, because later we can get a great harvest. If we ignore that initial working, then no matter what profound practices we do or what great lamas we meet, it's very unlikely that we will actually gain good results.

So these preparatory practices are for purification and for gaining more and more positive karma. When we come to do the actual essential practice, there will be no obstacles and the realizations will come very quickly.

Therefore in our tradition, we spend several years doing the preparatory practices. In fact according to the commentaries, there is no set time or number to the amount of preparatory practices one does. One

should carry on doing them until one gets what are considered to be the signs and results of each practice.

For each particular practice there are certain dreams which one should have and those dreams should come not just once, but as recurrent dreams. There are certain indications—some kind of physical manifestation such as the body becoming very light and feeling very strong. It feels like you're flying. The mind becomes very clear, very open, very spacious.

However, in the meantime, it is a very salutary thing to spend some time doing your meditation practice. Many of you have different meditation practices, but it's always a good thing to at some time, even just for five or ten minutes, bring the mind to look and observe itself, as we explained in the beginning. To use the mind to look at the mind, keeping the mind very relaxed, but at the same time, very alert.

During the day we remember to just suddenly bring ourselves into this awareness and look at what the mind is doing at this moment. Not judging it, not changing it, not in any way fabricating, just knowing at this very moment what the mind is doing. And then we forget and we get caught up again. But as often as we can, it is good to remember to just stand back even for a few seconds and observe the mind.

If we do that, then gradually the mind begins slowly to get into the habit of being able to observe itself. Then those moments of remembering come more

and more rapidly, more and more often and begin to extend themselves until after a while, it becomes natural for the mind to observe itself. And as the mind really begins to observe itself, the thoughts naturally begin to become more slow and controlled. Those moments of seeing the gap in the thoughts will also become more and more frequent, more and more prolonged.

You see, when all these thought moments link up, then one is the state of constant awareness. One moment of awareness is one moment of nirvana, one moment of forgetfulness is one moment of samsara, as they say.

It's really very simple. The problem is, we don't do it.

Now we will sit for ten minutes. Please try to keep your back as straight as possible. Now just very quietly bring your attention first of all into this room. Know that you're sitting here, be in the body then bring your attention very quietly to the in-going and out-going of the breath. When the attention is fairly stabilized, very quietly bring your attention to the thoughts themselves, just see if you can see your thoughts. Don't try too hard, just relax and watch what is going on inside....

Don't try to stop it. Thoughts are not the problem; thoughts are the nature of the mind. Just like an ocean has waves, so the mind has thoughts, no problem. But don't chase after the thoughts, don't think of the

past, don't anticipate the future, don't hold on to the present. Just know what is happening in the mind, at this moment.

The essence of the practice is just to leave the mind in its natural state. That is very difficult for us to do. We are continually interfering by manufacturing thoughts, feelings, responses and judgements. We never can just be. We can never just allow the mind to be in its natural state, relaxed and present.

The essence of Mahamudra is to learn how to be simply present in the moment, without creating. When we can do that, then every moment arises fresh and vivid like the first moment. Normally because we see everything through the filter of our memories, judgements, biases, likes and dislikes, everything is actually second-hand and stale. This is often why we find life very boring and wearisome. We need new excitement, new experiences, something more exciting, more vivid.

But actually if we could just leave the mind quietly present in the moment, open and spacious, then every moment is like the first moment. Everything which happens has a clarity and newness. Then we could never be bored even for one moment.

So meditation and practice doesn't dull the mind. For the first time, in a way, the mind comes alive. Things become more vivid, more clear. It's like we've washed the filters. You know what it's like if you have a camera or binoculars which are always out of focus

and dirty. When you clean them and turn them until they are in focus, then everything suddenly becomes very sharp, very clear. It's like that.

Our minds are usually very out of focus, very dull. You see something beautiful which moves you, and you think, "Wow! That's wonderful!" You really appreciate it. And then the next time you see it, yeah, it's nice, and then the next time it's not so special. In the end you don't see it any more. You're looking for something new. We all do this.

But if we didn't have that heavy drag of all our past memories, past experiences and past judgements, then every time we saw something, it would be like the first time. So then the interest will be there. It's a very clear, sharp mind, not stale or dull.

That's why when you meet very great spiritual beings, they are almost like children. They find everything interesting, like a little child. Not childish, but child-like, there's a big difference. Most of us are very childish, but we are not child-like. But there is an innocence, an interest which children have in things. They get so excited over things that we are jaded about. "Yeah, we're all done this..." But there is a joy in very simple things that you meet in very realized beings, the same pleasure.

It's also a mind which is very fearless. Mostly our minds are full of fear. Everybody has their own individual demons which they are afraid of. Different

people have different demons. But when you have expunged all the demons from your mind, then you have a mind which is fearless. And because you are fearless, you can afford to be child-like, open, ingenuous, innocent. It's a very innocent mind.

It's very important to maintain a regular meditation practice for however short a time and then as much as possible integrate your practice into your daily life.

It's not enough just to sit. You also have to bring this quality of awareness, of attention, of knowing, as much as possible into your daily life. Nobody is really too busy to be aware, at least sometimes. While you are waiting for the computer program to load, while you are waiting for the traffic lights to change, when you are waiting for anything, while you're just sitting there, while you are walking, while you are talking, when you go to the bathroom, when you are drinking your tea or coffee.

There are infinite moments in a day where one can for two minutes or even a few seconds bring the mind right here and now, into the present, just knowing what is happening, knowing what the body is doing, knowing what the mind is doing, not judging it, not trying to change it, just knowing it. We can all do it.

Attachment And Love

In the tradition of the Buddhadharma, meditation is only one of the many qualities which is emphasized. It's a very important one because we have to understand our mind, and we can only understand our mind by looking at it.

But to be a well-balanced practitioner and reach our aim of being a totally integrated and realized being, we must develop many other essential qualities. Among these are generosity, tolerance, patience, ethics, loving kindness, compassion and so on. Now if we take something like ethics or loving kindness, it's obvious that one needs other people in order to practice. It's very easy living up in a retreat to be ethical, because there is no one to steal from, no one to lie to. It's no big deal to be patient. And to be generous, it is only necessary to throw out a few crumbs to the birds. Yes, very generous!

We need others. We need society in order to really exercise these essential qualities. So we start where we are, within the family. Again, it's very easy again to sit on our meditation cushion or to come here to a dharma centre. We sit here and we chant, "May all beings be well and happy, may they all be at ease, may they be endlessly filled with bliss." All those little sentient beings are out there on the horizon, over there somewhere. Somebody told me exactly this the other

day. She was sitting meditating on loving kindness and compassion. Then her kids came and knocked at the door and said “Mum we want this and this and this.” And she found herself screaming at her children, “Go away, I’m doing my loving kindness!!” Whoops!!

The point is that our children, our parents, our partner, our business colleagues, the people we meet, our neighbours—these are our practice. These are the ones with whom we have to genuinely develop loving kindness, compassion, patience, understanding. Sometimes I’ve lived with couples who have been Buddhist for maybe 20 or 30 years. To listen to the way that the husband and wife talk to each other, you would think they had never picked up a Buddhist book in their life. Where is all the teaching in the things they say to each other? You have to be very careful.

If we are really sincere about having the dharma in our heart the dharma starts right here, right now, with those beings—especially with those beings with whom we are for some reason karmically connected. Those are the people we have to work on. Those are the people with whom we really have to purify our hearts. Because if you cannot do it with them, then with whom else? This is very important. Otherwise we can have big fantasies about attaining enlightenment to save all beings when we cannot even be kind to our partner, or we cannot even develop a little understanding and sympathy for our children or our business colleagues.

Another area in which daily life is enormously helpful is in developing patience. The Buddha described patience as the highest austerity. He said that austerity is not about flagellating yourself or doing tremendous fasting, not sitting in the midst of fires in the way the Indians did. He said to forget these ideas of austerity, these tremendous tortures of the body. The real austerity is being patient with others.

Everybody encounters in their life—often in their daily life—people who seem to be born only to have the function of pushing all our buttons, who seem motivated to be difficult and to cause us problems. Instead of making us angry or wanting to retaliate, these people are actually our greatest spiritual friends. Because while it's very pleasant when everyone is being nice to us and all the situations in our life are running smoothly, we don't learn anything. It's easy to be loving towards people who are loving. That doesn't take any talent. The real test is to feel warm and have a sense of "May you be well and happy" towards someone who is really creating a lot of problems for us. It is important to understand this.

We think that we are in this life in order to try and arrange things to be as comfortable and pleasant as possible—if we can manage that, it's a good life. But cats and dogs are doing that. If somebody has a cat, you always know which is the most comfortable chair in the room, because that's the one the cat's going to

be in. Cats and dogs love making themselves comfortable. All they think about is having lots of sleep, being petted and eating. Do we want to end up in the realm of dogs and cats?

So if our life is motivated mostly by making ourselves nice and comfortable, evading anything which is difficult and trying to attract everything which is pleasant, then we are still caught in the animal realm. We are challenged when we are in situations and with people who are difficult. When events do not go the way we want them to go, or when we have something we treasure and we lose it—that's when we can see whether we really have dharma in our hearts or not.

Love

When the dharma talks about non-attachment and detachment, it doesn't mean a lack of love. Sometimes people don't understand how Buddhism can talk about compassion and love in one breath and non-attachment and all these qualities of renunciation in the other breath. But that's because we confuse love with clinging. We think that if we love somebody, the measure of our loving is that we want to hold on to them. But that's not love, that's just self-love, attachment. It's not genuinely loving the other person, wanting them to be well and happy—that's wanting them to make

us well and happy. This is very important, because we confuse it all the time.

When I was nineteen years old I told my mother, "I'm going to India" and she said, "Oh yes, when are you leaving?" She didn't say, "How can you leave me, your poor old mother, now you've got to the age when you're earning a living, how can you go and abandon me?" She just said, "Oh yes, when are you leaving?" It was not because she did not love me, it was because she did. And because she loved me more in a way than she loved herself, she wanted what was right for me, not what would make her happy. Do you understand? Her happiness came by making me happy.

That's love, and that is something which we all need very much to work on in our personal relationships. To hold people and possessions like this (hands outstretched to indicate holding something lightly in the palms) and not like this (fists clenched to indicate holding something very tightly). So that when we have them, we appreciate and rejoice in them, but if they go then we can let them go. Change and impermanence is the nature of everything.

You see, when we lose something we love, it's our attachment which is the problem, not the loss. That's what causes us grief. And that is why the Buddha taught that with attachment comes fear and grief. We have the fear of losing, and then we have the grief when we lose. Buddha never said that love causes grief.

Love is an opening of the heart. It's like the sun shining. The sun just naturally shines. It doesn't discriminate, shining on this person but not on that one. It just shines, because it's the nature of the sun to give warmth. Some people go inside and close the doors and windows; that's their problem. The sun is shining anyway. And it's that quality of heart which we have to develop. That quality of open, unconditional loving, no matter what. I'm going to love you if you do this but I'm not going to love you any more if you do that... parents do that, when their children don't obey.

Attachment to Objects

Genuine love and kindness is desperately needed in this world. It comes from appreciating the object, and rejoicing in the object, wanting the object to be happy and well, but holding it lightly, not tightly. And this goes for possessions too. You are in an extremely materialistic society in which the possession of more and bigger and better is held up as the total criteria for being happy. Then people get confused, because they come to the Buddhadharma and it teaches giving up, renunciation. People say, "Does that mean I have to give up my Mercedes or my beautiful condominium?" But the question is—do we possess the possessions, or do the possessions possess us?

The objects themselves are innocent. It's our grasping mind which is the problem. Remember the story I told earlier about the Indian King and his guru? When the Palace was burning down, the king was about to lose everything—all his gold, all his jewels. He didn't care, he was holding lightly. But the guru with just his little gourd begging bowl was holding tightly, so the guru suffered. Do you understand?

What we own is not the problem, it's our attitude towards our possessions. If we have something and we enjoy it, that's fine. If we lose it, then that's OK. But if we lose it and we are very attached to it in our heart, then that's not fine. It doesn't matter what the object is, because it's not the object which is the problem. The problem is our own inner grasping mind that keeps us bound to the wheel, and keeps us suffering. If our mind was open and could just let things flow naturally, there would be no pain. Do you understand? We need our everyday life to work on this, to really begin to see the greed of attachment in the mind and gradually begin to lessen and lessen it.

There's a famous story of a coconut, which is said to be used in India to catch monkeys. People take a coconut and make a little hole just big enough for a monkey to put its paw through. And inside the coconut, which is nailed to a tree, they have put something sweet. So the monkey comes along, sees the coconut, smells something nice inside, and he puts his

hand in. He catches hold of the sweet inside, so now he has a fist. But the hole is too small for the fist to get out. When the hunters come back, the monkey's caught. But of course, all the monkey has to do is let go. Nobody's holding the monkey except the monkey's grasping greedy mind. Nobody is holding us on the wheel, we are clinging to it ourselves. There are no chains on this wheel. We can jump off any time. But we cling. And clinging causes the pain.

Relationships

So we have to develop a very open loving attitude in our relationships with people. With everybody we meet, whether they are nice to us or not, we must have that initial feeling of "May you be well and happy". Just a good feeling. It doesn't mean we have to be stupid or that we can't see that some people are bad or are going to cheat us. To be non-judgemental doesn't mean that we are not discriminating. It means that we see the situation very clearly, we see clearly the kind of person before us, but we don't react with anger. We don't have to allow ourselves to be pushed around, we don't have to be doormats for others to wipe their feet on. We can be very clear about what this person's motivation is; we see it, and so can't be trapped, cheated or abused.

But we don't have to reply with the same kind of motivation. We don't have to answer anger with anger. We don't have to answer people who are mean by being mean back to them, right? We can be more skilful, we can bring intelligence into play. Buddhism is the path of being very intelligent. We use our understanding to respond intelligently and appropriately to situations as they arise.

Normally our problem is that we are so caught up in habitual responses that we are continually creating more and more negativity in our lives, more and more problems. We don't set out to do that—we set out to be happy and make others happy. Very few people wake up in the morning and think, "Oh, another day. I can spend it making myself and everybody around me as miserable as possible... let's go!" Most people want to be happy and don't want to cause too much trouble to others. But because we are so confused, however hard we try to be happy we seem to create more and more problems and negativity for ourselves, then spread it all around us. So we have to clear up our minds. It's not the environment which is the problem, it's our mind that's the problem.