



**Nalanda Institute**  
for CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCE

***Turning Fire to Light:***  
***Tapping and Mastering the Blissful Spirit of Heroic Altruism***

By  
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The Nalanda Institute Contemplative Guide Series:  
Volume Four

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fourth volume in the series of Nalanda Contemplative Guides is the fruit of a journey that dates back to my childhood. As the son of an existential psychiatrist and a Sicilian-born history teacher, I grew up facing the challenges of our fragmented culture in my own home. While my father was drawn away from his Catholic roots towards modern science and psychotherapy, my mother stayed true to her mix of old world spirituality and progressive Catholicism. As I watched him grow more stressed and burdened, and her grow more calm and serene, I felt I was witnessing first hand an experiment on the costs of cutting our ties with contemplative culture versus the benefits of preserving them. I vowed I'd only follow in my dad's footsteps if I could find a way to integrate contemplative insights and methods into modern medicine and psychotherapy.

As a religion and philosophy major at Amherst, I was fortunate enough to encounter the Tibetan Buddhist contemplative tradition, in the person and through the genius of Robert Thurman. More scientific than Western religions, but more contemplative than conventional psychotherapy, the psychology of Buddhism seemed to offer a middle way between the divergent paths I saw fragmenting my family and the world around me. Although resonant with the many contemplative cultures of our world—from the ancient traditions of Socrates, Ezekiel, and Confucius, to the medieval traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—Buddhist psychology was not only better documented and preserved but also more scientifically framed than its sister traditions.

After my college years delving into Indian and Tibetan philosophy, I embarked on a journey that would take me from NYU medical school and psychiatry training at Harvard, to studying in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in

India and completing a PhD. with Thurman in Buddhist Studies at Columbia. From meeting Bob as a freshman in 1973 until today, the journey took four decades, and only really came to fruition in the last fifteen years. Though I immersed myself throughout in working to reconcile and integrate two complementary traditions of healing and psychology, the final integration of all my learning and reflection only ripened when I had the chance to found the Center for Meditation and Healing at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and open a private practice in contemplative psychotherapy in Manhattan.

It wasn't something in me that changed, but rather the world that had changed around me. After decades of following my journey with little or no understanding from my professors and peers, little by little a new field began taking shape. Colleagues I'd crossed paths with or had only heard of—Mark Epstein and Dan Goleman, Sharon Salzberg and Chris Germer, Jon Kabat-Zinn and John Teasdale, Richie Davidson and Dan Siegel—began to create the new field that each of us had envisioned but hardly dreamed possible. After developing and testing versions of mindfulness-based stress-reduction and mindfulness-based psychotherapy informed by the comprehensive mind science of the Tibetan tradition, I founded the Nalanda Institute for Contemplative Science to make these accessible to inquiring lay students and professional caregivers alike.

The Institute is inspired by the Buddhist monastic University of Nalanda in North India, which flourished from the time of Nagarjuna (c. 150 CE) to its destruction in the mid-thirteenth century. The world's first residential university, there are many reasons why Nalanda has left a global legacy of relevance to us all. For our purposes two of these stand out. Nalanda specialized in developing, refining, and spreading the scientific traditions of Buddhist culture, offering a non-

violent, contemplative version of human science and civilization that had a lasting international impact on cultures throughout Asia. In addition, it specialized in developing a systematic approach to teaching contemplative living in the everyday world, tailored to lay students and mainstream communities rather than simply to cloistered monks and nuns.

At the heart of Nalanda Institute are the comprehensive curriculum of the gradual path, and the integrative method of combining group classes with individual counseling and mentoring. These two aspects of contemplative learning come together in Nalanda's core programs: the Four Year Program in Sustainable Happiness for lay students; and the two-year Certificate Program in Contemplative Psychotherapy for professionals. Each of these surveys four great horizons of the gradual path—the basic science of self-healing, the socially engaged practice of compassionate openness, the transformational arts of role-modeling imagery and narrative, and the mind/body techniques of smart vagal breathing and blissful flow states—and each complements that learning journey with counseling, mentoring, and supervision, following the Nalanda teaching tradition preserved to this day in Tibetan monastic colleges and universities.

As a definitive reference text for these complete programs in contemplative learning and practice, I published *Sustainable Happiness: The Mind Science of Well-Being, Altruism, Inspiration* in the Routledge Behavioral Science series in 2012. Given the extensive nature and hybrid format of the Nalanda curriculum, many have asked me for a modular series, written in the conversational style and tone of my teaching and psychotherapy practice. This book is part of a series that does just that, based on transcriptions of live classes taught within the Nalanda Four Year Program offered at Tibet House US in New York.

We call the courses on which this book is based “The Bliss of Inner Fire,” and “Communing with One and All,” although they focus on the positive psychology of pure passion and open embodiment in Buddhism. One reason for this is that this Buddhist science is not just representative of other meditative approaches to imagination, sublimation, and altruism, but also among the most rigorously framed and best-preserved systems of its kind. The other main reason why the Buddhist contemplative psychology of love and compassion in particular is well placed to serve as representative of its class is that it shares many basic principles and practices with modern psychotherapy and neuropsychology. As I mention in the introduction to *Sustainable Happiness*, Buddhist psychology shares three key assumptions with Freud's new science of psychoanalysis and art of psychotherapy. Both traditions begin with the assumption of a mental causality, in which the mind's intentional activity is recognized as causally effective, and as a primary determinant of human development. Second, both take a broadly evolutionary approach to the mind, in that they see the causal workings of our minds as embedded in a multi-life continuum and in the interplay of inheritance and development, nature and nurture. Third and lastly, given their causal view of mental life as a function of mental activity, and given their view of mental activity as shaped by heredity and childhood, they both adopt as a primary method of shifting the course of our inner lives an intimate social learning relationship which amounts to a kind of re-parenting.

Of course, there are major distinctions between these two far-flung traditions of psychology, but I invite those who may want to explore those differences further to read the introduction to *Sustainable Happiness*, available online. For now, I simply want to point to the family resemblances that make

Buddhist psychology a crucial intermediary in any dialogue between humanity's ancient contemplative traditions and modern psychology.

The second main factor that makes the Buddhist psychology of love and compassion a viable representative of humanity's many forms of spiritual psychology in our day and age is that it also anticipated some of the key insights and findings of contemporary neuroscience. Like modern neuropsychology, Buddhist psychology sees the individual mind or consciousness less as a unitary entity or eternal soul than as part of a multi-life continuum and social field of co-evolving, interdependent minds and lives. Likewise, it sees mind not as disembodied but as always causally interdependent and interactive with subtle physical elements, including energies called winds, airs or breaths, chemical elements called drops, and microscopic structural elements called channels and complexes. In light of Buddhist psychology, today's great discovery of neural plasticity—that nerve cells and their electrochemical networks constantly grow and change in response to attention and mental activity—is not news at all, but a basic assumption that explains how active development, mindful self-healing and deep transformation work. And the great discovery of the latest psychology of creative integration—that the human mind and brain evolved, develop, and thrive based on positive vision and passion—is not news either, but a basic assumption that explains why turning childhood self-images and narratives of fear, anger, and shame into heroic visions of a better self, world, and life journey forms the ground and fuel of creative human development and sociocultural transformation.

The introduction to psychology that follows combines several topics that are often taught separately in traditional curricula, to give an overview of the field. First, it reviews the basic foundations of Buddhist contemplative psychology as a path of assisted self-healing and mindful self-transformation, comparable in some

ways to modern psychotherapy. Then it focuses on Buddhist transformational psychology as a practice of consciously reconstructing self and life in which each student-practitioner learns to replicate the Buddha's journey of self-transformation, by inspiring an ideal, heroic vision of self and life with the inner fire of sublimated bliss energy and the clear light of non-dual intuitive wisdom. Though traditionally, this path involves tapping the central neural network of bliss energy and chemistry, then harnessing that bliss to the non-dual realization of intuitive wisdom, this course presents this rare art as cultivating a natural process of integration and embodiment, in line with the modern psychotherapeutic arts of Jungian sublimation, Reichian analysis, and transformational affect therapy.

This rare art—integrating the neurophenomenology and arts of embodied integration that date back to the first millennium of the common era—is traditionally attributed to the founders of the Nalanda tradition, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, and Chandrakirti, although Western scholars question this attribution. It was transmitted to Tibet by Nalanda masters Padmasambhava (732-804), Naropa (978-1026) and Atisha (982-1054), among others. According to tradition, this system was integrated into the step-by-step teachings of the gradual path (Tib. Lam-rim), because its empowering, multi-modal approach would make them more accessible to lay students, especially in non-Buddhist countries like Tibet. I believe this strategy—of integrating the essential insights and skills of the gradual path into a therapeutic system of intimate mentor bonding—is also well suited to lay students in the non-Buddhist West. We present this integrated path of “creative-poetic process” (Skt. Vajra-mantra-tantra-yana) in the formats most widely known and practiced in Tibetan medicine and psychology, the Seven Step Role-Modeling Practice (Saptangapuja) of the Healing Mentor (Bhaishajyaguru), Healing Mother (Arya Tara), Sheer Brilliance (Manjushri) and Wisdom Mother (Prajnaparamita).



As for the story behind *Turning Fire to Light*, I'd like to acknowledge the kindness of the many individuals whose encouragement and help have made this book and series possible. First, I'd like to thank Bob Thurman for his lifelong friendship and example, and for his support of our fruitful collaboration with Tibet House US. I also am deeply indebted to the exemplary wisdom and kindness of Bob's Tibetan mentors, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Ganden Tripa Kyabje Lingsang Rinpoche, Tshanshab Serkong Rinpoche, Kyabje Gelek Rinpoche, and Doctor Yeshe Donden. I am deeply grateful for frequent opportunities to dialogue with His Holiness on topics from Buddhist psychology to modern neuroscience, Tibetan medicine to quantum physics, as well as for his teachings on the Wheel of Time, the art of mentoring, the wisdom of emptiness, and the history of Nalanda. I am forever indebted to his senior tutor, the Venerable Ling Rinpoche, for embodying the profound healing wisdom of Nagarjuna. I feel enormous affection for Gelek Rinpoche, who embodies for me the positive mind science and art of Asanga and Shantideva. I'm also truly grateful to Yeshe Donden, for grounding me in the science of Buddhist medicine, Lama Anagarika Govinda, for guiding me through the labyrinth of Buddhist psychology, and to Masatoshi Nagatomi and Geshe Losang Jamspal, for illuminating the enlightened cognitive science of Buddhist epistemology and logic.

I am truly indebted to the past and present directors of our textbook project, Rich Kennedy and Susan Brandwyn, who have so ably and faithfully organized, trained, and managed our textbook team. And of course I'm so very grateful to the committed transcribers and editors on that team, Anonymous, Susan Brandwyn, Yuria Celidwen, Maria Perez, Laura Pintchik, John Wencz, and Emily Wolf, for their patient and fastidious work on this and subsequent manuscripts over the years. The Nalanda Contemplative Science series could not

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On the Western side of my path, I want to thank my psychotherapy mentors, including fellow Buddhist psychologist Dan Brown, and my guides through the spectrum of analytic and research schools, Leston Havens, Hal Boris, Al Margulies, Myron Sharaf, and Bessel Van der Kolk. I was most influenced by my own psychoanalyst, the iconoclastic Rolf Arvidson, an unconventional Freudian-Jungian-Reichian analyst who for me will always personify the art of talk therapy. This foundation in analytic insight therapy was expanded into the realm of deep transformational affect work thanks to my time with the gifted affect theorist and couples therapist, my dear friend Robert Rosenthal.

Of course, my work transplanting the practice of the Nalanda tradition would not have come to fruition without the inspired work of my colleagues at Nalanda Institute. I'm especially grateful for the vision, encouragement and energy of Nalanda's assistant director Miles Neale; and the patient rigor of our assistant director of research, Emily Wolf. I am also deeply indebted to board members Elazar Aslan, Tom Damrauer, Beth Dembitzer, Jennifer Dubrul, Randy Glatt, Vance Lavelle, Geri Loizzo, Peggy Neu, Mary Pearl, Elizabeth Rovere, Deborah and David Sonnenberg, and honorary board member Brain O'Kelly, for so generously sharing their many talents, and abundant encouragement and support. I also want to thank our my old and new friends on our faculty, Ingrid Kemperman and Erin Olivo, of New York's Dialectical Behavior Therapy

community, psychoanalyst Pilar Jennings of Union Theological Seminary, and senior yoga faculty Mary Reilly Nichols.

I am deeply grateful to my students and patients throughout the years, who have taught me how profoundly necessary it is for us to transplant the powerful healing insights and tools of the Nalanda tradition into our culture and age. I also want to thank the circle of congenial teachers and guides who inspire me to keep learning, growing and changing, including Sharon Salzberg, Chris Germer, Paul Fulton, Jeffery Rubin, Pilar Jennings, Koncha Pinos-Pey and Diana Fosha. And last but not least, this book would not have been possible without the pioneers who have helped create the new scientific disciplines on which our translation depends, including Dan Siegel, Richie Davidson, Stephen Porges, Bruce McEwan and Bessel van der Kolk.

I owe most of my happiness in this life to my wife, Gerardine Hearne Loizzo, my unwavering partner in all things, including the development of Nalanda Institute, and the lucky yoga of raising of our two adorable sons, Maitreya Dante and Ananda Rowan.

Of course, if despite the guidance and help of all my mentors and friends, there remain any errors or omissions, I take full responsibility for them. May my kind mentors, inseparable from Sheer Brilliance, protect me! And may any merit or intuition that comes of writing and offering *Turning Fire to Light* help open the eyes and melt the hearts of all beings through the furthest reaches of space and time.

March 1, 2017

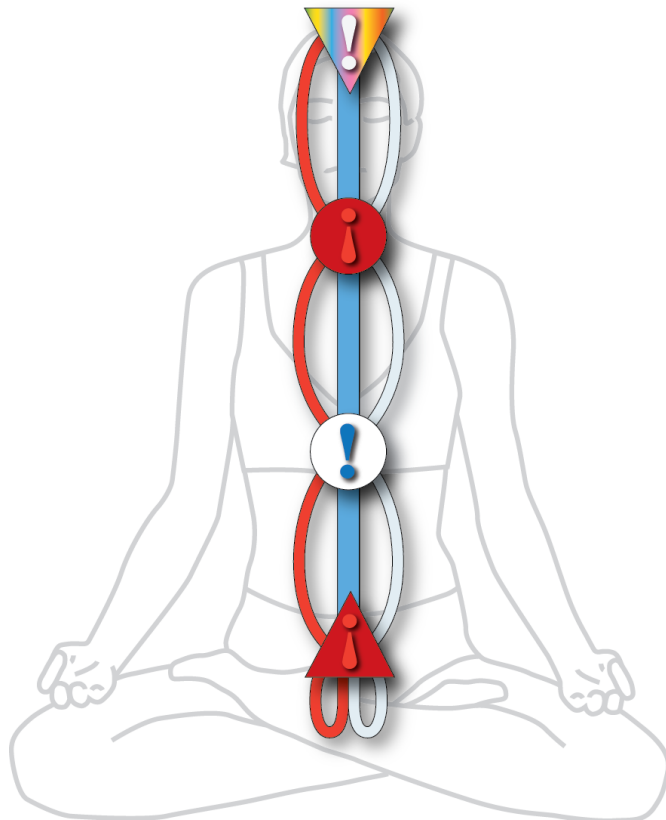
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PART ONE:

TAPPING AND HARNESSING  
THE BLISS OF INNER FIRE



## Chapter One: The Bliss of Inner Fire: Tapping and Harnessing Pure Inspiration

Whether you are new to the Nalanda Institute Contemplative Guide Series, or you've read all three prior volumes leading up to this one, welcome. This series is part of Nalanda Institute's Four Year Program in Sustainable Happiness, a communal journey through the timeless "Gradual Path" to enlightenment developed at Nalanda University in India and preserved in Tibet. The Contemplative Guides in fact are based on a series of eight transcribed classes offered by me at Tibet House in New York City, from 2010-2014. These classes are meant to serve as a complete introduction to contemplative life, from the perspective of the convergence of the Nalanda tradition with contemporary science, culture, and life. To reorient everybody and set the frame, I will say a few words about where this leg of our journey fits on the Gradual Path: how far we have come, and what lies ahead of us.

This is one of our core programs of continuing education for contemplative life. Why do we follow the tradition of Nalanda University in ancient India, rather than our own modern tradition? Nalanda was the first university on the planet, the first real residential university, and the source of all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as many of the schools of Chinese Buddhism and East Asian Buddhism, like Indonesian Buddhism. Nalanda was a very important cultural center in its time. You can call it the Harvard of ancient India, but it was not like our Harvard exactly, it was more spiritual, more like Mount Athos. Nalanda was a contemplative university about sustainable living, living in peace and spreading peace, with all the arts and sciences that are necessary to support a free, peaceful and creative life style. Our approach, as a contemporary institute, is to try to take on an enormous wealth of knowledge from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, contained in thousands and thousands of texts, and many hundreds of lineages of

teachers and practice, funneled through and saved by Tibetans. This knowledge has been brought out of Tibet mainly by His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama and other great teachers, who are trying to translate that knowledge into Western science, Western psychology, Western business practices, and Western education approaches, so that we can bring it into our daily lives. Nalanda Institute also offers a Certificate Program in Contemplative Psychotherapy for caregivers, coaches, and teachers; and alongside that we have corporate programs for business leaders and people in the workplace, and family programs for kids and parents.

This four-year program is for those of us who want to do a rerun of a liberal-arts education, to return to the basics of life and get guidance on how to proceed. We have covered a lot of territory; we have tried to break through the traditional Tibetan way, step by step, using their scientific approach to examining the basics of human life, one after another.

We began three years ago with the Foundations of Contemplative Life. In the first year of the program we started moving towards an understanding of the mind from a contemplative point of view. We covered the all-important practice of putting on your own oxygen mask and learning to stop the cycle of evolutionary violence, learning how to shift into positivity, first on your own, and then in the presence of others. You learn how to stop your stress and violence, how to disarm, be at peace, and be present. This is Buddhism's "individual vehicle," compassion at the individual level: take care of yourself, stop your own inner violence.

We spent the second year learning about the art of "Mind Training" -- what I like to call "social-emotional Kung-Fu" and Tibetan Buddhists call Lojong. This training teaches us how to maintain a positive relation in the world, with our own

self, with our own positivity, in the presence of others, including people who are freaking out and who freak us out. The second year is actually about revving up the skills and knowledge we learned in the first year, and use them as you connect with people. You connect, not in a competitive way or in any way that gets us riled, but in a way that is wholesome and resilient. This is Buddhism's "social vehicle," or compassion practice at the social level. Here you start being an agent for change in others, by bringing that new non-violent state into your interactions with them.

Last year, the third in our program, we went through "the Hero's Journey." That is the beginning of what is called the "Tantric vehicle," the vehicle of esoteric transformative practices, which is what I call the process vehicle of meditation. We talked about the use of imagination and how our imagination is either working for us or against us: for us by creating a virtual reality, a flight simulator with the right kind of people, the right kind of models, where we can practice becoming how we'd like to be and in the kind of world we want to live; or against us, as we hold on to our worst nightmares and traumas, using a filter that makes everything look a lot worse, and making us more reactive. We worked a lot on how to use the imagination to reshape our self image, and to revise our narrative, our story of who we are and where we are going.

The third year was really about how you change your perception about yourself and your world, and to see yourself as somebody who can rapidly transform your own self and the world -- that is where the Hero comes in. We all have this big Hero in us, we all have this amazing capacity, we have this amazing nervous system. You might think of yourself, "Oh here I am the same old Joe, same old whatever ..." But the reality is that, as ordinary as we may feel, we all have extraordinary capacities. The thing that we are trying to get at and out of our



head, to dissolve, is our clinging to our sense of ordinariness. That sense makes us feel that we can't live this sort of effective, caring, engaged, helpful life that we want to live: " I'm too neurotic for that; I am too traumatized; I am too small ..."

Part of the challenge as we start to practice visualization is to reboot. You crash the whole system down into the void, as they say, into the primal creativeness, openness, awareness, in this moment. And then you take full responsibility for whatever you are doing out of what's there, whatever you build out of that. You try to build a dream self in a dream world that you'd like to live in, instead of feeling forever trapped, in your therapist's office, saying "why am I this neurotic person, why did my parents made me into this neurotic person?" This time you remake yourself, you re-parent yourself with the help from the universe. That is a spot where the mentor comes in and that is why the mentor bond is so important in this practice. And the image of Tara, the perfect parent, is the image we need to unlock, we need to unlock this very natural capacity to transform ourselves.

This book covers an exciting phase of our journey, one that teachers and students don't get a chance to talk about very often. In the fourth year of the Program in Sustainable Happiness we go over some very esoteric practices in the Tibetan tradition. There is nothing quite like them in the other Buddhist traditions; but there is something similar in the Indic traditions, in Kundalini yoga, in Kashmir Shaivism, and a number of different Kriya yoga traditions. All of these practices are about some kind of energy work and deep breathing. Control of breath and of energy are very much taught. But that is not so common in the West -- although that is changing. For me teaching this material is great fun, and I consider it a great opportunity and a blessing to be able to share it with you.

If you want to follow this discussion more closely, you can read chapter 10 of my book, Sustainable Happiness. There are other books that offer “downhill reading,” for something a little easier. For a beautiful introduction to this kind of practice, I recommend Lama Yeshe’s Bliss of Inner Fire. He writes about it in the most accessible and inspiring way. It really is an exceptional book, on something that is not so easy to get at, even to get the idea of this practice. It is a kind of exotic idea. I will try to follow Lama Yeshe's lead, I will try to encourage you to not be afraid of your inner fire, and to explore it, do some experiments that allow you to find it, know that it is there, have a little taste for it. This inner fire is a real part of your constitution, and you can tap into it, and work with it, slowly, over time.

In the spirit of that inner fire, I often open practice sessions on this art with role-modeling meditations like White Tara. I like to start with White Tara because she is the mother, she is safe; and so it is good to have her help to get to know, to become familiar with our inner fire. We use her as the form in which we practice the basic vase breathing exercise. This breathing is a very common way for people to get a taste of this practice.

I want to say a few words about this practice, the “unexcelled yoga tantra,” or Anuttarayoga Tantra. What is tantra? Tantra literally means “loom” in Sanskrit. Think of it as something like a fabric, fiber that stretches, and it also weaves. The idea here is that our bodies are like a loom, the structure of the loom itself; and our minds are like the fabric. And we can weave, weave our new minds, weave through language and imagery, and also through karmic experience. When Rick Hanson came to visit us he talked about this in very practical terms: Where is our mind in this moment? Are we focusing on something positive? The more we practice the more we can choose to park our awareness in the positive. That is where the plasticity of our nervous system is going to put us in the future with this

practice, because “neurons that fire together wire together.” What we focus on is what we become; so if we are focusing on our positive potential we grow in that direction.

We move that process of who we are with the way that we weave, and the loom that biology gave us, the genome, which is the basic hardware, or wetware, of the nervous system. And so we weave the personalities and the realities that we live and become. We're just not aware that we are doing this. In childhood we do it in a panic, automatically, just as we have for eons, from the Buddhist point of view, in many previous lifetimes, out of fear, thirst and reaction. We make a reality very quickly, we make a little home, a little nest, we cling to it, we cling to something and we run from something else, and then, there we are ...! But here we are trying to stop our struggle for survival, and re-weave something that we really can live in, we weave in sustainable living. We don't need to keep running, we can start all over again, start by creating our own reality from a place of peace, a place of connectedness, a place of possibility and inspiration.

Tantra is that art which takes the normal process of weaving a personality and weaving a life through a nervous system, through a genome. Tantra is also a science with a technology. And it offers a technology. It says to us, “If you want to recreate yourself here's how to do it.” So, if you don't want to be in therapy the rest of your life, or if you want to take action instead of reprocessing, here's the technology, the ultimate technology.

There are four levels of tantric technology in the Gelugpa tradition; it's more or less the same in other traditions. These are increasing levels of creative courage and confidence. It is like the evolution of a relationship between a master and an apprentice. First the apprentice sits and observes the master do things, and he gets a little bit awed by the master. Then the apprentice may try

some things. Then, the apprentice may feel like, "I am the next master" and then "I am the master, actually, I am just humoring this guy ..." Finally, the apprentice reaches a level of parity, she can take in the inner Buddha nature, there is the realization that "I have the same equipment that the Buddha had ... Maybe I didn't have the same childhood; maybe in some respects my childhood was easier than the Buddha's, because the possibilities are much greater now; there were many Buddhas before us, so we have more models ..."

We start at the level where we can imagine that we have that mastery already, we have our mentor's mastery, we have that potential for agency, for really making a big difference. That is where the unexcelled yoga tantras are. They come in some variety, and they are the ultimate equipment, the Cadillac or the Rolls Royce, whatever your favorite equipment is, that's what they are.

The system and the road map for this technology were created by Nagarjuna, and here I mean the tantric Nagarjuna. He was a wild guy, with snakes coming out of his head, that were his buddies, they protected him. He was a healer and a very creative person. It is not clear if there was one Nagarjuna who lived nine hundred years, or a second Nagarjuna who came afterwards, so you can take your pick. Nagarjuna not only formulated the love and compassion, and the wisdom tradition of Buddhism; he also is believed to have formulated the unexcelled yoga tantra, which was like laying down the road map to reproduce this very special, visionary, far-out kind of enlightenment.

We do not need to be concerned with all the details of that road map. At this point what you need to know is some basics. There are two stages, the "creation stage" and the "perfection stage." In the creation stage we use our imagination to transform ourselves; we do it virtually, we transform ourselves and our reality, in a way that we want to, in a way that we choose to. We visualize

what we want to do and we see it happen, we see the change, we see ourselves as we want to be. And we do it with the awareness that it is a simulation, like a flight simulator. As we imagine being that person, what happens is that we are setting up a neural network that will actually make it possible for us to be that person. We try to feel like that person, to act like that person, to respond like that person, and so on. And so when we are practicing Tara we imagine ourselves as Tara. This seemingly absurd exercise -- imagining myself as this moon-colored young woman who is quite a bit younger than I am and a lot sweeter, much sweeter, than I am -- is good for my mental flexibility. And so I open to that part of my mind that is actually capable of that sweetness. I can be sweet, or so my wife tells me, she says that I can be sweet.

Why are we doing this practice? For mental flexibility, to overcome the tyranny of the ordinariness of thinking, "I am a human being, I have this background, at this historical time period, I can do this, I cannot do that, ..." Our ordinary thinking puts a limit on our possibilities. Yet our possibilities are infinite, really.

Reimagining ourselves and our world is called the extraordinary preliminary in this kind of practice. We have gone through the basic preliminaries already. In the first year it was to calm down, let go of the trauma, let go of the nightmare, breathe in some peace, feel the good. In the second year it was about sharing, sharing with others, using the practice in our connections with others, feeling that we can connect with others in a free, warm and caring way. That is possible, and you want to do more of it. The third year was about how to re-envision your own self. We are not stuck with ordinariness, we don't have to hold on to that ordinary identity that is saying, "No you don't."

Actually, the idea of ordinariness came up when the Buddha was sitting under the fig tree, right before reaching enlightenment. As he was facing his demons, Mara showed up, the Mara of ordinariness, the Mara that makes you small, that tells you that you are just like a kid, one of the children of God. That doesn't sound so bad, right? But in this tradition the child of God is seen as a demon. Why? Because, they say, "The child of God isn't God, and we don't need children." In other words, as Bob Thurman likes to say, "The Buddha doesn't need Buddhists, he needs more Buddhas."

In reality, unlike in the fairy tale, God and Buddha are not omnipotent. They may be omni-compassionate, they may care about all the tragedies we see on CNN, but they can't change them all. So what is needed to change all that? Help, we need help, we need teamwork, big time. Everybody needs to be a Buddha for the planet to work out for the better, everybody needs to be a Buddha.

So, Mara comes up and says to Buddha, "Who do you think you are, to claim that you are fully enlightened? You are not good enough for that, you don't deserve that, you are sinful, small, lowly ... " Buddha thinks about it for a minute, he has a moment of doubt and hesitation. Then he makes a simple gesture: he touches the earth with his right hand. And what that gesture is saying is that the earth is his witness, the earth has been there all along, watching him struggle over eons, struggle with his own self-protective instincts, slowly learning to transcend them, and becoming more and more aware, more and more peaceful, like a vegetarian reptile; more and more connected, like a mammal; more and more sociable, like a higher mammal; more and more expansive, creative and open ... The earth has witnessed how the Buddha has been transcending himself for millions of years.

It is the same for all of us, we all have this amazing capacity to grow and be enlightened. And in order to tap into some of that capacity, what we do is re-envision our self as having that capacity. That was the third year.

After the creation stage we go into the perfection stage. Now we are really deep into it. In the tantras, you take all the things that would normally be defilements and you transform them through the alchemy of this technology -- like excrement, one of the five nectars, when purified, when transformed by wisdom and bliss, is Vairochana, one of the five wisdom buddhas. If you are feeling blissful, if you feel bliss in your body, everything becomes good and happy. Have you noticed that? You don't have to make such a great effort to be nice to others, or to be more aware, when you are in a good and happy place; it just flows naturally.

The technology of the unexcelled yoga tantras gives us all the equipment and the training we need to learn how to be in the flow of bliss and openness, all the time, naturally. That flow becomes our new normal: now we don't have to work so hard at trying to see ourselves as empowered, confident, capable beings -- because we will be, we will be at our best, and our best is pretty awesome. This is a very optimistic vision of our capabilities. And what it does, what the technology does is it connects what is "over the hood" which is the imagery of the tantras with all its deities, fierce and peaceful, to what is "under the hood."

Under the hood, what do we have? We have a body with a nervous system that, at its core, supports our awareness. In the perfection stage we begin to take our intelligence and our creative imagination from the level of re-envisioning, re-imagining our social self as an altruist, to the level of re-engaging the actual, conditioned response systems, the neural systems, the habit patterns that make us who and what we are. That is where we engage our nervous system in the "yoga

way," meaning in this case in yoga classes, where some of us learned a bit about wheels and channels, chakras and nadis, and drops, and all of that.

I will quote from Tsong Khapa now, and will continue to rely on him through this section. I will read from page 399 in my book, Sustainable Happiness. This will give you a sense of this amazing, awesome stuff. By the way, I translated "unexcelled yoga tantra" as "optimal integral process" which is still not great, it's still jargon. Anyhow, what is it about?

"In general, all systems of optimal integral process perfection stage involve the preliminary process of controlling the vital energies flowing through the two side channels, (called) zesty and easy, and redirecting them to the central channel, (called) released. This is indispensable. There are numerous means for accomplishing this, based on the traditions of the great Indian adepts, who drew from the various great tantric systems... When these energies enter the central channel the four blisses are induced, and one cultivates meditation on the basis of these in such a way as to give rise to the innate wisdom of the great seal."

In other words, this is about an encounter, a new kind of encounter, an imaginative internal intra-psyche encounter, a neurosurgical encounter with our own nervous system. And we re-sculpt our nervous systems. We do this not just in the abstract; we actually map our brains, internally. And now we re-sculpt them, very specifically, following the road map and the set of procedures of the practice. The objective is to control something that is always present in our minds but elusive to our will, and that is the bliss system, what Western science calls the "internal reward system." This system reinforces our behavior, always, even when



we are freaked out, by releasing endorphins, dopamine and other such feel-good chemicals. The internal reward system starts in the brain stem, with the reticular activating system. It goes all the way back to a very primal level of awareness, and then, through neural projections up what's called the median forebrain bundle to the corpus striatum near the hypothalamus, right under the early mammal brain, forming the network which gets us addicted to things. As dopamine or any such chemical spreads through that part of the brain we get this wonderful feeling -- "wooosh!" -- and that is the reward.

Some of you have asked questions about the vagus nerve. I am not sure we want to go there at this time; it's quite technical. The vagus nerve starts in the brain stem; it is the "calm-me-down" nerve. It is also part of the equipment for shifting gears from fight-or-flight into growth, love, healing. We feel our good positive energy when the vagus nerve is dominating, that is the parasympathetic part of our autonomic nervous system, the part that stimulates love and growth, what Rick Hanson calls the "green zone" of our nervous system. There we experience the internal reward system as it is firing in the consummation mode, and we feel, "this is beautiful ... " It's like we are the happy reptile.

The internal reward system can motivate the most compulsive behavior and the most unpleasant need to grab, to hold on to something. When we are in the stress mode, we are in the fight-or-flight mode, the internal reward system is firing in seeking, scarcity mode: "I am really hungry, things are really bad here, I need something, quick, I need something now!" But it can also support the most blissful, releasing, disarming mode of consummation, as opposed to seeking.

I believe that you can look at the two side channels as the energy of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. That is where the two side channels are. There are a lot of good reasons to believe these systems are lateralized. The

parasympathetic system is more active on the left, the sympathetic is more active on the right. The female system, the solar system is on the left; and the male system, the lunar system, is on the right. We can calm down when we can balance those systems and learn to go deeper, all the way into the heart of our nervous system in a disarmed and sensitive way. Then we can tap into those deep roots of bliss that are our natural birthright. Actually, the story of the Buddha's birth as told in the traditional Pali scripture does not start with the individual, but with humanity, how humanity came to this universe and this particular planet. And it says that it all started with bliss, we all start out in bliss, floating in bliss, in pure heavenly realms of bliss. I suspect it is some positive womb memory. Initially this isn't so bad, we are getting all our needs met, kind of cozy in there, in the womb. Mommy is doing all the work and we are just cashing it in. For quite a while it is pretty pleasant. Then, after eight or nine months, it starts to get a little tight, and we start to feel a little trapped.

When we start to get greedy, or hungry, for more, out of a sense of either scarcity, or insecurity, we want to hold on to it, like we want to hold on to the bliss, eat it up, eat the bliss. When we want to eat the bliss it becomes coarser, and we start to have coarse physical bodies that actually need coarse food. Then we need to start to relate to earth and we have to grow food. When when we have to grow food we have to fight over plots of earth, we have to appoint a policeman to guard our land. When we appoint a policeman we are promoting a society where there is conflict and stress -- and here we are, in Samsara ...!

The point of that story is that we all start out as blissful potential, we all have that capacity, it's natural, and it's always there. But we can't control it. As we try to hold on to it we run into addictions. In a way it is like Pavlov's dogs, who were conditioned to recognize the sound of a bell as a signal that food was on its

way. The internal reward system gets hooked to some kind of intermittent reinforcement, something that feels good in the short term -- and sometimes only in the very short term -- and some of the time; but it just doesn't satisfy us very much in the longer term. Still, we get hooked on it, because we stay focused on that reward, as fleeting as it might be. The internal reward system is motivating us.

And, of course, there are also the flow states that some of us experience, in our best moments, when we are at our best, our most human, our most constructive. We feel, "Gee, isn't this wonderful? I could do this forever ...". We can experience something wonderful when we are taking care of someone, or we are creating something beautiful, or we are cleaning the house, or singing, whatever it is we are doing that become experiences of the flow state, also like a good sexual experience, or romantic experience, it all taps into the natural organic mind state that most closely resembles the blissful openness state that we are trying to perpetually live in, that state at the very basis of life. Life is sexual reproduction, if there wasn't sexual reproduction we wouldn't be here. And, without orgasm, there probably wouldn't be sexual reproduction.

What is orgasm? It is a state of mind that lets us know it's good to totally disarm, merge and co-create with other life; and so two people become three people. A love shared by two people is then shared by three people; it is like abundance, it's a fusion system. It is a system with some amazing potential, it produces new life.

But we don't live in the positive modes, we live in fear and we live in constant defensiveness; that is having the map of the yogic nervous system all knotted up.

The chakras in the yogic nervous system are usually depicted in beautiful ways, often as lotuses of various colors, maybe with triangles or syllables floating

on them. As you experience that, as you visualize the chakras, you think, "How beautiful, I love those chakras, I am going to go to chakra workshops and purge my chakras ..." And so you purge our chakras. That's good. But that is just the beginning.

From the technical point of view of the unexcelled yoga tantras, a chakra is the oscillation between the reactive extreme in the sympathetic, activating, system of fight-or-flight on the one hand, and, on the other, the parasympathetic extreme to put a brake on it, by shutting down, or running away, hide or freeze ... That oscillation can tie up our whole nervous system in knots, and so we cannot get to the bliss. That is the result of going from one extreme to the other, bouncing back and forth.

The metaphor -- and also the reality, though on another level -- of moving the energies from the side channels to the central channel is about balancing our nervous system with just the right amounts of activation on the one hand, and satisfaction on the other; that is balance between the channels that are at the right and left of the central channel, the so-called "zesty" and "easy" channels. As we reach that balance we get a momentary sense of goodness. The important point here is that we can actually go deeper, from a momentary sense of goodness into the goodness, into the source of the goodness, the chemistry of the goodness.

How many of you were here for Rick Hanson's session? He gives a great introduction to the tantras, in twenty-first century language. Rick Hanson is a neuropsychologist from California. He talked beautifully about Buddhism's individual psychology, the individual vehicle, Hinayana. He talked about this practice in terms of savoring the positive and taking it into your nervous system. He talked about how our brains operate like Velcro on our self-protective, negative experiences, and teflon on our positive ones. That means that we have

to take in the positive many more times than the negative in order to get the same level of registration and uptake, in order for our nervous system to build in the positive. Fill yourself with the positive, that is the essence of tantra, the teaching of tantra, so beautiful and simple -- that the method is bliss, that the quickest method to reach enlightenment is to find your bliss. "Follow your bliss!" as Joseph Campbell said. It sounds easy, to just follow. But first you have to find it. Now, the essence of these tantric systems is, basically, to provide reproducible methods of generating bliss states; and, with that bliss, you train your nervous system, slowly, to generate more bliss, more often, and to more easily stay in them for longer. The objective is to move your default state of mind to the bliss states, so that you will be a happy reptile and a productive mammal.

I want to read to you a couple more passages by Tsong Khapa, to point out the contrast between the creation stage and the perfection stage. I read from page 400 of Sustainable Happiness, where he quotes from the "Vajra Angel." Nobody really knows who wrote it. This passage compares the "core yoga," which is the yoga of blissful openness, in tantra it is the perfection stage, where the capacity to stay in the flow of blissful openness has been perfected; and the "artificial yoga," in tantra that is the creation stage, when we use our imagination with some artifices to help us calm down our minds, so that we move to the positive.

In order to realize the core yoga,  
One should practice  
The artificial meditation and recitation  
Once one realizes this is the core yoga,  
Since it is realized by going out

Beyond the artificial yoga,  
One should not practice any artifice  
For example, one takes a boat  
And goes across the water,  
And then leaves it, once beyond.  
Artifices are like that:  
Such rites as mandalas and so on,  
Which are made up with the artificial mind  
Since they clear up one's (habitual) outer actions  
Are recommended for beginners.

So, first you clear up the reactivity of suffering, you get over the notion that you are suffering, and you arrive in heaven. That is what you are imagining in this practice's meditations: "I am here! I am in heaven! I'm home now!"

'All those accomplishments are presented here (in the creation stage).  
But not in the knowledge reality of the Victor'

And from the Esoteric Accomplishments:

Do not salute deities made of wood, stone or clay;  
Worship the body itself!  
Venerate it as a mentor and bow down to it!  
Don't make shrines, etc. from earth and stone,  
Do not delight in books,  
And don't make hand gestures in mandalas and so on,  
Even in your dreams!

...

Eating and drinking, enjoying sexual union,  
Again and again fill the circle!  
By such teaching as this,  
You will achieve transcendence in this world;  
Here we have triumphed,  
Hitting the world of ignorance on its head!'

Why does Tsong Khapa talk about "hitting the world of ignorance on its head?" Because the world of ignorance is based, and depends, on suffering. So if you get rid of ignorance and you get rid of suffering. And how do you hit the world of ignorance on its head?

'Where energy and mind no longer move and sun and moon no longer function,  
In that place the mind will be relieved!  
Herein the arrow maker has taught all personal instructions.'

Tsong Khapa explains:

"Thus, by relying on the art of penetrating the vital points in the outer and inner body ...

This means that we need to find the points within our central channel, the points within our central nervous system where we can "feed back" and modulate, or shift, our nervous system; points that are like acupuncture points in your mind, that only you can find, with your mind.

Injecting the sun and moon wind-energies  
into the (central) released channel  
and dissolving them,  
burning the inner fire and melting the spirit of enlightenment,  
And filling the body and uniting bliss and void."

Remember, bliss and void are the female and male bliss energies. Once you have experienced bliss, you learn how to turn it into openness, intuitive openness, how to perfect it, galvanize it; it is not your bliss but you give it away, it's just pure, pure bliss.

"You eradicate ignorance and encompass all personal instructions."

These traditions have something really exceptional, not present in our Western traditions in any way or form. We have several esoteric, mystical traditions. For example, Judaism has the Kabbalah, and in it the Sephirot is something like the chakra system, with three columns, the left and right and middle columns, and circles. In the Hermetic tradition there is the caduceus, with the staff, the two snakes that twirl around it and the wings at the top. But these are all arcane systems. There are no expectations, at this point at least, that they can make links, or contributions to modern science and its understanding of the brain, of the nervous system. On the other hand, in the Indian yogic system, both the Hindu and the Buddhist versions are based on a scientific system. Isn't that remarkable! And through careful description of the parts and functions of their system, it is possible to establish correlations between the Indian and Western



sciences. We recognize what they are talking about as a map of our brains from the inside out. "Brain" in their case is not seen as an object, studied from the outside in; it is studied from the inside out, how it feels inside the nervous system, from inside a living being. When we learn to understand that map, we can locate our bliss network. Once we know where it is, we put all of our energy into it. With this technology we'll have a method to disarm ourselves, disarm our fears, all our fears, go back eons of evolution and say to our inner reptile, "You made it! It's safe, it's warm here, come on in, the water is fine, it is safe here ..." We can tell our nervous systems that it is safe using words or images. If we use chemistry and what we now call deep visceral affect, transformational affect that is embodied cognition, our body gets it, we get it, right away. That is one of the reasons why they say this path is very quick. We'll come back to this, when we get to vase breathing and inner fire.

How do you get a practical day-to-day understanding of this practice, apart from this high-tech notion of the nervous system? how do you have a more experiential understanding? In his Introduction to Tantra, Lama Yeshe talks about how Samsara has gotten a bad reputation. But Samsara is not so terrible; there is a lot of pleasure in Samsara. The problem is that we don't know how to handle it, we don't know how to make the most of that pleasure, we don't want to recognize when it's time to get out of it, before we get all caught-up in it. Tsong Khapa tells us,

"What would normally ensnare a normal person and get them all addicted, with practice, this approach, these techniques, can bring enlightenment."

He is saying, "Eat and drink, enjoy sexual union, again and again, fill the circle." It sounds like materialism, it sounds like hedonism, like another version of "Eat, drink and be merry." In a sense that's what it is. It recognizes that your body enjoys certain things, our senses enjoy certain things. So enjoy, don't be afraid of enjoying. Just don't let your mind get carried away by them or try to build them into something more than they are or can deliver. As Rick Hanson said, when you are savoring the goodness in life in this moment, feel the happiness of just being alive, the happiness of just a little comfort, savor it, but don't hold on to it. At the same time that you are savoring it, you are letting go of it. That's tantra.

The art of savoring pleasure is to enjoy without clinging to it, not to expect it to be the end-all and to do everything for us. This is more about enjoying pleasure as a connoisseur, so-to-speak. You learn how to savor the positive while really opening yourself, keeping yourself open to the next beautiful, positive thing. All that clinging feeling, the urge to cling, comes from the instinctive sense of scarcity, that this is the last pleasure ever, so fill up now. We are in seeking mode, hunger mode, which takes the pleasure out of the pleasure and brings up the greedy in us: we want more, even before enjoying what we have.

In a way you can look at this as a system of learning how to recover our capacity to enjoy life, to enjoy being alive, to enjoy our bodies and to enjoy being connected to others, to enjoying the things of beauty. That is where all this tantric art comes in -- and it is so cool ...

The channels, what are they? Are they actually real, physically real within our bodies, or are they more like mystical energy? They are part of what is referred to as the "subtle nervous system." The subtle nervous system has four elements, two that move and two that are stable. The two moving elements are our energies, our "winds" and "drops;" the two stable elements, or structural

elements, are the "channels" and "complexes," more widely known as "chakras." In a very general way this map has all the basic descriptive elements that we have in our own modern map of the nervous system. There are pathways, there are nuclei, there are energies and there is chemistry -- that is the basic map of our nervous system, and that is the basic equipment for this practice.

The central channel is drawn right where the spinal cord is, then it continues up to the brain, to the top of our heads, to where the mother of all the chakras is, represented by a hundred-thousand-petal lotus. If you cut a body open you are not going to see this. Still, the central channel is so close to the spinal cord it seems to me that the identification is clear. Anyhow, this anatomy isn't just described from the standpoint of tantric meditation. It is also part of the curriculum for medicine and psychiatry in this tradition. In the medical system these channels and networks are understood as support for the basic life systems, like breathing, excretion, cardio, circulation of fluids, sensations. There are channels that go to all the sense faculties; there are channels that go to all the action faculties. This system of channels is basically your nervous system.

Their map, like their meridian map, doesn't follow our coarse map; their map is based on the functionality of the nervous system in ways that are naturalistic. For them our inner bodies are shaped just like nature, reeds and drops and flowers and things like that, not like God but like nature, a living organic process with a certain structure. And we can change that structure, we can re-wire it. That is what they say, and that's what we are trying here.

A question is, is the main ambition of Buddhism to return to the absolute? It's an interesting question. In Buddhism, there is no absolute in the sense of something that is totally supernatural, not connected to causes and effects. In Buddhism everything, even Nirvana, even the Buddha's ultimate liberation

experience that we all supposedly strive for, while it is not on a map, and it is not a particular mental state, it is considered to have causes and conditions, it is part of the network of causality. Its ultimacy or absoluteness is not ontological; it doesn't have to do with its very fundamental nature. The nature of Nirvana is not really different from the nature of Samsara. It's a causal, conditional state, or process. Its absoluteness comes from its soteriology; that is, its healing power. Nirvana is the best way to be in the network of causes and conditions. It's healthy, it's practical, it's beautiful, and it's vital. Its ultimacy comes from practical, realistic benefits.

The other difference between what you might conventionally think of as mysticism, whether it be Hindu mysticism or Christian mysticism, is that it's true that many people within these traditions tap into these notions like Nirvana. Freud talked about the oceanic state, the experience of losing a sense of self and merging with the universe. Many traditions talk about God as a kind of ultimate repository or sea; and the human being is like a drop that slips into the sea. But the difference in Buddhism is that the sea isn't God, and it is not a person; the sea is just an accumulation of many drops of water. And we all have a little bit of sea in us; you put it all together and you get the sea. So there is no other real being, like for example God, that we are dissolving ourselves into. What is happening is that we are actually recognizing the part of our true nature that is not bounded by our normal sense of separateness; it isn't just this body. There is a part of us that can feel connected to everything and be aware of everything, even somebody on the other side of the planet, or what is happening on the moon. How is that possible? There is that part of us that is much bigger than our body -- and that is what many people refer to as the mind.

Buddhism is different from other traditions, in that it doesn't just value merger states, or states of immersion that mystics of other traditions talk about; it

also values the states of emergence. One of my Western mentors, my teacher Lama Govinda, used to say, if you want to talk about mysticism it's just as appropriate to say that the sea slips into the shining drop as it is to say that the drop slips into the shining sea." In other words, each one of us, as separate living beings with our own identity and our own history and our own potential, is an ocean, is the ultimate. There is no ultimate bigger than us or better than us, there is no god beyond us. When we tap into what is fundamental in us, what is truly beneficial to us and others, we're it! There is no reason to escape our little bodies to reach Nirvana. But to be in that state we have to get over our narrow conception of the body, and our frightened instinctive self-protective clinging to it. It makes us miserable, it keeps us from connecting with others, it keeps us from having good fire in our bodies. But it's not that we want to annihilate our bodies or that there is anything wrong with them. In Buddhism there is the concept of "Atman" but there is also the concept of "Anatman." In Buddhism the only self that you have to face is the one that you don't have. In fact we suffer because we have wrong and wacky views of who and what we are, views that we developed, perhaps, and partly, through unconscious conditioning through evolution, over time. We have a sense that "I am separate from you; you are there, I am here, we are clearly different, I don't know what is in you, you don't know what is in me." But the reality is that we are pretty similar. Under a CT scan we look quite similar; and what we want or what we don't want is not so different. At the end of the day what we want is a good meal, nice entertainment and fun conversation...

From the Buddhist point of view, we have a few selves. We have the self that we need to get rid of, and that is our false concept of self. That false self constricts us, as if it was a paper bag over our minds that keeps us suffering, on guard and disconnected from our true nature, that nature that is our blissful

nature, our connective nature. We have to dismantle that wacky self because it's a delusion, it's a false belief that makes us suffer. The other self we have, our Atman if you will, is our capacity to learn and grow, to free ourselves from the delusion of separateness and interconnect with others, the capacity to be aware of and relate to life responsibly. That is what we have to strengthen; and for that we can make a Buddha self. Buddhists say, "Don't make a smaller self", they say, "Each of us should become a Buddha self, we should all be our divine self, we should have Buddha pride and divine pride." As the great American poet Walt Whitman wrote in his poem called "Song of Myself:"

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I shall assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

We are awesome beings and we often don't get that sense. Why? It's not that it was true once but it's no longer true because we are maturing and aging; Or because we made some terrible mistake and now that capacity is gone. Or because I am too much like my father, or too much like my mother. It is because we get out of the state where we can really appreciate who we are, just like we get out of the state we can appreciate who other people are, or what beautiful music is, or beautiful art is. We are not always in that state where we can appreciate all the good things. Why? Because of our self-protective instincts, our worst-case scenario thinking instincts get the better of us, and they run our lives; otherwise we wouldn't have gotten here. That is our evolutionary hangover, that's the blessing and the curse, as the evolved beings that we are: we are run by our

self-protective instincts even though we no longer need them -- and they are now a curse.

It is my view, as a modern interpreter and practitioner, that Buddhism gives us a way to dismantle that evolutionary hangover and learn to be at the pinnacle of evolution, and triumph over ourselves, our craziness, our weakness. It is not a question of competitiveness, of triumphing over other people, or the market, or something like that. If we can do that, if we can dismantle that hangover, we don't need anything else, we've got it all.

Tantra used to be sort of a secret practice. A question that comes often is, are there any dangers of diving into tantra too soon, too quickly, before mastering the preliminaries we went through in the first couple of years? I would say that there is always risk in trying anything. In terms of actual research there is almost nothing harmful about meditation of any kind; it really is not a dangerous thing to do. But it is good to know what we should be careful with, or aware of. The biggest danger in my view is that we lose interest and we develop a bad taste for this. There is also some danger if we shoot too high or we push too far too fast; then we get disappointed because it didn't work the way we expected, or it is too much trouble, or we feel It's too weird, too foreign, too Buddhist, or too Tibetan.

That is part of the reason why this is referred to as a "gradual path." You go a little bit at a time; you take little bites at a time, and so you get used to it. You familiarize yourself, you get accustomed, you become acculturated. A big part of this is that you have to understand, you have to have realistic expectations, you do not take it like a kid in a candy shop, where you try every candy and then you get sick. When you eat too much candy you get sick, but it does not mean that the candy was poisonous. You do not want to try too hard or go too fast. It's important to have a common sense approach: "This is a good practice for me, but

I don't think I can do all that quite now; that is a little much for me ..." I like the wisdom of Gelek Rinpoche, one of my favorite teachers, who some of you have met in this program; he always says, "You think of what you would like to practice, and then you cut that in thirds, or fifths."

For the tantras themselves, it is considered that you need a safety manual, because they are what anthropologists call "transgressive." That means they employ the same kind of "I am going to do this" mentality that has given us Western civilization, globalization, the microchip and so on: some of the stuff that is just wonderful, and then also some that is completely insane.

We can get out of control if we dive into the tantras with the wrong kind of energy. Have you ever seen the movie "The Sorcerer's Apprentice?" There are two versions. The original was a Disney cartoon, back in the 1950s; and there was a remake recently, with Nicholas Cage and Jay Baruchel. The idea is that the sorcerer's apprentice takes the magic before understanding it, one time while the sorcerer is away, and the magic takes over, making a mess of things. It is like an episode of the old TV show "I love Lucy" where Lucy goes to work in an automated chocolate factory, very high-tech for that time. But she doesn't know how to work with it, really, and ends up making a big mess. In the same way, this technology can get a little bit ahead of yourself, and then there can be trouble.

There are two main concerns. One is using imagery; if you are practicing and you are imagining yourself to be god, or to be Manjushri, just remember that you are not god, not really; you are just imagining you are. The other is bliss, and the use of vase breathing, which has to be very, very gentle. We will talk more about that later.

People can get into trouble with this type of practice where a lot of energy is moved. It is like practitioners of kundalini yoga can have kundalini awakening



experiences that are not so pleasant, that are more like rude awakenings. You need to get to a stage of practice where you have the equipment and the knowledge to control the energies that such practices stir up. Without having an advanced mind or advanced nervous system that is capable of processing all that energy that the practice stirs up you can get into trouble. As I have said earlier, if you want to play with fire, first you have to learn to put it off.

That is why this system has an extraordinary preliminary, that is why we first have to develop the mind to hold bliss. Our nervous system has to be able to hold bliss without freaking out. Otherwise the bliss will loosen some trauma, which, without knowing how to manage it, can lead to some negative energies.

In order to develop a mind that can hold bliss you need this extraordinary preliminary. What it boils down to is you need a strong relationship with a teacher, and a community, so that you are learning and practicing under supervision. This is not something you can do alone, something you do in your closet; of something you learn like a recipe, out of a cookbook. You do it as part of a community, where there are procedures with safeguards, and people checking in, checking this and that. It's like going to the moon, in a way: you don't want to go to the moon without Houston, because if there is no Houston to guide you, you may end up like Sandra Bullock in the Oscar-winning film "Gravity." Did you see Gravity? It's a great movie.

You want to be careful because you are playing with major mind tools. So you make sure you know how to use them, and you practice under supervision, not alone off in the woods somewhere. And you go gradually and gently, especially when it comes to working with the energy; we work with the energy of the deep breathing, without violence, without neurosis, without stress, as much as possible.

That's why when I normally teach this practice I like to do it in the form of White Tara, because White Tara is sweet, nurturing, kind, and loving. She gets us in a mood of gentleness, she makes us want to be gentle with our body, to be good mothers to our own bodies. When we do the vase breathing as Tara it's likely to be sweet and gentle and not violent and rough. We have to be careful of that. Otherwise, if you push too hard or too fast there is too much energy going around all over the map, and not moving in the right channels.

One question is, how does the fundamental science and technology of Patanjali's yoga relate to this kind of Buddhist practice. The answer is that in some way they are very closely related, and in others it is not. There are ways to track the influence back and forth between these two. Some scholars believe that there is an interaction, or mutual influence, between these two, with Buddhism taking up the meditative science and technology from the traditional Vedic teachings. The Buddha was initiated to these teachings, so he had the right to use them. But he repackaged them, in a scientific form that Buddhists call the Abhidharma, which means the "ultimate teaching," or the super teaching, fully organized and systematic. Some people believe that the systematization of Abhidharma actually influenced Patanjali, who lived a couple of hundred years after the Buddha, in the writing of his "Yoga sutras."

Tibetans sometimes mention Tummo. Tummo and inner fire, our subject this term, are the same thing. Tummo in Sanskrit is kundalini, and they are the same thing. They can bring in the sense that we have inspiration, we have chemistry within us, the chemistry and the neuro-electricity, the neural energy signatures that produce a sense of exhilaration, inspiration, well-being, enthusiasm, bliss, pure passion, whatever you want to call it. Isn't that great? But it all seems so evanescent, so ephemeral. We have these short peak experiences

and then we go back to our normal sense of self as neurotic, tied up in knots and embattled. Buddhists say that it does not have to be that way. We can get rid of the knots, we can dissolve them and dismantle that negative sense of self, and relocate to those peak experiences as our new default sense of self. Modern neuroscience calls this "Neurointegration Therapy." If we slowly integrate from the higher awareness down, we integrate the different levels of our mind and nervous system. We line up and wake up all those primal subsystems within us that are prone to freak out, and we tell them, "No, you don't need to freak out, we don't need to freak out, everything is okay." That is how we rewire our self as an integrated person, we do it where our most primal nature is actually aligned.

If our inner reptile knew who we are, in reality, if it knew that we had already won the struggle for survival, that we are capable of understanding the universe we live in, and the possibilities of that universe, and the capabilities of the bodies that we live in, that little reptile would understand that there is no reason to be scared. So look at it this way: our task is to establish a network link between our higher awareness and our more primal system. That is essentially what stabilizes fundamental positivity.

I want to talk about vase breathing. I mentioned it a few times earlier. Why is vase breathing so relevant? We have talked a bit about the vagal nervous system. Vagal tone is where it's happening. And you can improve vagal tone with vase breathing. You will be hearing more about the vagus nerve a lot more, I promise you. In our evolution, as mammals we did one really smart thing when we crawled out of the slime and we developed a new branch of our vagal nervous system, what we call the "smart vagus." The smart vagus allows us to breathe at will. Before that, as reptiles, we could not breathe when we wanted to; breathing

in reptiles is on automatic cycles, whenever the feedbacks occur. But we humans can stop and breathe, at will.

You will notice when you do mindfulness practice that you can do it two ways; you can either choose to breathe actively, controlling your breath, or you can choose to watch while your body breathes. We can choose to breathe because of the new smart vagus, that's what allows us to control our breath. On the other hand, when we are breathing automatically it is the old vagus system that is operating. These two systems are not supported by the same nucleus. Essentially, the newer vagus is designed to subsume, or moderate, the old one. In other words, we humans learned, we got smart enough to know that we don't have to be so extreme with our responses. We shouldn't get to fight-or-flight mode so easily, we shouldn't freeze so easily. We should be more confident. The smart vagus is there so that we can stay sociable, so that we can self-soothe, so that we can keep our mammal selves, our mammal brains and our primate brains working, so that we don't get hijacked by our inner reptile brain, fearing and thinking "Oh, this person is trying to kill me ..."

There is also chemistry involved in this evolution. I want to mention two new chemicals that evolved in mammals, oxytocin and vasopressin, more popularly known as the "cuddle hormone" and the "rough-and-tumble" play hormone. Oxytocin modulates some activity of the parasympathetic system, which is the calm part of our nervous system; it makes us a little sweeter and more sociable, kinder, more loving and more caring, it wants to connect and cuddle with another life, it doesn't just want to calm down and be peaceful. On the other hand, vasopressin, which modulates the fight-or-flight nervous system, says, "Not so hard, and don't hurt anybody we are just playing it's just a game let's just have fun."

In a sense, you can think of the three channels as the old vagal nervous system, the old parasympathetic nervous system; and in the central channel, in a way, is the ability to control the whole nervous system with the smart vagus. The smart vagus is what opens the central channel and gives us the capacity, chemically and electrically, and neuro-electrically, to modulate the old primitive reactions, calm the mind and tap into those deeper states of what one researcher calls "immobilized love," or "immobilized bliss," where we are fearlessly able to stay in positivity.

Why is deep breathing so important? Deep breathing uses what we learned as amphibious mammals, to breathe more consciously. We have two reflexes in our abdominal system near our diaphragm, two feedback systems that we can use to control our nervous system. One is the "Valsalva reflex," which comes into play after we eat a little bit, or when we just breathe deeply, and the vagal afferents in our abdomen tell our brainstem, "Calm down, we are digesting, it's time to digest." If we hold our breath instead of breathing deeply, and we hold it the way an amphibious mammal does, after a certain period of time the "diving reflex" kicks in, and what it does shifts our whole neurochemistry. It draws blood from our muscles and sends blood to our heart and our brain, and so it lowers our metabolism. Some practitioners can lower their metabolism by as much as 50 or 60 percent. Imagine that, going through your day using only half the energy but with greater awareness. Your heart and your brain are exceptional; with them you can be at the level you would be if you were having an orgasm or a beautiful REM dream -- and that is very aware, very clear -- and very relaxed at the same time. That is the effect of the diving reflex. Essentially, what we are doing is controlling the internal reward system by controlling the diving reflex -- and that is why holding the breath is so important.

By learning how to slow the breath increasingly, and to hold it without freaking out, to hold it while relaxing and trusting, "I am not going to drown myself, I am going to take a breath soon, relax ..." you are disarming the self-protective panic systems, and you are increasing your capacity to regulate consciously, to elicit the deep vagal tone, you are deepening your vagal tone the more you do that, and in that way you are deepening your capacity to be in your "green zone," in a positive state, bliss, satisfying your nervous system. As you keep practicing doing that, you prepare yourself for the perfection stage of the tantras. Tsong Khapa says that inner fire yoga, or tummo practice, is the foundation of all the Perfection stage practices. So we need to build our control of our breath, that is the foundation. This is the way to start, so that is why we start here.

I will lead you through a brief breath holding, or vase breath exercise. This exercise has a few steps. First, breathe out, exhale completely; then take a full breath while relaxing the whole body, as if you were filling up a balloon; then nod your head, and swallow; you do that and you tone the pelvic floor by holding it in, as if you felt like going to the bathroom, but not hard, not scared, pleasantly toning our pelvic floor.

So we hold the air that comes in with the inhalation from above, by nodding the head and swallowing; and we tone from below, by holding in the pelvic floor, and then we savor the breath that is locked in, in our belly and chest; and then we let the air out gently before it gets uncomfortable. This breathing exercise goes very deeply; this is a very simple vase breath. We can come back to that.

## Chapter Two

### The Magic of Inner Fire: Gateway to Your Brain's Natural Bliss Network

We have our work cut out for us in this chapter. I'm going to read to you a little bit. But first we will begin with a general orientation of where we are and what we have been talking about. We are in the realm of the tantras, which is the realm of transformational meditation, of practices that transform mind, self and world, using creativity and intensive positive experiences, as we try to cultivate what nurtures the goodness within us, and what shifts our state of mind from defensive to proactive.

And so we have built a foundation for this kind of practice. Of course if you don't have a foundation you'll have to go back and build one. On some level, we have established the foundation to bring peace to our own rat race, to our inner struggle with stress and trauma. We bring peace by stopping, by pausing mindfully, so as to live in the present moment, to see that we're not there but here, and that we have openness in us, we can disarm, we can refocus. With that kind of inner peace we can start to engage with others. And so we work on the next foundation, which is to not only let go of our own negativity -- that is, do a bit of kung fu on our self-protective legacy of clinging to the negative through evolution and childhood -- but also to bring in the positive, bring it with the confidence that comes with living in the positive, and go into our interaction with others feeling safe and peaceful. We can make the space around us safe by learning how not to be triggered into our own negativity, how to engage in the world from an unconditional positive place. Visualization skills can help us build a safe space; and we work on it until it's set. We can create a protective field with a firewall made out of unconditional wisdom and compassion. Here wisdom is the

understanding that we create our own suffering, and if we can change what we're creating we can change our suffering; we do not have to fear so much, we can relax and be more open. And compassion is the realization that what happens within us also happens in others. If we can understand that, there is no reason to fear or react to what's happening in others. That is the essence of that firewall that we build out of wisdom and compassion.

Tibetan Buddhist tantra is a special practice, one with quick results, and the one I think is going to be very popular in the West. This practice is sort of a power tool, one that is especially needed in this information-overload age and world of 24/7 connectivity, to tap into our own inner vision, the inner film of who we are becoming, with our attention fully focused on it. We pay attention as we look into ourselves in terms of how we engage with our lives and how we engage with others. And we create a new reality.

We can create a new reality just by having the vision of a new reality and setting our mind in a positive ideal. The Tara archetype is an example, a model of an ideal way to be a person. We may think that we are too tired, or too neurotic, too battered or bruised, for this practice. Still, we all have an ideal self, an ego ideal. Here we are learning how to be a person in a truly positive, transparent way. Our model is Tara, and other such archetypes. They set a tone for us, they create a new parent -- a "parent imago" in psychoanalytic language -- to take into ourselves. They work together with our mentor, our live model, our model of how to be a positive presence, to be a living being who is closest to that energy, that awareness, that being that we want to emulate. The mentor doesn't have to totally be how we want to be, just closer than we are, just at the next step. We use visualization to mix the mentor with the archetype's image. In the mentor we have a real person we admire, and we're idealizing him, as an image. In that way,



we're setting up the neural network for us to become what we visualize and idealize, what we imagine. It's like reproducing the experience of childhood role modeling, but this time we choose the model, and we pay close attention to it.

So, we are going to become Tara. Part of the power of tantric practice is that we're not just taking in a new potential self image, like "I could be like Tara when I grow up." Now we're learning from her on many levels at once.

In this four-year program we've done many things. We started with the nonviolence and peace practice. Then, in the second year, we went through social engagement and mind training practices. Last year we learned about practices to shift ourselves into an image using a role model and a mental archetype as our vision of an ideal way of being; and then we learned how to set this ideal image in motion in a new film, a narrative that engages the natural cycles of creation, dissolution, and transition -- or birth, death and in between. We kind of repeat this every time we practice, in our introductory meditations: We first dissolve the world, which is like death; then we rebuild it, which is like development and transition; and then we become a whole person in a new way, which is like birth, or life.

Then, at the next level, you review the narrative. First, you are your self-image, your self-image is the mother of all defaults. We all think, "I know who I am." But have you looked in the mirror lately? When I look it's like I'm 30 years older than I am! I look in the mirror and I ask, "who is that white-haired guy?" How is that possible? It's possible because we don't really live in our bodies. We live in a mental image that is a simulation of our body. That mental image is like a governor -- and a clamp -- on our potential. It's just sitting there, saying "I know who I am, I know what I'm capable of, I know where I've been." But, actually, you

don't have to know all that. And you can change that mental image. That's what this practice is about.

We take that clamp off and we liberate our potential, our full potential -- and especially our ability to change, our plasticity, the quality of neuroplasticity that we now know we all have -- for changing in the moment, changing by moving our attention and placing it on something better, something positive. We take that clamp off and we replace it with the image of Tara, with our mentor, and that is our new model of how we'd like to be. And we act as if we were Tara. Then we transform ourselves and our relationship with the world, outwardly, including the story of the life that we live in. It is not the story of trauma. It's the story we hear and retell in psychotherapy, the story of our heroic evolution and development. Have we talked about the movie *Gravity*? It's about separation anxiety. Sandra Bullock is in outer space, and in trouble, and Mother Earth is down there, out of reach. First she lands on some Chinese spaceship module, from which she's spit out into the ocean, like she's born again, right? So she makes it back to Earth, she climbs to the slime at the edge of the ocean where she's crashed, and she puts her hands down and she stands up, like a goddess. At this point the camera moves and shoots her from below, making her look big and strong. She is awesome, and she feels awesome, because she's made it! Like us. We also have made it, we're safe. So why don't we feel that way?

We have made it to the top of the food chain, all the way up to being humans. And on top of that we've made it to this amazing country where we have freedoms. Of course, we're losing a bit of this and we're not getting enough of that. But there is always plenty of good stuff going on. And we have amazing equipment. But we don't feel so good. Why? It's that governor, the inner governor that is always pointing at the negative side, at bad things, saying "look

at this, you're small, you're hopeless ..." It's like a worst-case governor. It's like the fable of Chicken Little, who was always fearing and warning that "the sky is falling."

Anyhow, so we have our ideal model, we are Tara, and we redo our story, in which we really are heroic beings. And, I know, it's hard work. We don't feel this way. But this is the purpose of this practice, so get used to it, to feeling like heroic beings. Do it slowly, it's an acquired taste, this taste of feeling like we're much more than we think, or imagine, we are. We come to what is called the "subtle creation stage." We turn our attention inward, towards our own body. And we start to bring the influence of the deity, and of our mentor, into our body. We start to feel them inside our house. Our body becomes like a temple, or a crucible, where we have our inner family of mentors. And actually -- and this may sound very weird -- we all really have our families inside of us. You can hear your parents, you can hear your loved ones, they're all right inside of you.

Your body experiences a lot of feelings that you really need to examine. People talk about "embodied cognition" and "primal body memory" and so on, referring to life's early experiences of being affected in some way, after being yelled at or sung to or whatever, that we store in your bodies, in various places. Now we're going to replace those primal experiences with a new birthing, from the idealized mentor. We do this by placing the image of the idealized mentor in the key places in our body, our vital points along the central neural axis, and then we switch it. I don't usually do that part, it's a demanding visualization. For example, you can visualize a little Tara is sitting inside of you, at your head, and then at your throat and heart. You can put different deities in different key points. The traditional way to do this is you visualize the five meditational Buddhas, one at each of the main chakras along the central channel, as if they are watching over

your mind-body processes. Then they turn into a seed syllable. Not only is the image of your new ideal filling the space in your body, but you have what is called a "body mandala": your body is no longer just a body, like a solid thing, one bit of life. Your body becomes a residence for influence. If you think in terms of our ancestry and culture, our minds, our bodies, our nervous systems are like a residence for a whole universe, right? We consciously go over it, and we redo it. We take the influence of the ideal one step deeper into the unconscious, the normally unconscious, by placing these sub-personalities. There are people who actually live like this all the time, with multiple personality disorders, with a fragmented self. The current therapeutic approach is to try to help them heal their inner family. In this practice we're going to have to do exactly that.

There are parts of our being that are not working together, not acting as a family. Our inner reptile is more like a dinosaur, and the inner mammal is mostly hiding under the covers or looking for something to eat. Think of that inner family as our nervous system, with many complex layers and components. How do we get that family to work together, as one orchestra? This is what we are now dealing with.

As part of Buddhist psychology, or in Buddhist practice, there are preliminaries. In Tantra the preliminaries include establishing some level of peace, of compassion, and an understanding of emptiness, or openness. Then there is the extraordinary preliminary of re-envisioning yourself and your universe in a totally positive way, so you can actually feel like you could be a Buddha. After all these preliminaries are in place, so to speak, you can start working. You begin at your goal, at the result you want to achieve. This is on-the-job training. So you put on your white coat, or you put on your white Tara, your white being, your white essence.

The preliminaries are there to prepare us to engage in a new and positive way, not only with our self-image and our interaction with, and perception of, the external world, but also engaging our inner world for transforming our relationship to it by re-envisioning it as a divine space, a space of genius, a space of sacred transformation, or whatever you want to call it. And then, within that space, we begin to find our nervous system. As I have said previously, the nervous system is the engine under the hood, it is what supports all the potential for growth, for development, and transformation. So, for actual transformation we need to work with the nervous system, we need to learn to understand its language. If we don't understand the language of that engine, we're not going to really be able to transform, the transformation will just be in our heads, a movie in our heads, but when we get out of the movie we're still the same.

And so we spent the third year learning about the creation stage. After the creation stage comes the perfection stage, and that's where we're diving into this year. We reach the perfection stage when we've gotten the idea, and now we go to get the spirit, get the energy and the chemistry of it, get the whole visceral equipment all lined up, a positive image with positive energy, and sustain it.

I want to bring you back to Tsong Khapa's quote, from "The Diamond Pavilion Process:"

"If emptiness were technique, there would be no (complete) enlightenment. No fruit is of a genus different from its seed. So emptiness cannot be the art (of embodying enlightenment). Victors teach emptiness to vanquish the self (reifying) constructs of those who insist on their view of self and those who reject the view that things also lack self.

Hence it's envisioning the mandala sphere of a perfected world that binds the blissful art."

So, in the creation stage, you practice envisioning your self as a perfect self in the world. And in and the perfection stage you take this blissful art and actually live up to it, actually live it. The text goes on:

"Through union with the dignity of an enlightened being, enlightenment will not be far ... Buddha, the teacher, was endowed with the 32 signs and the 84 marks of altruistic embodiment."

The technique here is to assume the form of success, which is the teacher's form of self. The essence of tantra is re-parenting, going back to that very fundamental process. And fundamentally, mammalian nervous systems are shaped in the presence of other mammalian nervous systems. For us humans, as we grow up in family we don't just learn about ideas from our parents; we download a whole way of being, we learn a whole way of being, the whole person schema. And that includes the voice and thought patterns, and what is underneath the voice and thought patterns, the mood and the state of consciousness. We take it all in. So, if we are going for real transformation of ourselves, we've got to repeat that parenting process. But this time around we will make it better. Therapy is one way of doing that; but it takes long, it's expensive, and maybe not so positive, maybe too focused on what's wrong and not focused enough on what's possible or what's right. This practice is the complement to that kind of therapy. It is maybe a Jungian form of therapy, or maybe a Reichian form of therapy, whatever. The point is it allows us to learn a whole new way of

being, in good relation and with a positive interest in others, open to others. And for that, we must remember that the other person, and all other beings, are not just an idea, and they're not just words. They have a nervous system, just like us. Who was here for Rick Hanson's talk? I'm going to quote him quite a bit, so get used to it. His new book, *Hardwiring Happiness*, is really lovely. The main idea is just brilliant: we need to rebalance the evolutionary bias we all have towards the negative; we need to focus on the positive more, say five or more times as long, as deep and as often as we spend with our focus on the negative. This imbalance is the essence of what's wrong. As Rick Hanson likes to say, our memory is like velcro for negative experiences and teflon for positive ones. That is why we need spirituality, we need to meditate, because we need extra effort to open up more for our intake of the positive. It's like going for extra credit when you're in school, it takes an especially stronger effort. If we're really going to get it, we need to do the extra work. A bias towards the negative means we need more positive to outweigh the negative and establish a good balance. Actually, we remember the negative more easily. It takes less effort for us to register and install negative experiences in our nervous system than it does to register and install positive ones. That is what all this positivity in this beautiful art is for, to help us register and live in the positive. And for that, of course, we need to register the positivity all the way down, to a visceral and chemical level as well.

This term is about inner fire. In order to kindle our inner fire, we need to understand its foundation, and we need to learn how to use it well. The foundation of it is vase breathing. We did a little bit of that earlier. But we haven't talked much about how to use it; we'll get to that soon. I mentioned last week that vase breathing is the foundation of all of the practices of the perfection stage. And we talked a little bit about how we Westerners might understand that,

because of our scientific, fact and experience-based way of understanding things. We will recognize that by controlling our breath, we as mammals have a unique capacity to shift gears in our nervous system. And with especially deep breathing and breath holding we are powerfully equipped to go into a primal, almost survival mode, but also with many positive and protective benefits. We've talked a bit about the diving reflex, how by holding our breath we can trigger a fundamental shift in our neurophysiology. As blood goes to our heart and brain our bodies relax, and they generate a totally different specter of neurotransmitters -- including a lot more dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and probably the growth hormone and oxytocin as well. The production of some of these neurotransmitters has been documented. As our systems produce more of these feel-good chemicals, they are sort of bathing our heart and our brain, and the vital organs, in this incredible flow of electro-chemical positivity, which is the optimal state for opening, and learning. We can really focus and we're excited, as if we're in a dream, or a vision, or in some kind of ecstasy. And we do that while lowering our metabolism, using less energy than we normally use.

So you get more benefit spending less energy. This is really cool! And this is why, from my point of view, as a psychiatrist, physician and researcher, this is such an important feature that we have as mammals, this basic feedback in controlling our breath and using our old diving reflex to develop a highly positive altered state.

The tantras are different from other contemplative practices in some fundamental ways. Most contemplation is about calming down. It's low arousal. This is because we humans are too excited and so we can't focus so well; we need to learn to calm down and be present, still, whatever. Tantra goes the other way after you calm down: you crank things up, get excited. The question is, how do



you get excited in a safe way, a way that's not tainted by stress and drive and insecurity and competitiveness, a way that's just pure joy, pure passion? How do you do that? This is the system that allows you to do that. Tibetans are so intense, right? They're like us, Nordic mountain people in their own way. They used to conquer the world. Then they found Buddhism, and they conquered their inner environment. They are very blissful and at the same time very dynamic people, because they have this unique form of practice, this high-arousal contemplative practice. Good Tibetan monks smile all the time, they're cheerful, they're funny. The Dalai Lama is a great example. He's funny, he makes jokes, he's completely irreverent and he hasn't lost his zest, his zing.

This will be a good practice for us Westerners, because we like to be on, we like to be up, we like to be doing things. But we are doing it all with stress energy – pushing pushing pushing, worrying worrying worrying, proving proving proving, running running running, ... and all that wears us down. Think about what it would be like if we could be more focused at peak performance using half the energy that we normally use ... Better performance, half the energy ... very cool! We'll come back to this.

The perfection stage has a very interesting map. We are mapping the journey to set the big picture for the vase breathing. Where does the vase breathing fit in? Let me quote again, from two sources, Tsong Khapa and Saraha, about what I call sublimation, which is what this whole process is about. This is from Tsong Khapa's "A Book of Three Inspirations:"

"In general all systems of optimal integral process perfection stage involve the preliminary process of controlling the vital energies flowing through the two side channels, called luscious and succulent, and redirecting them

into the central channel, called released. This is indispensable ... When these energies enter the central channel, the four blisses are induced, and one cultivates meditation on the basis of these in such a way as to give rise to the innate wisdom of the great seal."

Here Tsong Khapa is saying that the perfection stage is about creating bliss. And then he quotes from Saraha, who said, more specifically:

" ... by relying on the art of penetrating the vital points in the outer and inner body, injecting the sun and moon wind-energies into the central channel and dissolving them, burning the inner fire and melting the enlightenment spirit (or bliss drops), and filling the body and uniting bliss and void, you eradicate ignorance and encompass all personal instructions."

That's saying a whole lot! Saraha is saying that the purpose of the vase breathing is to kindle the inner fire. The purpose of the inner fire -- think of it as a kind of altered chemical state of arousal -- is to allow us to re-channel and rebalance our energies in such a way that we can tap into deep core bliss states. And when we have those bliss states, when we're in a bliss flow, we can purge our mind of all the eons of negative instincts and patterns, and all the years of negative memories from childhood and adult difficulties. This is the medicine, this is the elixir of immortality, this is what allows us to overcome this life driven by fear of death, whether it be our survival over millions of years or our childhood momentary panic that "mommy's going to drop me in the dumpster if I ask for one more thing!"

But the main point where I am now – I don't expect you to understand all of that, because it's a lot -- what I want you to understand is that the way that Tsong Khapa and his colleagues, the way this whole tradition describes the path of the perfection stage, which is the real path of Tantric transformation, is based on this map of the nervous system, which is familiar to us from the yoga tradition which talks of the charkas and nadis and so on. That's why we need to understand a little bit about the map of the nervous system.

Let's talk about the map of the nervous system. Going down the center of the body there's the central channel, a line down the midline. On the left and right sides of it there are two thinner channels, called the "luscious" and the "succulent." One is solar, the other is lunar. One is female, the other is male. The main chakras are located along the central channel.

In the Hindu tradition they usually talk in terms of seven chakras; in the Buddhist tradition they typically identify only five, or four, or even just 3, mainly for the sake of simplicity. Chakras are like hubs. What I want to point out here is that this describes the central nervous system. There is also a peripheral nervous system. If you go to a medical text, not a meditation text but a Tibetan medical text, you'll see illustrations that show how, coming out of the crown chakra there is a bunch of spokes, coming down like an umbrella, feeding the eyes, then continues down to the other senses, the skin, and so on. And coming up from the throat, there's another chakra, like an umbrella upside down, reaching up into the neck, the tongue, and so on. Likewise, from the heart, there's a set of channels going down, and from the navel chakra there is a set going up. The third goes from the pelvic chakra to the tip of the sexual organ.

There you have it, a map of the subtle body. The point is that there is a peripheral nervous system in this map, it's not just the central nervous system.

The peripheral system feeds all of the motor functions and the functions of sensation, just like our normal nervous system does. So, their subtle body model is a triune model -- just like the Western model is a triune model for the brain. So what about our brain? In our brain we have the neocortex, which is the brain's outer covering. Inside, under that, is the middle covering, and then further down, near the brain stem, is the core brain. Some people refer to it as a triune brain -- the brain of the reptile, the mammal, and the inner primate. There is also the triune map of the nervous system: the outer peripheral nervous system, or "coarse" system, which is basically the material level. Then comes the "subtle" system, which is made of the channels, the chakras and the drops. And, finally, there is the third system, inside the central channel and within the heart chakra, called the "extremely subtle" system, at the indestructible drop at the heart. In other words, at the subtlest core molecular level of the nervous system there's another system, called "extremely subtle."

I should say to you that this can get very complicated. This is a complicated map of the nervous system, with various layers. Ideally, there is vertical integration, when different levels are working together; but they don't often work together. So their map has layers, as does our brain. If you put their map and ours side by side, you see that they can complement each other. The question is, are you interested in the coarse level, where you can measure things, or are you interested in the more subtle level, where you feel things?

In the Eastern model, the contemplative model, the centers are where we feel things -- and that is where the ends of the neurons, the terminal synapses, are. The cell bodies, from their point of view, are not most important; what is most important to know is where the feedbacks are. Then there is the issue of laterality. Interestingly, long before we knew in the West, the Indians had recognized the

laterality in the two side channels. In the West we have recently discovered that, in fact, our autonomic nervous system also has laterality: the left brain and the left side of the body are more activated by the sympathetic nerve; and the right brain and the right side of the body are more activated by the parasympathetic nerve. According to the yogic tradition, the moon is paired with the parasympathetic nerve, and the sun with the sympathetic nerve. The balance between the two sides, and their integration, is not fixed, but it shifts overtime. This shifting has long been recognized in the yogic model.

The Yogic map of the subtle body is a map of our autonomic nervous system, that's my main point here. There is a different way to map the nervous system because it is based on the neural functions; and it predicts functions and capacities in ways that we've found evidence for. There is vertical integration, as different levels can be coordinated and integrated, or not; and there's lateral integration with common arousal or balancing, or not. The central channel goes up from the root chakra to the crown. The side channels start at the nostrils, they meet and then they go down on each side of the central channel to the root chakra. Below the navel they branch out. One goes to the sexual organ and the other goes to the anus. These are the anatomical pathways that are in their map. In the practice we are balancing the energies of the side channels with the help of vase breathing, and with a lot of mental energy directing the breath energy.

As you breathe into the side channels, you draw the energy down, below the navel, and you imagine, you visualize, how this works. Imagine that you can take the energy from the side channels, bend the side channels and insert them into the central channel. You are trying to really develop a pattern of deep breathing, using this image as a mental map for your deep breathing. It's not like you're going to find these channels somewhere inside your body, with little arrows

pointing in the right directions. But the fact is that the imagery serves as a mental map to do the practice. The anatomical basis for this is the vagal afferent nerves in the lower abdominal region. There are a lot of them, for a number of different reasons. So we direct our attention there, and we hold our breath, in the same way that a diving mammal, like a whale or a sea otter, would do as they dive: they hold their breath for a long time, and in that way they can totally change their metabolism. In our case, we change our state of consciousness that way. We have research studies of diving mammals and of human beings doing this practice, and we see that they're doing the same thing. So it's not esoteric. Herb Benson, a medical doctor trained at Harvard, studied a group of tummo meditators, or inner fire meditators, and he found a pattern that's very consistent with the diving reflex and the hibernation-like, or aestivation-like, even orgasmic-like, state of diving mammals. Evolution is modular, like Apple computers. It invents one thing for some task and then it finds all sorts of other uses for it. In our evolution orgasm probably came first. Orgasm is a very primal altered state of consciousness, designed to switch the organism out of self-protective mode, a mode in which it just wants to fight or fly, and into bonding mode, when the organism is willing to stay connected to another living being for some time, open and defenseless, in order to procreate and continue the species. During orgasm bliss runs the internal reward system, generating an experience of intense blissful openness. That is the reward the organism gets for doing just that: opening up to procreate. So the apparatus, the equipment that makes up the internal reward system, goes way back in evolutionary history. It was probably used by mammals; we humans have in an updated version. That's kind of what we use to do this practice.

This breathing practice comes out of the yogic tradition. There are a number of different yoga practices, like kundalini yoga and sudarshan kriya yoga,

that use this breathing. It's not just Tibetan Buddhist meditators who do this. Hindi yogis have been brought into labs, to study the effect of these breathing techniques that allow them to reduce their metabolism, increase the blood flow to their heart and brain, and so on.

This breath that is present in different yoga practices is a concerted exercise that is more ambitious than chanting, or just breathing. Its purpose is to trick your nervous system into entering a radically, or significantly different, altered state of inspiration, or centralization, or whatever you want to call it, by using a variety of different mental feedbacks. It's a paradoxical state, one in which you reach, at the same time, profound physical relaxation and intense heart/brain activation. This makes perfect sense for a mammal, because the heart and the brain are made of oxygen-sensitive, hypoxic-sensitive tissues. And you want to protect them. If you want to go under water, you want to learn to protect your heart and your brain. Somehow, we evolved this capacity to hold our breath in that way. Some of our ancestors figured out how to do this, and it worked, so we got it too. But you see, the ironic thing is, if this is true, and if this becomes the new default state of consciousness and the new energy signature for future civilizations, and we all become like these aquatic diving mammals, then what this tells us is that flowing through the day of work and play is not that different from flowing through the ocean holding your breath!

You don't really need all your physical organs, they are not that useful. You don't need to fight and take flight so much. What you need to do is protect your heart and your brain; and for that you need to open your heart, and open your brain. Then you can relax. That is, in evolutionary terms, a rationale for why this is actually useful to us as a default state. It may not be the only default state that we want to cultivate, but it's one of them.

There are letters, or syllables, among the symbols that we use in our visualizations of our inner body, our inner map. Some of them are upside down, and some of them are right side up. And they have colors: red is fire, or heat; blue is ice, or water; white is snow. This is designed to guide you to where you fan the flame. So you take the breath coming from the side channels, you imagine a syllable at your navel and you install that breath under the syllable, and then you try to get it to "ignite," so to speak. You feel how this generates a sense of warmth, which may be increasing blood flow, increasing vagal tone, releasing endorphins and other things like that. As that spot starts to warm up, you imagine the red flame starting to thread its way up the central channel, and as it does this, it starts to melt the blue, it gets to the blue heart and starts to melt it. Then it continues up further and catches fire in the syllable at the throat, and that flames up and melts the syllable at the crown. This imagery is typical of kundalini.

This is how you start what Tsong Khapa describes as the flow of blisses, the flow of bliss nectars. They float down the central channel, taking a little breather at each of the chakras so you can enjoy great bliss. It goes all the way down to the sexual centers, but you don't go through a normal release -- a wet dream, or whatever. Instead -- here's the hardest part of sublimation -- you take the energy and bring it back up again. You bring the focus back up, that's the real sublimation part. The other part, lighting up your inner fire, is just learning how to self-generate, how to kindle a high- arousal state that feels blissful. And so you're stimulating your internal reward system, you are kindling a release of endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, and so on, in your body. They're flooding the system. Some people say that it feels like shooting up something powerful like morphine or opium. I haven't done that myself; my research hasn't gone that far. But that's how some people describe it. And then the blissful drops, the chemicals, flow



down, through your whole system. Then you do the sublimation process of bringing the energy back up again. That's how you generate the willpower, the capacity to control the flow, the bliss flow. You don't just release and pass out; you learn how to modulate and control the blissful experiences, so that you can bring them all the way back up to the crown, where it's cool. It's a lot cooler up in the brain than it is down there, right?

There are other things happening as well. But I'm not going into them here. This is all part of the prelude, all just warm-up. And then, what we do is we use this bliss that we have generated to dissolve our normal mind-body state into the heart, for a kind of molecular and biochemical-rooted state of absorption. Our awareness and energy become totally focused on, or integrated with, our internal reward system, which actually reaches under the hypothalamus where the autonomic nervous system is, and taps into the brainstem as well, where motor and sensory vital systems and points of activation of consciousness are.

What we are trying to do with all this is what Dan Siegel calls "neural integration." We have a conscious mind, which normally is just riding up there, on autopilot, over all of the equipment in our body. A lot of the processes supporting our life -- the brainstem, the core brain, the limbic system, most of our cortex, and so on -- are not in the sphere of our attention. We do not have the capacity for evaluating them, or reforming them. We're not even capable of being aware of them, it's all unconscious. What this practice is designed to do is to use the experience of these profound, blissful altered states to stretch our awareness, stretch it down and deep. Bliss protects us from fear and distress, it disarms the system. If we're blissful, who cares? In bliss no one feels like fighting. So we're disarming the system. And we're going deeper, we're getting in touch with very primal layers of awareness that we normally wouldn't, layers that you

might reach in deep sleep, for example, or in hibernation, or sustained orgasmic experience. It's actually consummation, like the dissolution and blissful unification after a normal sexual experience.

You reach into those deep states, and you learn how to speak to, to communicate with your internal reward system and your primal consciousness, the activating system in your brainstem. Then you start to integrate those basic levels of awareness.

There's some research to support that certain kinds of practices promote the growth of certain capacities that were thought not possible. An example is Qi Gong, which comes from the acupuncture tradition and works with a kind of energy that is very similar to what we're talking about here, and it aims at recycling energy in a similar way. There is research that shows that yogis who practice Qi Gong have increased white matter in their brainstem, which we never thought to be possible. This suggests that, with some of these practices, we are actually building our neural connections, we are interconnecting and networking the higher parts of our awareness all the way up to the prefrontal cortex -- not only with the limbic system, or the core brain, but also with the brainstem. And the brainstem is connected to vital functions among which is the one of the internal reward system -- and that is bliss, and basic clarity and awareness.

I know this is very far out, and it may be too much information. The main purpose of telling you all this in the beginning is not to make things too exotic, but just to help you understand how it all works.

Now let's talk about vase breathing. Vase breathing is an exercise that goes into the nervous system; it's a form of training that prepares us to experience greater states of wellbeing, internal dissolution, and it probably increases our vagal tone significantly. We know that this is all good, really good stuff. It's not

like your inner fire is going to burn you. Vase breathing probably enhances our training for stimulating what I call "sublimation," meaning a profound transformation of energies and chemistry that allows us to self-regulate feelings of inspiration, feelings of blissful openness and wellbeing. The whole essence of the tantras is: why work very hard to become a really nice, really open and caring person, when you can just learn how to generate bliss? Because when you generate bliss, you automatically become a lot nicer, a lot more caring, a lot more open – because if you are blissful you are disarmed.

So, if you were to study this image literally, you would see that each of these syllables is different. For example, the syllable at the bottom is the short "ah" right side up; the syllable at the heart is a "hung" upside down; at the throat there is a longer "ah" and at the crown there is an "Om", and that's upside down as well. But who's going to visualize that? We don't even know what that is. We need to go slowly.

This is a lot of information already. The basic idea to take home is that we have this amazing nervous system; and that we don't have to live in it as it was naturally installed. We can actually play around with it, we can tinker with it, we can take the parts and the pieces and the elements of the nervous system and reconnect them in a creative way, one that works better for us. Essentially that is what we're doing in mindfulness practice. It's rare that a human being or an animal would have moments of mindfulness, moments when there's calm and clarity, vivid clarity, at the same time.

What we're doing in mindfulness practice is installing a new default place. Why? Because our environment has actually changed so much from how wild it was at the start, that now that default state is outdated. The way that we survived then is not best default place to live in, operate from. Instead of having our

default operating state at fear or defensiveness, we'd do much better if we had a default state of clarity and calm. So we have to install that default state. To go back to Rick's language, our brain is like velcro for suffering, we are pre-wired for suffering, for survival, for fear and protectiveness; unless we rewire ourselves for something else, that's where we're going to default to. If you don't do something like this practice, you will be stuck, stuck at wired for fear. As T.S. Elliot writes about his vision of the Holy Spirit, towards the end of his "Four Quartets:"

“The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre --  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame  
Which human power cannot remove.  
We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.”

This says that we have no choice: we're stuck in a recycling of suffering, worry and tears. That's how we're wired. If we don't have an inspiration of some kind, that

allows us to reset our awareness, our self, to one of the more ecstatic, more positive states of activation or inspiration, there's no way out.

This talk is weird, very weird. Right? This talk about turning ourselves into aquatic mammals, floating through life, spending a lot of time breathing very deeply. But try it. What else are you going to do, what else do we have to do? This is our precious human life. Do the experiment and see what you think. We have a few weeks together; and we will try some of these practices.

On a very practical level, I encourage you all to read Lama Yeshe's book called *The Bliss of Inner Fire*. This is a very useful book. In it he describes this type of practice, and he makes it sound really easy, just like eating a little bar of chocolate. And we need that encouragement. Read at least the first chapter, it's inspiring. But also do practice. I have posted four guided meditations that use vase breathing on the class web page. Vase breathing is restorative, and that's what inspiration is all about. But remember, the vase breathing exercise that I'm giving you in these practices is not really full vase breathing, full industrial-strength vase breathing. It's just a gentle training exercise, at the level of a basic yogic exercise. If we do it gently it can't hurt, it can only do good. We all need more vagal tone, we all need to have more presence, more calm, more living from our parasympathetic nervous system. This is like medicine for us: it promotes longevity, it promotes healing, it promotes learning, it promotes love and care-taking. Those are the basics, like apple pie in American cooking, something like that.

This practice is a very powerful way to increasing vagal tone. You don't have to do the full inner fire practice. I bet you, if you practice this kind of deep breathing -- not too much, and very gently, a couple of times a week -- you will get a little taste, a feeling, I think enough to find out that your body and your

nervous system have the capacity to feel good simply through such breathing exercises. That's why these practices, like sudarshan kriya yoga, have been proven to be very effective for people in crisis zones, natural disaster and war zones, with people that have lost everything. In one experiment they flew in a group of yogis to some crisis zones to train the victims and the aid workers how to do this type of practice. And they found that it helps them to be more resilient. They learn to work on their nervous systems so that they can generate positive experiences.

In a matter of speech, we're all living in an earthquake zone, an information-overload earthquake zone. And so, having this capacity to have a positive experience within your body, in a simple and very deep way, is great. It's restorative, it's energizing. It's different from other forms of meditation, which can also feel energizing over time. When you are doing your meditation practice, you feel a sense of energy, like you are energizing yourself in a positive way, a way that feels good. Over time, if you keep a meditation practice that generates energy, that energy is psychic heat -- and that's inner fire, just a very gentle version. If you want to put a little bit more fire under that, and intensify the practice, you can experiment with different intensities. I emphasize, it is important to do it very gently, very slowly. Then you'll see what is possible, what you can do with this kind of practice, as you intensify the experience. It is a powerful way not only to feel good but also to transform your state of mind, deeply, by using the rush of neurochemistry that comes along with it.

If you have had years of training and preparation you can go faster. But for most people it is best to go slowly. This practice is also taught as a beginning practice for medical students. And so, for example, White Tara is often recommended as a practice for people who have panic disorders, or high levels of

anxiety. The vase breathing practice is recommended to bring calm, and peace, because it promotes vagal tone. It is a simple healing exercise that can be practiced without all the fancy enlightenment stuff. But if you are on the path to enlightenment already, then you go for both. It is my experience that gentleness is key, and the parasympathetic nervous system is all about gentleness. It's not about force. If you force it, you're actually hamstringing yourself. You have to ease yourself into finding that gentle way of stretching. It's like all yoga practice: you stretch yourself out of a place of kindness, and of peace. That is very different from forcing it. We live in a culture that's so into force ... I always encourage people to be very gentle; the last thing you want to do is to try to stretch your nervous system using force. It is just not a wise thing to do. If you're really doing it gently, if you approach the practice from a place of gentleness, it is very restorative and powerful -- and it can build momentum in your contemplative practice.

I am going to talk now a little bit about the perfection stage. The journey that Tsong Khapa describes is for channeling the energy into your core being and dissolving into the flow of bliss, and for learning to cultivate wisdom. That is what you're trying to do, to melt your whole system down. It is what we do at the beginning of our guided meditations. I ask you to melt your vision of the universe, and go into your body, and even into your mind, into a primal kind of state, a state that is like a simulation, a theory, but it can happen as a chemical experience, an electrochemical experience in an altered state of consciousness. We can have these experiences in a whole range of different states.

About half way through the perfection stage we get to this place where we can totally dissolve and immerse ourselves in these experiences of blissful openness. The latter part of the perfection stage is basically about learning how

to recreate ourselves using bliss and openness as raw materials. Bliss appearing is our virtual body. That is to say, it is our embodiment of positivity, a translucent, transparent embodiment of positivity, the equivalent of a deity body, an archetype body, a mental image of a better person, an embodiment of joy. Then there's the clear light mind, the translucent mind. This is a mind that is totally, radically open, and it has opened through a deep ecstatic experience, not just an effort to be open or to stop thinking, or any stuff like that. Then, when you have these two raw materials, as a new body made of bliss and a new mind made of translucency or openness, you put them together into a new person -- and that is the great perfection stage.

This is a journey that starts after you've done all the preliminaries and preparations, with the experience of vase breathing and inner fire. Then you start to get a taste for blissful experiences. And then you are ready for this journey, where you will feel increasingly safe and comfortable committing to those experiences and offering all of your suffering, and all your neurotic mind-body, and your history of the past. Out of that chemistry and awareness -- you can think of it as a sort of primal soup -- you are recreating, re-baking yourself into a whole new person that's purely positive, and purely integrated. All of this is based on a very subtle kind of alchemical tantric esoteric science.

The amazing thing is that there are these correlates, these dotted lines from this science to scientific breakthroughs in the West, and they are helping us understand how the nervous system works, in particular its potential to be fully positive, even if it has been clamped down through evolution, and through childhood, and by habit, by all sorts of negative instincts and negative memories. The question is, what would happen if you took all of that negative stuff and burned it, and you were left with just the most pure and positive essence of who



you are? This practice takes you there -- to "finding your inner genius" as we say in the West. It is a very powerful practice. Even if we only put our toe in it, it already gives us something very positive, which is a beautiful vision about what we're capable of as human beings. It is positive vision for the journey all along the way. And you don't have to get to the end. You can go just one little bit, and you will see, it's really good!

### Chapter 3: Kindling, Melting, and Channeling Flow: Mastering Your Inner Fire

In this chapter, we'll talk about the practice of the inner fire. Are you ready? I hope you've had the chance to clear your mind, maybe take a little dip into Lama Yeshe's material and the things that we have been discussing. We have our work cut out for us in this chapter. We may be close enough to glimpse the end of our journey in the distance, but where we are right now is pretty important. We have been talking about the passion practice, the idea of the esoteric tantras, the "process-oriented teachings" as I like to call them. We are now talking about this sort of virtual part of the practice, in which we try to get a new vision, for our self and the world. And that is the Creation Stage. For that we reprogram our perception of the world so that there is room for us to tap into our positivity. And then comes the Perfection Stage.

In the Creation Stage, we talked about how the creative imagination is working to free us instead of working to trap us back into a nightmare. In this stage the creative imagination is envisioning the way, the kind of virtual reality, for being the being we want to be, the being we want to be in the world we want to live in, and the way we want to live in it. And then we have to make it real.

How do we make it real? That's when we started to talk about the practice of inner fire, as the foundation for making it real, the foundation of the art that we call sublimation. And, what does that really mean? For that we need to work on our nervous system.

In our second class we took a little excursion into our nervous system. I showed a powerpoint presentation with some images of it. You can see it in my book on pages 299 and 424 if you are interested. There is not that much out there on the Tibetan tradition. Bob Thurman wrote an article or chapter on this, way back in the 1990s, pre-fMRI.

Today we are going to talk a little bit more about the actual practice. I have given you a scientific rationale for why this is not as crazy as it may sound, and why all of us should at least be aware that we have the potential to self-regulate our energies, to tap in and disarm the stress system, and tap into the deep well of wellbeing and positivity that we have within our nature. We can actually do all that, all of us. And breath is the foundation.

One of the reasons why breath is the foundation is because by modulating our breath with consciousness we can get to the smart vagus, the new part of the vagus nerve, and we can increase our vagal tone; and then we learn to use that combination to regulate even the older parts of our autonomic nervous system. We can balance the two side channels, which is to say the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system, with the smart vagus involved.

The nervous system in both the Western and the Indic models has a lateral balance as well as a vertical balance, and that balance needs to be integrated, embodied, both ways. With lateral balance there is no dominance of one side over the other -- in Western terms, the sympathetic nervous system, which is arousal-oriented, and fight-and-flight oriented; and the parasympathetic, vagal, nervous system, which is calming, loving, and other yummy, wonderful stuff.

I have talked a bit about the central channel, as part of the way in which the smart vagus can give us conscious access to the stick shift of our nervous system. And it does that when the usual oscillations between too much arousal and too much clouding and fatigue are in balance. With that balance we can get into that sweet spot, in the middle, where we can actually tap the bliss system and the awareness system that run from the forebrain, from the very old parts of the middle of the limbic brain or cortex, all the way down into the brainstem. And that system, I believe, depicts the same system described in Eastern medicine in terms

of a central channel with two channels, one on each side, that feed into it. The side channels are the breath channels that begin at the nostrils and run down the body to below the navel. All that is telling us something very important, it's telling us in visual terms: the breath is somehow connected to getting us to that centered place of perfect balance, which is what the central channel represents.

The central channel goes down from the crown into the heart. And the heart is, in fact, in the brainstem, where we have our cardiac regulatory center, right alongside the centers that control the activation of consciousness -- the wake, sleep and dream levels, or layers, and also the states of sexual arousal and near-death experience, which are more primal -- and so it can lead to total opening, and disarming of our state of consciousness, wherever we locate that.

We can find a neurological basis for this Eastern map of our nervous system. We can understand it in Western terms. The map of the central nervous system in the yogic traditions presents it as something within our body that we can use through breath control -- and in particular by holding the breath -- to train our smart vagus, or our conscious control of breath. And in this way we can slowly deepen our capacity to relax and keep our reflex system balanced and in good shape.

So, we did cover that a little bit. We did some basic vase breathing and I suggested that you try to do some of the visualization practices that are posted on the Nalanda website. There is a basic Healing Mother practice, and a basic Mentor bonding practice as well, the Healing Mentor, and I think a Tara, also very appropriate. They are all on the Nalanda Institute website.

Today I will be using Tsong Khapa as our guide, and particularly his commentary on the five stages of the Perfection Stage. In it Tsong Khapa quotes Saraha, as follows-- and I read from page 419 of "Sustainable Happiness:"

"Thus, he says that, by relying on the art of penetrating the vital points in the outer and inner body injecting the sun and moon wind-energies into the (central) released channel and dissolving them, burning the inner fire and melting the enlightenment spirit, and filling the body and uniting bliss and void, you eradicate ignorance and encompass all personal instructions.'"

This may sound familiar, I already read that to you once, I am just refreshing our memory about that. Tsong Khapa described the vase breathing and inner fire practice in a very distilled way. The conversation and the discussion of this knowledge is in my book. There I focused on four basic points. I have to say that I wasn't able to follow all the complexity, with lots of numerology -- there are sets of four of this, and three of that, and eight of the other ... that's just the way these things are. They get more subtle and nuanced, and you just ease your way into them.

The four points that make up the main structure of the practice are: one, tap into the vital points of the central nervous system; two, balance the two side channels; three, kindle the inner fire to get the flow of bliss going; and four, bring together, or seal, the most intense experience of bliss with the most visceral intuition of emptiness.

So, to begin, how do we tap into our central nervous system? How do we stop it from running us and learn how to get into it? Remember, we are not talking about just the old central nervous system, it's also about the bliss network we can tap to get the most positive, disarmed, clear, open and inspiring part of our neural capacity.

Two, we balance the polar energies of the two side channels and infuse them into the central channel. Whatever this means in terms of Western physiology, in this context the idea is, literally, to take a breath through the nostrils, be aware of it as it flows into and down the side channels. Then, somehow, mentally, try to train the breath to go in the central channel. What we prepare for is we are going to inject the breath into the central channel at the navel chakra, four finger-widths below the navel. Also, we try to take deep breaths, take them in and down, and focus on the abdomen, that is bring the air in somehow to your abdomen, and try to use that air to get a deeper, more centered state of inner awareness. And that, as we learn with practice, can kindle a peak neurological state, a peak experience of some neurological state.

Three, we kindle the inner fire of sublimation to release and spread the flow of bliss chemistry throughout the body -- we all want to know how to do that!

And four, we seal the state of the most intense experience of bliss, what is often referred to as orgasmic bliss, with the visceral intuition of emptiness. We do that because we want to go beyond blissing out. This isn't just about blissing out, but about using bliss to purge our minds, to free our minds so that we can help others free theirs. That is why Vajrasattva, who is known as the Heroic Altruist, is all about purification and purifying our past mistakes. It could be for purifying our instinctive mistakes from hundreds of millions of years of evolution.

So we first get to bliss and then we purify our past mistakes, because it is always easiest to let go of whatever we have to let go of when we are blissed out. And here we are talking about letting go of our self-protective instincts big-time. In a way this is like a ramped-up version of what Rick Hanson was talking about when he told us about learning to "take in the good." For that we generate an extremely positive state of mind, and we learn to re-hone ourselves into living in

that state and let go of anything that will pull us out of it. This includes the self-protective instincts, like, "No, I can't feel so happy" or "something bad is going to happen to me" or "somebody is going to come and say something;" or "I should feel guilty for being so happy; I should share it with everyone ..." So share it with everyone! And don't feel bad about that.

We are not going to be able to cover all this today; we are going to spread the material over a couple of classes -- which is already in itself a little insane for such rich material, but that's the way life is in the big city, where there's never enough time for all we feel we need to do. Anyway, this is the first take. I am not encouraging you to go out and try to practice this. But I do encourage you to practice vase breathing, and get a little taste of it. This is a reasonable basic practice to start with. To learn how to deepen your vagal tone is something you can learn in many places, at almost any hospital. It boils down to deep abdominal breathing, adding to it a little breath-holding, breath-slowness and breath-holding ... something fairly simple to do.

I want to share with you this knowledge, mostly intellectually at this point, to give you a taste of what is possible for us if we really want to follow that knowledge as a path. You are not going to hear this in many places during your life. The *Kalachakra* view is that every human being on the planet should know that they can do this. You remember how kids in grammar school believe they can be president? They hear it from supportive parents and teachers who say to them, "you can grow up to be president if you work hard at it." This practice is like that. But in this case you are working hard at growing up to be Buddha. Everyone of us can learn, everyone can have the capacity to do that. We should all try it on for size and know that we can do it, intellectually. That is the liberal arts part of it. And we are going to do a fair amount of practice also. We are going to focus on the

preliminaries. The preliminaries are interesting in and of themselves; and they are key.

Some ask me about the bliss, about its purpose: is it to develop complete openness so we can focus on the emptiness part, the wisdom part? Blissful energy in the bigger picture is considered as the cleanest and quickest energy to use to become a Buddha. If you remember what I told you about the first and second initiations I went through, the yidam asked the disciples two questions: "who are you and what do you want?" and "what do you want that for?" And the answers, you remember, are, "We are the lucky ones and we want great bliss;" and "we want great bliss to keep the commitments of the Buddhas." What do the Buddhas commit to? They commit to liberating all living beings from suffering; by educating, uplifting and inspiring them, all of them. The purpose of bliss is to provide pure and positive energy. This energy is good not just for communicating wellbeing; it's good also for purging our minds, for purification. There is a very specific and incredibly beautiful system in this tradition for using the bliss to purge the mind of all the conditionings and instincts of suffering.

In priming practice at this point I often recommend a little taste of the Vajrasattva practice, with lights going down, lights going up and lights going in, as a preview of our coming attractions, in terms of how this process works to create a sense of wellbeing internally. A sense of wellbeing makes it easier for us to let go of the negative and to let in the positive, and allow it to sink in. We do this incrementally, a little bit at a time.

Now, bliss is necessary, but not enough to take you all the way to liberation. There is also a need for wisdom, the wisdom of emptiness. Emptiness is important because the understanding of emptiness means recognizing that there is no hook for us to hold on to our self, to protect our self. That's the cognitive



part. In and of itself bliss wouldn't bring a liberation that is as lasting, but only present while we are blissed out. Together with emptiness, we realize that there is nothing to fear and there's nothing in us that is disconnected and therefore precarious, there is nothing that is not part of a much bigger picture, and therefore nothing and no one can be annihilated.

So, there are two parts in the sublimation practice: a cognitive part, which we just went through, and then an emotional part. The emotional, energetic part is learning how to ride the bliss flow, learn how to channel the flow and master it. The cognitive part is learning how to be a bliss hero -- that is, you learn how to use the bliss to dispel all the ghosts of evolution and childhood.

Remember, Vajrasattva is holding a wand, or "vajra," in the right hand, which is a scepter that represents the bliss connection, the mastery of bliss, the knowledge for tapping into the bliss flow; and then there's the bell, in the left hand, representing the wisdom of emptiness. It is said that those two should be inseparable, always in union, like mother and father.

Here you start to get the gender, the sexual sort of symbolism. Vajrasattva is envisioned as a male/female; the subjective part of the experience, the bliss part, is male; while the objective part, the ecstatic, wisdom, or openness part, is the female. Our natural, primal sexual energies already have primed us to be open to and interested in sex, for the sake of reproduction, for the sake of survival. But this practice totally subverts the system, in a way. Here the blissful energy, the orgasmic blissful energy, is not for the sake of reproduction or survival; it is for the sake of no longer reproducing the energy of survival, but opening up to the wisdom of who we really are, to the wisdom of emptiness.

Before you do any of this stuff you have to set the stage for it. And for that there are preparatory, preliminary exercises. I am sitting here, on a cushion, in the

Tibetan way, because this is part of their physical guidelines. You can sit on a chair until you get to this point, then you have to get off your chair. The reason is that your body really starts to matter at a certain point. What your body is doing really matters if you want to get into a deep visceral state. You don't have to sit on a cushion like this, in lotus pose. But you have to be mindful of exactly what state your body is in. If your body is happiest, then it is blissful, as the Tibetans like to say. And yoga is one way to get there.

Let me go into the specifics that will make this clear. There are a couple of points here. The preparatory exercises are preliminary practices which we sort of did already. We have learned about the mentor, the mentor as model, and so now we invoke the mentor in this preliminary practice. We are orienting ourselves relationally. And we visualize our body as a body of light, we convert our normal solid body into a pure translucent body. And then we can shape it. We can shape it following Vajrasattva, the model of the hero altruist, represented in our mentor.

The next thing is a set of exercises. First, we visualize the channels within our body, that is now a bubble body, a breath bubble body. And then, still visualizing the channels, we place syllables in them. I have graphically described these syllables for you, but we didn't connect them to a practice. In this practice, first we have the blessing of the lineage; next, we have the body of a Buddha, or more exactly, a mental construct of an image of a Buddha body. Our breath capacity is primed and ready, and we have good tone. We visualize the channels and within the channels we place the seed syllables at specific locations, and then we are ready to roll. We use the vase breathing, not just as a relaxation exercise but also to rev up the kindling process, for kindling the inner fire. Usually this is done at the navel, although it changes in different traditions and at different points in the practice.

In setting the stage, our hero, our model, our mentor -- whoever took us here -- comes to the crown. On top of our mentor is his or her mentor, and on top is their mentor, and so on, the whole lineage, one teacher stacked on top of the other, all the way to whoever transmitted the teaching first. In some cases the lineage might go back to Buddha.

There is a historical lineage for each of you, and in it are those who heard this teaching. First is the teacher who you heard it from, and then his teacher, and the teacher of his teacher, and so on, whoever heard the teaching from a teacher. In this case, say you heard it from me, and I heard it from my teacher who heard it from his teacher or any specific teacher who was that person's teacher, and so on. There is a historical lineage in this teaching, you got to hear it first from somebody.

If you take this practice seriously, the best way to do that is you appropriate that lineage as your ancestry, your spiritual lineage, and you envision it, with all its members, stacked up, one teacher on top of the other, one hero on top of the other. It can be a very tall stack. Then you take their blessing. You want to feel like you are appropriating all of the goodness in them. And you are really grateful to them, you thank them and acknowledge all of them. If you know their names you say them, and ask each of them for their blessing. Then they melt, one by one into the next one, and then the next one, and the next one, and so on ... It's like the Seven Medicine Buddhas' initiation. Some of you here went through that initiation. That is the standard practice used for healing. In the practice you envision stacking up the seven Medicine Buddhas on top of your head. Then they melt and slip into you, and you use that energy, you sort of ride off that energy.

Normally, as a preliminary you invoke the lineage and all of its heroic ancestors. You don't need to learn all their names. You can just do it in a more

general way. You request their blessings. Then you imagine one melting into the other, all melt into the other and so forth, and you say "thank you, thank you, thank you." They melt into the final member of the lineage, the present mentor here, your mentor or your teacher. And you push the pause button right there. We will come back to that.

You can also not push the pause button. What would happen next is that the mentor would dissolve into your heart; and dissolving into your heart would melt your normal body -- just like when you have a love connection, with someone who matters a lot to you, so much so they make you feel like you are melting, in a certain way. This is a natural human experience that we all have the capacity for. You imagine your body literally melting into your heart, and then into clear light, and then rising up again, now as a heroic altruist permeated by the energy of the whole lineage. You are now becoming the descendant, the heir, of that lineage. You are being reborn as an heir of that lineage.

Whether you choose to do that or not, you imagine your body of light, then you start to prepare yourself physically. This is about your body, it's about your energy, it's about your nervous system. And we need training to work with it.

I want to go through an example with you, of one particular system that Tibetans use as training for this kind of practice. It's a system of six different physical exercises. It's called the Six Yogas of Naropa. It is more or less equivalent to Kundalini yoga, or hatha yoga or sudarshana kriya yoga. All of these practices from the Hindu tradition would be more or less equivalent, in that they all are, basically, intensive breath workouts; like an aerobic breath workout.

Before these six exercises, it is good to do the nine breaths of alternate nostril breathing. Some of you who are familiar with this exercise. There are several versions. One version is, you start with a nice full exhale. Then you close

off the right nostril with your thumb and breathe in through the left; then close off the left nostril with your ring and small finger together and breathe out through the right nostril. That is one breath. Then you reverse it: you start breathing in through the right nostril, you close it with your thumb and breathe out through the left; that's another breath. You can also breathe in through the left nostril, close it and breathe out through the right; and then breathe in through the right nostril, close it, breathe out through the left. And then you breathe in through both nostrils at the same time and breathe out through the central channel and back out the nostrils, or your crown. Traditionally you do each of these three breaths three times, for nine breaths of this alternate nostril breathing.

This is different from what most of you have learned in Hindu Hatha Yoga class. In the Buddhist and Tibetan traditions there are different ways of doing it. So sometimes people do three breaths inhaling from the right nostril and exhaling through the left one, then three inhaling from the left and exhaling through the right nostril, and then three inhaling with both nostrils and exhaling through the central channel. It probably doesn't matter that much if you start with the left or the right, or do a variation of this. Although it might matter at a more subtle level; and one particular way of doing might work better than all others for each of you.

There is research that shows that alternate nostril breathing actually balances the cerebral hemispheres, which is kind of interesting. So this way of breathing is doing something. The cerebral hemispheres are related to the activation level of the sympathetic and the parasympathetic parts of the autonomic nervous system. Normally, at any one point in time one is dominant. If the left hemisphere is dominant, that means that the parasympathetic side, your vagal nervous system, is dominant. On the other hand, if your right side is dominant, as if you were in trauma, it would be your sympathetic nervous system

that is dominant. And by balancing both sides we're doing exactly what Saraha and Tsong Khapa tell us we need to do. We need to balance the energies on the side channels, of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, these polar energies of life that sustain us. Then, once we are more centered, we are able to go deeper. We don't want to get too technical about this. It's a practice. We are trying to develop a qualitative experiential relationship with this, not just have it be some knowledge, like "Oh, so that's my parasympathetic system! And where am I going to find that?"

After doing the alternate nostril breathing, you do six breath exercises: one, vase breathing; two, revolving like a wheel; three, the binding hook; four, diamond binding, five, fierce expelling, or expelling breath lock, which, unlike in the Hindu yoga system, you do this in cat pose, on your hands and knees; and six, stand up and shake your whole body including the head. And then you massage your hands. I'll give you a brief description. You can get more details on pages 421-422 of my book.

There isn't a whole lot of magic to this. A lot of these breathing exercises are designed for disarming the tension in the shoulder girdle, which increases pulmonary capacity. Some of the exercises are for softening the abdomen and the tension in there -- and that can actually lead to hyperventilation so you want to be careful. Exercising your diaphragm also increases breathing capacity.

As you can imagine, there are many different ways to increase your pulmonary capacity and to make you breath deeper, more flexible, healthier, more robust. You could try them and find the exercises that suit you. This particular set of six are traditional, handed down as part of the Tibetan tummo practice, inner fire practice. I will describe them briefly.

The first exercise is **vase breathing**. We did that earlier. I like to begin with a big exhale first, then breathe all the way into my belly so it feels like a soft balloon. You may want to nod your head a little bit, and tone your pelvic floor to hold the breath in, feel that your belly is like a balloon, with your diaphragm pressing down a little bit and your pelvic floor pressing up a little bit. Do this gently and just enjoy the squeeze, enjoy the breath in your belly massaging your belly, and before it becomes uncomfortable, let it out. That is one basic vase breathing. Do this two to six times. Then, you move on to the next exercise. Interestingly, all the other five exercises are done conjoined with vase breathing.

The second exercise is the **rotating wheel**. Ideally, you get into the full lotus position, or if you can't do the full lotus, do a half lotus. Then you take each toe with the opposite hand, you cross-hold your toes. You do the vase breathing, you nod and you tone the pelvic floor, and then you rotate your body in this sitting position. You go around a few times clockwise, then counterclockwise. Some teachers may encourage you to move forward and backward. If you sit with Tibetan monks in their monastery you will see them doing this, going back and forth. You can do this to "activate your root chakra" to use the Sanskrit term. You do this to develop a kind of increased blood flow and increased flexibility in your pelvis, since you are toning the pelvic floor muscles. There is a little bit of activation of sexual feedback, mostly because of parasympathetic feedback and afferents in the abdomen and pelvis. You should be feeling a little kind of sweet, a little bit of arousal, like, "Can I have some more of that please?" It should not be like a chore, it should feel quite sensuous, pleasant. You should feel a little bit of a buzz in your pelvic area, which is just part of stirring, like churning the butter.

Then, third is the **binding hook**. You do this in seated posture, preferably in lotus position while holding a vase breath. Your thumbs are inside your fist. You

bring them together to your heart, and then extend them out fully, at the height of the heart. Stretch the arms to the left, as if drawing a hook, slide the right fist on top of the left arm starting at the shoulder, then below and the chest. And then do it on the right arm. Some people consider this to be like shooting an arrow. Finally, tuck the elbows to the sides of your body. And next we are moving like chickens, flapping our bent arms!... I haven't thought about the physics of this exercise, and specifically what it does to your breath capacity other than activate the breath through physical stimulation. The idea is to give yourself a full breath body workout. And for that you need to activate many different parts.

Fourth, the next exercise, is **diamond binding**. I don't actually do this one. It is similar to one that is used in Kundalini. Only here you use the fierce mudra, to chase away demons. I don't know why the practice says that you are chasing away demons now; anyway, you do that mudra by folding your ring and middle finger, and you put your thumb over them. In the Mediterranean world, the same sign means that you have been cuckolded. But that is obviously not the meaning here. So you start with your fingers in that mudra position, then you do vase breathing, holding the breath and letting it out before you are uncomfortable. It is very simple.

There are other ways to do vase breathing. For example, instead of holding the breath and using it to work on your pelvis you hold it higher, around your heart area, to work on your shoulder girdle. In this way you are opening and loosening your shoulder girdle, and moving your chest.

Practicing vase breathing with a focus on the pelvis or the heart area has different effects on the body. You are moving different muscles, you are opening different parts of your musculoskeletal system, you are opening different joints, you are expanding and loosening your breathing capacity in different ways. But



the end effect is basically the same, and that is you are increasing your breathing capacity. The final pathway is all the same, increasing breath capacity while increasing vagal tone. You can think of these as smart vagus exercises. Basically, you are deepening your conscious capacity to relax your nervous system by using your breath.

In the Zen tradition you do this while kneeling, I am not sure why. But, then, you are focusing more on your shoulders ...

Fifth is the **expelling breath lock**. You do this one in cat pose, for some reason. Probably the cat posture, with your behind up, somehow activates your pelvic core muscles. I don't do it in cat pose. You expel with a sound "hah" and when you breathe in you do the vase breathing and hold it in for a bit. Another thing that really works for this is using your core muscles. When you finish, stand up and shake all over.

Sixth, and last, we basically do more shaking. **We shake our whole body** as we do vase breathing. This is like going for a progressive muscle relaxation of the whole body while holding the vase breath. And then you massage your hands. Remember, there is vase breathing with all these exercises. I don't know what kind of feedbacks we are triggering with these exercises. It gets very subtle. But the result is clear: it's calming.

We talked earlier about the "diving reflex." The diving reflex triggers a seemingly paradoxical combination of deep physical relaxation and very high heart-brain arousal. Our bodies are really relaxed, as relaxed as they feel after a good yoga class, or any good workout, or after a sauna, something like that. The body is relaxed but the heart and the brain are alert, we are not sleepy, foggy or fatigued; our heart and brain are getting good blood. That is the unique thing about this particular kind of physiology. It is a kind of quirk of our evolution, that

we can control the breath and we can trigger this particular kind of pattern of blood flow that is profoundly self-protective. I hope I have given you some taste for that.

In my personal experience I find this set of six exercises kind of cumbersome. I do some hatha yoga at home on a regular basis, and I have worked some of these breath exercises into my yoga practice. I don't do all six of them and I don't do any of them two to six times. I do the rotating wheel. I don't think it is so important that we go by the letter of the law here, as if there were some magic in doing it exactly "this way." I think you have to understand what is really meant here, how things work, and then experiment and find what works best for you.

There are different systems that have the same effect. If you do *sudarshan kriya* yoga or you do *kundalini* yoga, you use different postures to generate the same effect. There is more than one way. This is an ancient tradition, probably predating all the hatha yoga postures that evolved sometime between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries, when they were codified.

There are a lot of other hatha postures that I find more opening and more stimulating, and so I use them. If you understand the principle, which is what we are really trying to do here, to relax our body while deepening our vagal tone, and in particular opening and expanding. Be aware that at one end of the breath apparatus are your hips and at the other end are your shoulders, and try to open both of them so that the whole trunk is relaxed, that it's as open and flexible as possible.

The vase breathing is for handling the nervous system. We are trying to open up and relax the anatomy of our chest and abdomen. It's a neurological thing, we are trying to promote the neurological tone that will also naturally relax

us and, eventually, help us kick into this hyper-drive help, kick into this unusual altered state where our body is very relaxed but our heart and our brain are very activated.

Some people ask me if some days we may want to do one breath exercise and others a different one. How do we know which one to do? What is the difference among them? The answer is no, at least in my case. I do the same thing all the time. I have a routine I go through, and it's the same routine all the time. I don't use all of these practices. As I like to say, you need to experience and find those that work best for you. I use some hatha yoga practices that I feel work better. I haven't actually bothered to write up my own list. I hope this gives you at least an idea of what we are going for. Again, there is not a lot written on this, although there is more coming out. I know some Buddhist yoga teachers who teach Vajra Yoga; I don't know to what extent they have done this kind of work. Now we move on to the next fun thing, which is visualizing the channels. The easy way to do this is to go back to the visualization we've discussed. Let's imagine first that we have cleared our energy, we have invoked our mentor and the lineage mentors have all dissolved into the root mentor who is sitting on our crown and we have done all our exercises in that context. In our body of light our breath is doing vase breathing so that the body of light is helping our mind feel more capable -- and light, hopeful and airy. This breathing is doing the same on a somatic basis. The vase breathing is energizing, toning and balancing us.

Then, invoke the mentor: "please bless me, bless me to practice the bliss of inner fire -- or whatever you want in your practice. Then you imagine the mentor melting into the heart chakra and then Vajrasattva -- again, you can visualize this as the male and female melting together, or just the male or just the female, melting into a drop, a rainbow drop that then melts in through your

crown, light as nectar; and as it goes into your crown you are imagining that this is like a fantastic voyage, you're imagining going right into your central channel, through your crown chakra. You are traveling, and you can see the side channels coming down from your nostrils. The right is red, the left is white; the central channel is blue. As you are continue down inside the central channel you look up and see the crown chakra. And so imagine you are seeing your crown chakra ...

Let me describe the chakras to you in more detail, as to how they look in this practice. Just imagine that you are looking down, like down an elevator shaft, but much thinner, as thin as a thick Starbucks straw. For this Fantastic Voyage, you have to miniaturize your sense of subjectivity. And imagine you are going down, a little bit like holding onto an umbrella, back and down the central channel, and you get to the throat chakra. You can see the throat chakra. In this practice the crown chakra has 32 petals, the throat chakra has 16, the heart chakra has eight, the navel chakra has 64. As you go down the central channel, each time you get to a chakra, you stop and look around. All the time you try to imagine that this drop that came in through your crown has your subjectivity in it, fused with the mentor's. And it works like an incredibly powerful searchlight. It's a combination of searchlight/bliss drop, or bliss nectar. And you are a little drunk with this, filled with the sense of wellbeing, right here, it's all happening here ...

When you are at the throat chakra you look up, everything is illuminated by the searchlight, and you can see the central channel going up, all the way up to your crown, where, now, there's a glow where your mentor was. You also look down, and you can see your heart chakra, and then the next story, the next level, is your navel chakra, and then under the navel the two side channels come into the central channel. You also look around from your throat chakra, and you can

see the petals, the 16 lotus petals. We won't go into any more details than that right now.

You move on, you go down from your throat to your heart, you stop at the heart, you see the eight petals at the heart, you look around and feel, "here I am ..." and see the light shining through and out your central channel ... Then you go down to the navel and its 64 petals -- and that's a lot of petals ...

Actually, the chakras are made of the central channel and these sort of arteries that come off it. So when we say eight petals, we really mean eight main arteries that fold into one another, making shapes that look like petals. The petals -- or arteries -- from the crown chakra curve down and those from the throat curve up; the petals of the heart chakra curve down and the ones from the navel curve up.

All these details aren't really that important, except that you want to have the experience that you are actually seeing something, something physical that is actually in your body. And then you are not, not really; at this point you are just creating a virtual network that doesn't actually exist yet. You are creating new paths by paying attention, by using your awareness.

Tsong Khapa says that if this version with chakras, petals and channels is too complicated for you, just focus on the three channels. And feel how you go down the central channel. When you get to each place, each level, you don't have to worry about the exact number of petals. You can think of this in terms of a few petals, a middle amount of petals, or a lot of petals; and a little moon disc in there, about the size of a pea, going down the central channel and stopping at every level, at every major chakra along the channel. Once it's clear you can go right through it, stop at the next chakra, look up and down, and around, then go

down to the heart, then to the navel. But if you want to just focus on the three channels, just focus on the three channels. Start with what feels comfortable.

On the other hand, if you have that kind of active imagination, you can use it as a tool in these practices, and remember that neurons that fire together wire together. The more mental energy you invest in this process, the faster you will be laying down a network that will allow you to tap your bliss, tap into your internal reward system.

At this point we will just have to take it on faith that this will happen. People have been doing this for thousands of years. And we have lab evidence. We have seen groups of people in laboratory studies who do amazing things with their nervous system using tools from practices like this one. So it does something.

If you like imagery, you can imagine the navel chakra in the shape of a red triangle, inside and down the central channel, all made of light, because there is nothing solid in there. It's luminous, it's subtle matter -- it's microstructure, if you want to use a Western term. So, there is this red triangle shape in there, at the navel chakra, also called the emanation chakra.

At the heart there is a white circle, like a moon disc; at the throat there is a red circle, or sphere; and at the crown there is a rainbow-colored triangle. If visualizing that helps you, then visualize it; if it does not help you, don't visualize it.

So, it's like a rainbow at the crown, red like sunset at the throat, a white disc, a full moon disc at the heart, and at the navel a red triangle lying flat.

The Buddhist system, like the Hindu system, uses sound in its practices. But it uses it differently. In the Hindu system sound is more emphasized, for somewhat cosmological reasons. The Vedas were revealed and preserved orally. There is a

whole cosmology in Hindu Yoga about sound which doesn't exist in Buddhist Yoga. Hindus use recitation more than visualization whereas Buddhists use visualization more than recitation.

Now that you have visualized the channels while practicing vase breathing, you can practice being Green Tara, or White Tara. Remember, while holding a vase breath imagine your awareness kind of moving up and then moving down, kind of like taking an elevator -- first floor, second floor, third floor, fourth floor, ... looking around, and going back down again. And then up again ...

In this practice, like in mindfulness, you are trying to park your attention in a particular place. What is different here is that the parking place for your attention is your nervous system, rich with all kinds of neural feedbacks. Stationing your attention is also a way for establishing dendrodendritic connections, or connections between dendrites of different neurons, between your conscious breath control on the one hand, and your motor cortex, your visual cortex, your heart cortex and your somatosensory cortex. You are establishing network linkages that will eventually become the base on which you can build on.

Some people in these traditions say that "the central channel has to be opened." What they mean by that, from our point of view, is that we need to establish a network to control our bliss system consciously. It doesn't actually exist yet. It's not built in. You have to create it, you have to install it. And it is easily installed. It is like landing a plane: you follow those little lights, they help you, they guide you to land, safely. So, if you want to move in this direction, you need the map of where you have to focus your attention. You start inhaling, with the attention on the breath at the nostrils, and follow it all the way down, through the central channel.

The next preliminary is to place syllables on key chakras. In this practice, it is not about placing syllables on five or seven chakras. These are not the Hindu cosmic syllables for the chakras. There are specific syllables for this practice of inner fire. We use four chakras, in pairs of two. You can see this in the diagram on page 424 of my book. At the navel chakra there is the AH, which in this context looks like an upside down exclamation point. It stands in there, like a monolith, four finger-widths below the navel, not exactly at the navel but between the navel and the pelvis.

Then at your heart, at the level of the chest, there is HUM, an upside down HUM; it is sapphire blue. If you don't know what a HUM looks like do as I do, I use exclamation points, they're easier to visualize, and at the heart you visualize it right side up. Tsong Khapa advises to simplify. So you can also use single letters. If you want to use English you can visualize a "U" upside down at the crown; it may be hard, but you can try, take a "U" and just turn it upside down. Or, use a capital A for AH, with red ruby light at the navel. And use an upside-down U, like a bucket pointing down, sapphire blue, at the heart. At your throat there is an OM -- you can use an O there -- that is ruby-red light and pointing up and then at the crown there is a HAM that is white; I suggest you use an H for that if you want to use a single letter. Although it doesn't work as well for an H, because it does not point in either direction, it's the same right-side up or upside down. Anyhow, what you want is two sets of two chakras each, where one is facing down and the other up.

The two syllables AHAM mean "I," the first person pronoun in Sanskrit. And SOHAM means "I am that" which goes back the Upanishads. In our case, AHAM in translation is something like "I am the nectar of blissful openness'." And so this



is what you are trying to make your "I" into, a nectar of blissful openness, that is to be your new "I."

Again, I like to use the exclamation points because they are simple and thin, so they easily fit in the channels. You should use what works best for you. I think the syllables are very important because they are connecting, tying in the syntax module in your brain to the visual cortex. That happens every time we encounter a symbol. The syntax module, the visual cortex, and whatever somatosensory feedbacks are spatially located wherever we place the syllable, working all that, we gradually gain consciousness and imaginative control of the feedbacks in the part of our body where the syllable is. As we do that we are increasing the blood flow there. And we are triggering neurochemical reactions in the neurons that are feeding that part of the body. So, we are doing something, we are stirring something up in our bodies, some energy is moving.

Our next job is to figure out how to channel that energy. Like the Sorcerer's Apprentice in the Disney movie "Fantasia" you can get hurt if you don't know how to channel it and learn to handle it safely. So think of it this way when you actually do the practice: the red triangle at the navel is what you are trying to ignite, it's like fire, the AH looks like a fire, and like a fire it points up. According to tradition you imagine a little crescent moon on top of the letter, and a little drop, a little flaming drop on top of the crescent moon, almost as if the flame is sparking up, a little bit, trying to prime your imagination. Imagine there is this flame, it looks like a candle flame only it's red -- hot red -- and it has a little tip that is sparking up. Then, at the heart it's blue like ice, and pointing down. What are you going to do now? You are setting up a practice in which you are going to melt that ice around the heart chakra.

Then you go to the next chakra, which is the throat chakra, it's got a little flame on top and it is pointing up, and then a white thing which is like snow. And you try to melt that. Then, up there at the top is the big kahuna, up there at the crown, with OM. You visualize melting the crown by igniting your inner fire starting at the navel. And when you succeed in melting the crown, it is said that you "release the flow of nectars."

Again, remember, whatever you are doing to your brain by this kind of stimulation, what you are going for is establishing a new self-stimulating system for kindling the internal reward system, somehow. There are two red areas, at the navel and the throat. At the heart it is white like ice, and at the crown there is a rainbow light.

It is kind of magic, in a way; but then, it works all the same. Remember, if you are going to use exclamation points the exclamation point has to be upside down at the navel and the throat so that the drop and the thrust of it is pointing up; and right side up at the heart and the crown, so that it's like an icicle waiting to melt, and one little drop is melting, dropping down. That is the setup.

Now, what have we done? What has happened inside? We have talked about this, about tapping the vital points of the nervous system using visualization for priming the nervous system, with deep breaths, and placing syllables in strategic places. And we talked about balancing the polar energies in the side channels. We haven't talked about the next step, which is infusing the energies into the central channel; but we will. We are talking also about kindling the inner fire, causing the release flow and spreading of bliss.

To start simply, you can practice imagining that you are inside your body, and you focus on the navel chakra, without the vase breathing, just focusing while breathing, focusing intensely -- just like you focus on the breath when you are

practicing mindfulness of the breath, for example. And then imagine that it starts to heat up, and as it heats up it starts to flame up. You can kindle this inner fire without the vase breathing just like you can light a fire without a bellows. By paying attention, by parking your awareness at the navel chakra it will start to stir things up. It will start to open up to new sensations, starting around the navel area. This is probably related with some endorphin release, similar in a way to drug users' high experiences. If you talk to people who shoot up heroin for example, one of the places they feel the rush first is at their navel. Anyhow, in this case, we can enhance this sensation just with the vase breathing. We bring it in to stir the inner fire, like we bring the bellows to stoke the fire in the fireplace.

And so we're setting the base to light a fire, a strong fire, in our nervous system. We start with the hearth, at the abdomen. We light the fire up in the abdomen; we can light it by just paying attention to it, intensely; and then use a bellows to get it going more strongly, by applying vase breathing. The bellows is where the vase breathing comes in.

The way that the vase breathing actually works in this context is that you imagine that, as you breathe in, air goes inside your nostrils and down through the side channels running down the sides of the central channel. And about four finger-widths under your navel, just under the area where the central channel mysteriously ends and opens, the two side channels curve around, and they get injected up, right under the seat of the navel chakra and right under the seat of the exclamation point of inner fire.

So, you take a deep breath, you imagine the air flowing in, how it fills the side channels, sort of like sausages, they fill up a little. The air continues down, almost down to your navel and then you swallow and it gets pressed further down into your navel and it goes around and up, right under the flame and then you

squeeze the lower doors and imagine that pressing it further; and then you hold the breath as long as it's comfortable, gently. Then, as you release it, you imagine that air rushing past the flame and kindling it, and continuing up the central channel to the crown, turning around, down and out the nostrils.

This visualization that goes with this practice is obviously quite elaborate. I don't encourage anybody here to do all this. You don't have permission to do this. Right now we are learning about this kind of practice in a liberal arts kind of way, I wouldn't encourage you to do this at home. You can do a very simplified version of this by adding to your breathing an awareness of your navel chakra, maybe even add a little exclamation point, like a little ember in there, a coal ember, glowing, warm, and imagine it warming your body. And when you hold the breath, be gentle, but also be precise. They use words like "tapping" and "injecting" because they want you to be as precise as possible, to have pinpoint control over your awareness as you do this. The reason is that the more you repeat the practice in a pinpoint way, the clearer and deeper the connections you are establishing between specific neurons. Also, in order to keep you focused your mind has to be stable, like in a basic concentration practice. We want the mind to be very stable to be able to focus very exactly -- in a way like focusing on the head of a pin.

So, with interest and enthusiasm, bring your attention to the navel chakra and the little ember in the navel chakra, and the short A which is a symbol of the breath when it's held, the short A that stands for the breath that is between the in-breath and the out-breath. And when you bring your focus in there, and you connect that with vase breathing. As you hold the vase breath, think of the little ember, that little warm thing inside you, just sitting there, warming you up.

If the ember starts to send up a current of warmth, be sure that you don't let it just dissipate all over your body, like a wild fire going out. You want to focus it and mentally direct that energy right up the core of your being. It is not a question of focusing on the exact right place following the precise map. The point is that you are opening up inside and building a network to gaining control. You want to have precise, accurate control over these processes, you don't want to let them go wild. The control is key to your guiding this process along, gradually increasing and eventually gaining total control over your mind state and the state of your nervous system.

You can also just imagine that there is a little warmth in there, at your navel chakra, and it's going up a straw. The straw is like a chimney, it goes up and out. You can let it go out the crown if you want. But ideally, when you breathe out the air should go back into your side channels and out your nostrils. Some of you have asked, why is it so important to go slowly, to go through an initiation for practices like this one? One of you came up to me and said, "I have done these practices the Kundalini way." The Tibetans are very conservative about this, much more so than I am. You will not see too many Tibetan lamas teaching this kind of thing, although some do. The reason for being so careful is like this: if you are trying to build a spaceship you must have the infrastructure with all the wiring in place before you start welding all the pieces together. Maybe that is a weird analogy. The point is that the mind has to be really well prepared. You want to cultivate this very pure energy and the mind has to be very pure. And our minds are not very pure. So if you start generating all this intense energy before you learn how to handle it what is going to happen is, it's going to flow into your normally impure afflicted mind -- and it may kind of go haywire, or get dissipated, or it may arouse some conflictive experiences. This is a very serious practice, something like

psychosurgery. We are trying to rewire our nervous system, and not just in any old traditional rewiring way. We are trying to go deep into the core of our brain and gain control over very primal forces that are close to our self-protective instincts, close to our vital rhythms. It will be much safer to do it within a safe crucible that we need to build.

A safe crucible consists of having a bond with a teacher, in a situation where you can be guided as you prepare to be ready with individual control. I don't know each of you intimately, I don't know whether you are ready to do this practice or not. In general, it is really an individual decision. Somebody, like a therapist, has to say, "Yes, you are ready to do this, this is the next thing for you because you have already gotten everything else, all the other bases are covered."

You want to protect your mind when you actually start doing this. It is not so hard to do. Like going to Kundalini Yoga, you are going to have an experience. The question is what is the value of that experience for your overall development as a human being? If your mind isn't exactly ready to receive this energy, harness it and channel it, then it will be less valuable an experience -- and it might actually give you a bad taste in your mouth or stir up some complicated stuff.

I encourage people to start very, very simply, learn about it in a liberal arts way, and then have some experiences of it. I am not saying you shouldn't try; I am saying try this experience, and try that experience, ... that is why I suggest these things. But I wouldn't try the whole practice without the crucible. It's like going to outer space without a space suit, to use an analogy from the movie "Gravity." You want the space suit to go to outer space, to go out on a space walk. You want to be sure that you are well provided with oxygen, and that you are protected.

Let me just say this: part of what you are doing when we start to get the energy into the central channel in this way is you are trying to kindle an experience. Then you coax it to start to wire up a connection in your nervous system, and then you register it and hold it -- that is the next thing. Once you get the energy into your nervous system you try to retain it. And, slowly, you kind of get the feeling that you are melting something. Gradually, you develop this sort of tool, a little bit at a time. The flame goes up to your crown and then the crown starts to melt and you start to have this dripping experience.

What does this mean, really? Basically, you are actually going into a flow. You are getting into a blissful flow that is an intensely focused experience, an experience that can be ramped up by developing a high level of vagal tone and an unusual leveraging of our natural neural feedback loops, by focusing on our abdomen. This practice actually opens the way for triggering neural feedbacks.

You will find in the Nalanda website, on the web page for this course, a number of simple introductory practices that will prepare your mind to do the more complex practices. White Tara or Green Tara will prepare you to do the kind of very technical, full breathing practices. It will prime your nervous system for the more complex practices in a totally safe way.

If you practice the Vajrasattva yoga, look at the Heroic Altruist yoga that we opened with today, it's on the website: The energy is flowing down, then the energy is flowing up, then the energy is going into the heart. That practice prepares you to harness the flow of bliss nectars coming from your nervous system, flowing through your whole body, creating a cascading sense of bliss. And then you draw this blissful energy back up again ... And so you gain extra special control of the bliss flow process. It is not just a matter of letting it happen to you.

The point is to learn to control it. In your practice, you bring it up to the crown, and then from the crown down to the heart and the pelvis, and then up again, into your heart, as you try, slowly, gently, to tap into the heart, its basic vital rhythms and basic awareness centers.

This Heroic Altruist practice is for training your mind, for priming the mind. If you want to do the practice, start with the preliminary practices that are on the class page on the Nalanda website; you will not be wasting your time. They will prepare you to ease your way in. Eventually, you will be ready to get more specific in your practice, and this context will be there to help you, and encourage you.



Chapter Four:Unraveling the Heart Knot: The Unexcelled Yoga of Blissful Openness

We have lots of exciting things to talk about. I think between the material of last chapter and this one we have the real substance of the practice. We have been talking about the way in which, in this system, we get to the heart of this kind of practice: We learn to tap into the potential for blissful energy and chemistry, and then to use that blissful material for healing ourselves, and transforming ourselves all the way to our most subtle level. The Tantra path is said to be the quick path, and what makes it quick is this, that it gets down to the root level, to the visceral level.

The traditional teachings talk about the different subtle states of mind. And the idea here is basically to try to change the mind all the way, from the surface consciousness to the most subtle level. It's like we're all the way at the top and there's a problem at the bottom of the ocean, and there is a little volcano there, or something threatening like that, at the bottom. We are sitting all the way up at the surface, leagues and leagues away, looking down, saying "Now now, calm down, down there..." But the volcano is still acting up, things are blowing up, islands are forming and continents are being split apart, because it's very hard to talk from the top, from the surface all the way down to the bottom of the ocean and have an effect.

Now, suppose that, like a diver, you have a little weight belt of awareness that can take you all the way down to the bottom of the ocean. Down there you can reach the volcano and tap into its energy. And you can harness all that energy, so that instead of erupting and destroying, it is turned into a source of thermal energy -- and with that power you get Utopia. It's like our subtle consciousness is reaching all the way to the source, where the root of all of our mind states lies,

where all our states of mind are generated. If you can get there, you can more easily and quickly transform all the forms that come out of it.

From a simple Western standpoint, if we understand that all habits, that all behavior patterns are reinforced from the source, that source is the internal reward system. This reward system starts at the base of the brainstem. It's not exactly the base, but it's sort of the base of the brain, as opposed to the spinal cord. And that's where awareness begins, that's where the most primal awareness is generated. So imagine that you can reach all the way in there and tinker around. And you have a little wand with you, like Harry Potter. You have a wand with some power, power to break spells, spells like illusions. And that's what we're trying to do.

I want to be very clear with what I say to you, and I want to correct some wrong impression from our last conversation. I said something that sounded like you shouldn't be practicing what we're preaching here. And I want to clarify what I meant. I think that many of you can seriously begin to practice this, especially those of you who have been with the program for a number of years. You are not just starting out anymore, you are not beginners; you're on the journey. Now, at the end of last session, I was talking about a very elaborate and complicated form of breathing practice, where you bring together visualization (of the channels) with breathing (flowing through the side channels), and letters placed here and there along the central channel, and so on. I think that this is not really the best for a beginning practice. It's too complicated and too specific, and it's too technical. On the other hand, simple vase breathing, properly done, can be a good beginning practice; and then you continue, you do it as a gradual exercise, and you can go very deep with it.

According to Western scientific understanding, the function of vase

breathing, biologically speaking, is to deepen vagal tone, and that strengthens the calming part of our nervous system. It's like pulling the whole nervous system down with a big whoosh, down into something much calmer, much more grounded, better rooted. And that's something we all can do. But we need to do this practice very gently. We can all realistically have the confidence that we can do it because we're all mammals, which means that we have the capacity to consciously regulate our breath, our breathing system, and with it we regulate our autonomic nervous system; we can tune it, slowly, a little bit at a time.

In this chapter we will be talking more about this practice, and its origins. But before we get into that conversation, in a very simple way, I want to go over the two basic practices that are used to get centered enough so that we can tap into the central channel and experience a unified field of bliss and openness. Then you will learn to go deeper and deeper, reaching all the way to the heart center in the central channel -- and that is the most primal level, the source, the experience of blissful openness. The two practices are vase breathing, which we've been talking about already; and vajra recitation, or diamond recitation, which I'll introduce today. These are not unique to Tibetan Buddhist tradition; some yoga traditions have the same practices.

Diamond recitation sounds very fancy, doesn't it? But actually it's disarmingly simple. The essence of the diamond recitation practice is that we begin to hear and understand the movement of the air into the lungs as we inhale, then the stillness as we pose, and then the movement of the air out of the lungs as we exhale. We hear those breathing sounds as the three basic seed mantras -- or root mantras, or basic forms -- of Enlightenment: OM in the in-breath, AH in the pause, HUM in the out-breath.

As we practice we try to take the sound of the in-breath as the real OM.

We are not just hearing an OM. It's a mental thing. We're trying to hear that sound, and as we hear it we think, "That's the real OM, we are really taking the world into ourselves ..." , which is part of what OM means. We're experiencing our interconnection with the world and the universe by taking air in; and we're realizing that we're part of that world, that we're one with it, that it's one with us. Then there's AH, which is like the sigh, the sweet sound of the pause in between the in-breath and the out-breath. The AH is the sound of stillness, when the breath is not moving. In AH there is assimilation: we're taking the universe in, we make it ourselves and we become one with it, we become one with the universe. And then comes HUM, the out-breath, which is like a humming. HUM is integration, HUM is when we're giving back. The Dalai Lama has a lovely simple meditation for integration: "Breathing in I think about my own happiness and well-being; breathing out I think about the happiness of all other living beings." Very simple practice, big impact.

Recitation is a word that describes the mantra practice, affirmation practice. This practice is a way to override the normal internal videos, the worst-case, negative narratives that go through our minds saying things like, "Oh people don't like me ... I'm not doing well enough ... " You try to put a mantra in, you bring in an affirmation to displace the negative narratives. As Rick Hanson says, it allows you to override the default bias toward negativity, and focus, register, install a positive thought, an affirmative thought or experience.

According to the tradition, in Hindu chanting, or yoga chanting -- like Mary Reilly Nichols does, she does chanting all the time -- there is one original source for all the chants and all the mantras, and that is OM, also written as AUM. OM, or AUM, is, in the Hindu yoga tradition, divided into the three sounds: OM AH HUM. And why is that? The Buddhists explain, in their usual scientific way, that

it's because as the air comes in the body it sounds like "OM," as we hold the air it sounds like "AH" and as the air goes out it sounds like "HUM." Vajra recitation is mantra recitation. And the mantra is the sound of the breath flowing in and out. So you're taking your verbal mind, and you're sort of immersing it in the natural flow inside you, in the elemental flow of life breath within you. That's the vajra recitation practice.

Now, let us move to vase breathing. There are three different kinds. The one I told you about last time is the most fully developed. There are much simpler forms of vase breathing. The simplest form is breathing without holding the breath in any way whatsoever, and putting your awareness on the pause between the in-breath and out-breath. I think that by paying attention to the pause you're probably increasing its duration; but that's another matter. Here you're not trying to slow your breath, you're just trying to pay attention to the pause. And so that's a vase breath: you breathe in and for a moment you pause and you say mentally, "Here I am, I've just breathed in some beautiful sweet breath, I'm a vessel of life and energy ..." and then you breathe out, naturally, without holding your breath or anything of the sort. And you think about it, you reflect on it: Why is it doing that? It is doing that because "in" and "out" imply movement and in between there is stillness. The AH is stillness, so taking the breath in brings a moment of stillness. That moment of stillness is the moment when reflection is the most possible. And so it is: When we're doing the least is when we can reflect the most, right?

So, on a very simple level, that's the first vase breath.

The second vase breath is you take a nice deep breath into your belly and you hold it, just as it is. This is a very simple breath-holding practice that does not require any of the bells and whistles, no nodding your head or holding in to tone

your pelvic floor, nothing like that. Here you hold your breath just for a second. It's like when you go into the water in a pool or a lake, or any body of water; and then you let the air out. That's a vase breath, a middle vase breath.

The vase breath we talked about earlier is a third vase breath; it is the most powerful, and the most complicated. That is when you hold the breath and "lock the upper door" at the throat, by swallowing and bending your head, and the "lower door" by toning your pelvic floor; and then you add the visualization of the mental channel and the mental recitation, and so on. It can become very complicated. So for now we are staying at the simple level of vase breathing, in and out, slowing down the cycle of breath. In the Ayurvedic and Buddhist medical traditions, there's a teaching that says that we're born with a certain number of breaths, life breaths -- prana -- so that the quicker we breathe, the shorter our lives will be. So, if you want to lengthen your life, slow down and savor each breath, make every breath count. And then you'll be doing more with less. So, that's a very simple kind of understanding.

The physiology here is clear. If you use your breath mindfulness -- or rather, say, your smart vagus -- to gather your awareness on your breath and try to consciously modulate the breath process, you're probably increasing your vagal tone, and you're certainly enhancing the activation of the insula, which sits near the top of your brain. We already know that these are things that slow metabolism, increase the control of local inflammation and promote healing -- and so this breathing strengthens our immune response.

All these things that we are doing with this breathing are probably keeping our telomeres longer. Do you know what telomeres are? Telomeres are the little shoelace tails at the end of the chromosomes that keep them from unraveling. People who practice mindfulness have high vagal tone and their telomeres stay

longer, whereas people who are under high stress have low vagal tone and their telomeres are shorter, which is a sign that their DNA, the very fabric of their life, is unraveling. Shorter telomeres make people more prone to get cancer and other diseases. Also cells die because at a certain point they can't reproduce properly.

So, that's quite useful and interesting information, right? By doing simple vase breathing we slow down our breath and strengthen our telomeres. That's what vase breathing is doing, slowing down our breath, so we can savor each breath. You will experience this when you practice with Mary Reilly Nichols. Mary will come to our retreat and she will teach us to love the breath. "Love your breath. I do." That's what she says and that's what she means, because the energy of love is sweet, it's caring, it's not violent, right? It's tender, and tender means without force. It means careful. It means slow. It means patient. It means present.

So that's vase breathing, in three versions. It's actually not so fancy or complicated. It's something we all should be practicing right now.

In the Tibetan tradition there is a practice called "Inner Fire" -- tummo in Tibetan, or kundalini in Sanskrit. Young monks are taught to do this practice by filling up the belly as they breathe in, and hold the breath for long periods of time. The longer you hold your breath in, the more it changes your metabolism, changing your blood flow to your brain, and, as I explained in an earlier session, shifting you into "diving reflex" mode. One of the things that changes in this process is the internal temperature regulator, and that's why Tummo practitioners can withstand a lot of cold. One of the things they do is sit on the snow, put wet blankets on them, and then check how quickly they can dry them. Some of you may be familiar with Milarepa. Milarepa is a key figure for this teaching, he's one of the lineage holders in the transmission of tummo, which comes from Naropa,

and is related to the Mother Tantras.

Let me tell you about mother tantras. In the Unexcelled Tantras, the advanced Tantras in the Buddhist tradition, there are two basic technologies for tapping into the bliss network. One is called Mother Tantra, one is called Father Tantra. The Mother Tantra focuses on the navel and on generating the inner fire. That inner fire is personified as a female, a fierce goddess who burns all of the afflictions out of the way. In the traditional iconography she's vermillion red, she has a chopper and skull bowl, she drinks the nectar of immortality and infinite love and compassion from her bowl, and she shares it with humanity and all living beings. Her name in Sanskrit is Vajrayogini. A yogini is the feminine form of a yogi; and vajra, which is usually translated as diamond, or thunderbolt, is the scepter that represents the control of the bliss network. In Tibetan the word is dorji. The different translations can get confusing. I like to use the Sanskrit because it's more international. And Sanskrit is actually easier for us Indo-Europeans.

I want to read some lines to you, a few couplets by a Naropa practitioner, an antecedent of Naropa's; this in the Mother Tantras, the Varjayogini Tantras, the Heruka/Chakrasamvara Tantras. His name is Kanhapa or Krishnacharya, the Black Master.

The altruistic spirit lies dormant  
 Like a seed covered with mud  
 Planted in the indestructible drop.  
 Its flower of ecstatic openness  
 Unfolds within the body like a lotus.  
 Space is its water  
 Its soil boundless light  
 Its only root, release  
 The central channel is its stalk  
 The crown syllable its seedpod



With left and right channels  
Sun and moon both stopped  
Through its four nodes and leaves  
Great bliss flows  
Sprouting from the mystic seed avon  
The lotus blossoms  
The lucky hero drinks its bliss-void  
Nectar like a bee.  
From that seed of openness  
Come all five forms of matter,  
Solid, liquid, heat and gas  
All spring from blissful space  
So contemplate earth and water  
Fire, wind and space  
Realize the sacred circle  
All things reality.

Now comes the part that I want to call your attention to:

When the breath neither rises nor falls  
Flows neither in nor out  
But stops motionless  
Kana says the mind has nowhere to travel  
When breath, its spouse, stays home unwavering.  
Just lock the doors where life breath stirs.  
Make mind your lamp in utter dark.  
Your victor's jewel will touch the sky  
Nirvana's one enjoying light.  
What's the use of chance and offerings  
Myths and rituals so mundane?  
Without your boundless passion love,  
How will this body ever awaken?  
Like salt dissolved in water  
The mind in love's embrace  
Tastes equipoise in this moment and forever.

Beautiful poem, right? That's just one of many. Krishnacharya, the Black Master, was a bit of a trouble maker. It was said that he had not realized Enlightenment --

unlike Milarepa, whose poetry is not quite as beautiful, but he did make it to Enlightenment. I wanted to draw your attention here to the fact that by slowing down your in-breath and out-breath you amplify the potential for stillness in your mind. And you can take that literally, in terms of deepening your vagal tone, and, through that, making your basal state of awareness more unshakably calm.

The vagal theory is still controversial. I'm not sure how many people here know or think much of the vagus nerve, or the autonomic nervous system, or the parasympathetic nervous system. Who knows about the parasympathetic nervous system? Let me give you a quick rundown. The traditional way of teaching this is that the autonomic nervous system has two branches: the sympathetic system, which is the fight-or-flight response system; and the parasympathetic system, which is the relax, the love-and-growth response system. And then there is the freeze response of the sympathetic system. The freeze response is like full paralysis, like playing dead. So, how does our nervous system do that? Neurologically, we humans -- and some mammals -- have the power to play dead, to stop the motion within our body, to slow our heart rate to a very low rhythm, slow enough to appear really dead so we can fool predators. This is a neurological capacity we have that we don't understand very well. And we don't use it normally. The same thing might happen when somebody faints. For some reason, the vagal tone spikes and shuts us off.

So, we have the capacity of playing dead. We sort of experience the process of stopping life. It's like getting off the Ferris wheel, stopping life so that we can actually be in the present, expand the moment of the present, expand it infinitely. The idea is you stop the mind and the struggle for survival, you even stop the breath. The famous researcher on the vagal nerve, Stephen Porges, calls it "fearless immobilization." I think he's going to win a Nobel Prize pretty soon,

his work is just amazing ... Anyhow, normally, when we become immobilized through the vagal nerve, through our defensive reactions, we are terrified. What would happen if we could immobilize ourselves at will, without the fear?

According to Porges that is essentially what happens during lovemaking, and during loving caregiving also. And it happens with the presence of a parent that implies security in the face of terror. It's the parent who seems to say, "I'm not going anywhere, I'm not going to leave you, and I'm going to take care of you." Here we are trying to cultivate our capacity for fearless immobilization by strengthening our vagal tone. And we do that by slowing down our breath. That's it, it's that simple.

The vagus nerve has two branches: the newer vagus, or smart vagus; and the older, more primitive vagus, the archaic vagus. The smart vagus deals with the breath and the diaphragm, and is interrelated with other things like hearing, facial expressions and so on.

I think that evolution is pretty conservative, in that when it comes up with a good idea it tends to stick with it. And it uses it over and over again, in many different ways. So, somehow, for whatever reason, evolution hit on a few states of consciousness that have a certain biological reality and similarity between them. I am thinking specifically about orgasm, fearless immobilization, hibernation and estivation, and also REM sleep. The common point between all of these states is that in all of them there is at the same time a sense of physical relaxation and a very heightened heart/brain arousal. I assume that orgasm is the oldest of all, because sexual reproduction had to be reinforced somehow for our survival. It must have something to do with one life form willing to disarm and risk its life by cooperating with another in order to reproduce. On some simple level, it probably started with basic chemistry, and then other things were added on, as

applications of the same basic chemistry, like a protective neurochemistry and biochemistry. But it's probably not that useful right now to go into any more detail other than to just simply say that in this type of practice we're working with nature. All this stuff is natural. It's been with us for a long time, since we became human. Most animals are not wise enough to master their own neurochemistry and understand it. But we are, or we can be, we have the equipment. That's really what yoga does: it trains the nervous system, the mind and the body, for long life; it trains it to thrive in a safe, stable situation. And meditation is a mental version of that.

So much for that. When we originally discussed the sublimation practice, we talked about four points in the process:

**One**, tapping into the central nervous system, which in this model is the bliss network, the central channel. How do we tap into the central channel, whatever that means, exactly? **Two**, "injecting the sun and moon energies." What does that mean? This is about balancing the nervous system. We take energies that are normally polarized, or states of consciousness that are normally oscillating and polarized, and we move them to a deeper place, transitioning them into a deeper and more centered state of mind, and greater stillness, well-being, centeredness, whatever you want to call it. **Three**, "igniting the inner fire," and with it, "melting the spirit of enlightenment," which refer to igniting the kind of neurochemistry that is a blissful chemistry, and then filling the body with it. And **four**, we seal all that bliss in. So we begin by igniting our inner fire; then we channel it, and we kindle it, in such a way that we ultimately get aroused, changing the state of mind-body and shifting into a very blissful neurochemistry. And we want to keep it there. And so we begin to experience the bliss filling our mind and body and flowing through us, in some way. In other words, the first

point is getting in touch with our central nervous system, our bliss network.

**The second point** is investing some energy into it that would normally be going elsewhere, for good energy flow. **The third point** is using that energy flow to kindle, to induce an altered state of consciousness that is bliss-promoting and be filled with that bliss. And then **the fourth point** is using that bliss to free our minds by meditating on emptiness, selflessness -- and, specifically, what that means.

Those are the four basic points. And right now we are sort of in the middle of the third point. We have talked a little bit about the side channels and we did a brief meditation visualizing breathing the energy down the side channels and inserting it into the central channel under the short "a" and then igniting those, like blowing with a bellows on an ember. We're trying to infuse some energy into a more centered and deeper experience of wellbeing -- whatever that means exactly -- somewhere deep inside of us. And when we somehow get the energy in there, we begin to kindle a process of increasing positivity, a more and more intense arousal of positivity, of euphoria, of well-being, or whatever excitement state -- we all get into excitement states -- finally getting into something like a flow state. It is similar to when you see something you really love, you see it and you focus more and more on it, and as you do that it gets more and more exciting. That's what love is about, right? You focus on another person who you're excited to be with, and, for that short while that you are together, you get more and more excited by each other and with each other, the energy goes up and up and up, and then there's a release of bliss chemistry. At this point we're not going into what that is or how it happens. We could have lots of fancy theories. But let's just say that something happens and it keeps the energy and enthusiasm going up and up and up. Now, everything that goes up must come down, and so

eventually there's a descending of bliss, or drops, or whatever you want to call it, from the crown and through the central nervous system. You actually try to stop that flow at the four points so you can appreciate what's happening. It does not go too fast so that you don't notice much of it, which is what happens a lot with normal sexuality: the satisfaction goes by so fast that we almost don't feel it. We don't even have an inkling of the full power, the depth and range of the potential we have for experiencing euphoria, or ecstasy, because we're so busy running, running through life.

If you stop the flow at the four points -- the crown, throat, heart and navel -- you can savor the bliss that comes with each energy, you can feel it filling you, satisfying you, nurturing and disarming your nervous system, until it reaches the pelvic center. Then you bring it back up again. You are not trying to have a release experience here; you're trying to hold on to it for inner release, and not in a normal sexual way where you have this discharge experience and then it's all over -- and you somehow feel let down. But you don't want the letdown. What you want is to get up to the peak and then build from there. Basically you want to savor the bliss, and for that you need to harness it. It's like water power: if you want to get energy out of it you have to build a dam to harness its power; otherwise the water just flows. So here is the real sublimation practice: you bring the energy back up your nervous system. And you cool it off. Instead of getting all carried away and hot by the bliss, you bring it up, as you're cooling it off, and controlling it, pumping it back up the nervous system, like water in an aqueduct, back all the way up to your crown. Part of the purpose of that is to learn to control the flow of bliss. And this is the way that you're building a neural network that allows you to do that.

And so we go through this process, and whether it's on the way down or on

the way up, at a certain point we get to an experience of bliss that is so powerful that we begin to dissolve. The experience of bliss is what sets the stage for dissolution to happen. After the energy is immersed within the central channel, there is the release of nectars with the flow of bliss energy and awareness. We try to retain that within the central channel. This is sort of the corollary of focusing on the "a" syllable, which is where we want to get to the place of stillness. We get to that energy of stillness inside our core network, and we hold it there as long as possible. We want to get used to it, we want it to be our new normal. We retain it and it builds in intensity, so that eventually there's so much bliss that it starts to melt us, and we start to have an experience of dissolution.

You probably get some sense of that when you have a normal orgasm. You get a sense of everything sort of dissolving, and your normal perception of the world temporarily vanishes. The French call orgasm "la petite mort," the little death. You experience a collapse of your normal state of differentiated consciousness, and your mind, your awareness, goes down to much more primal brainstem levels of formless, content-less consciousness. It is like it all just dissolves.

When we go through the Hero's Journey in the third year, we talk about the eight stages of dissolution. Do you remember the eight stage of dissolution? Of the eight stages four are physical and four are mental. First, the physical form, the solid physical matter, dissolves into the bodily fluids. And when it does, the experience is described as a mirage; things don't seem quite so solid anymore. Second, the bodily fluids dissolve into the bodily heat. And you have an experience that's sort of like smoke, black smoke. Third, the bodily heat melts into the breath gases; and we have an experience that's described being like fireflies, or sparks from a flame. And then, at the end of the physical dissolutions the

breath gases melt into the space of mind, the pure mind, or subtle-breath energy. It is like the flame of a candle, a very still flame.

So, you can think of it in this way. We are all gathered around the metaphorical campfire. And the world is sort of shimmering, the way a mirage does. Then you start to see the smoke, then the fireflies, and then you get the flame, the essence of the flame, very still, that is the heat of the flame, it is like light.

Then come the four dissolutions of the mind and the subtle energy that supports it into the primal mind. Here is the dissolution of the subtle mind and energies oriented towards desire, craving, clinging. As they release, the first sign is a luminescence, like a moonlit sky. We feel like a spacious awareness, or a clarity that's said to be like a moonlit sky, an autumn sky pervaded by moonlight. Then we experience what is described as a sunset sky, a twilight sky, with a feeling of warmth and vividness. We let go of the defensive-oriented instincts and states of consciousness. In the third mental dissolution, we experience something like a swoon, like the dark night of the soul. It's a midnight sky experience. We let go of the delusion-oriented instincts, the inwardly-oriented, withdrawal, isolationist instincts. Then we go through the dark night of the soul, which is said to be like an emerging, totally black darkness. Most of us do lose our consciousness when we go through it. We need to practice to stay conscious through that, like the pilots who are trying not to black out when they plunge. So you try not to black out and stay conscious through it. Then, finally, you come into the space that is described as "clear light sky" or "translucent sky." It is like the sky just before dawn, when there's no moonlight, no sunlight, nor darkness. It's something pure. It's the pure clarity of the mind that is not colored by desirous instincts, or defensive instincts, or by instincts of myopia or self-involvement. It's the natural,



most lucid state of mind.

The four states of mind that I just described, in this process of dissolving of the ordinary subtle instinctive patterns of the mind, are also called the "four lucid intuitions." The first one, the one that is like moonlight, is the luminous intuition. The second is the radiance intuition. The third one is the immanence intuition. And then the fourth one is the clear-light intuition -- and that last one is the one we're going for. The clear-light intuition is a sort of bedrock of primal material out of which all life is made. And out of that intuition, that primal awareness, with energy and chemistry, we can produce either Samsara, a life of misery and suffering, or we can produce Nirvana, a life of release, positive transformation and connection.

The clear light is not a bright light. There's a kind of pop association with this light, a belief that it is the same light that people who have a near-death experience refer to, when they say, "I saw a white light." But, literally speaking, that is not the case. The lucidity, the clarity of these intuitions comes out as the instinctive patterns that cause suffering are removed. They are lucid intuitions because they're not colored by instinctive affective states and the chemistry that's driven by stress. When we eliminate the chemistry in the stress-driven instinctive patterns, then the clarity of the mind appears. And it happens in this sequence.

So, that's essentially it, that's how we purge our consciousness of attachment to negative instincts, to afflictive emotions, to the three poisons that reinforce all of our patterns of suffering. It's the kind of stuff on which we build the house of cards of Samsara, OK? So, that's cool! This is how you can begin to get to the bliss, and to have bliss flowing through all of you. It's like you're totally immersing your mind experience into that bliss and the possibility that it unlocks for you. And that is the possibility of letting go of all the traumatic moods and

states of mind, and the instincts that normally color all of our experiences and our consciousness. That's the possibility that bliss offers.

A question that comes up is, is the supply of bliss limited? Can we run out of bliss energy? The answer is essentially no. The Buddhist view is that the only thing that limits bliss energy is the stuff that is not bliss, it's all the stuff that we layer over it. Bliss is our nature, what we're naturally made of. And it's boundless, it's unwavering, unending, inexhaustible. And it's like the fountain of youth, or the fountain of life. But then we pile up on top our normal conditioning, which is all about fear and survival and separateness and boundedness, and all of this is fighting all of that. It's not safe. We feel we need protection, "let's keep this under raps, let's wall that off, I don't want too much bliss because somebody is going to come and eat me ..." It's all of those survival instincts that are like the evolutionary hangover, or the childhood nightmare, instincts that are saying, "No, I can't be happy; no, I have to worry." All that makes bliss feel like a scarce commodity, and so we feel we have to go looking for it outside of ourselves, when actually we are the ultimate source of bliss chemistry in the universe.

So that's getting energy into the central channel and into the central nervous system. And then, what do you do after that? One would think that all the things I just described would be already far out, right? But this is actually just the beginning! We're not even at the middle, not yet; we're just starting. We're describing the state of one to whom a slight degree of wisdom has come, when you have a little bit of the bliss experience.

Now I want to transition from one system, the tummo system, the Naropa system, which is all about the navel, and introduce a larger framework, the *Guhyasamaja* system, the king of Tantras, the original Father Tantra system. Here, for tapping into the central channel there is less emphasis on using the navel, less

emphasis on using vase breathing, and more of an interest and emphasis on using sexual energy, and sublimating sexual energy. The texts say that there are three different ideal points at which you could tap into the bliss nervous system. These points are referred to as "the three tips of the nose." One is literally the tip of the nose, and the other two are the heart and the tip of the sexual organ. In one of the practices you visualize a drop of bliss nectar with the five wisdom energies illuminating at the tip of your nose, or at your sexual organ, or at your heart. The point is to get to the clear light, not just see a little bit of it. We want to go to the very source, what's called the "ultimate objective clear light," the clear light that is "the clear light of death." That's as if we had died and were seeing the white light, only it isn't white. They say that this light lives in the indestructible drop in the heart chakra, the heart complex, within the central channel.

So, the first horizon of practice is to get the energy into your central channel and to experience a kind of vertical flowing in there. The second horizon is that you sort of bring the energy from the two nose tips at the sexual organ and the nose tip into the third nose tip at the heart. And then you try to immerse the energy more and more into the indestructible drop at the heart, which is where the extremely subtle mind and body are. That is described as "the place where the orgasmic bliss lives," or "the place where the ultimate objective clear light lives." In anatomical terms, let's just say that you get into the hypothalamus, and you start to build your capacity to regulate your autonomic nervous system from there. But that's not all. You have to expand your self-regulatory capacity all the way to the root of the brainstem. That's one way to think about it.

You are going deeper, not just to a place where you can have a sense of wellbeing and feel the outer limits of bliss. You want to go to the ultimate innermost sanctum and innermost source of it all. And they say that, while you

can tap into the central channel at any of the three points that I described, you can also get in at the throat point, like when you do dream yoga; and at the navel which is where you do the inner fire yoga. You can tap into the central channel at any one of those points, whatever that means literally. There are practices that allow you to generate deep bliss states at any of those points in your body. But ultimately, to experience the deepest bliss and openness, you have to get to the heart. If you want to experience not just freedom of body or freedom of speech, but you ultimately want to experience freedom of mind, then you have to go and totally immerse your energy and awareness into the indestructible drop at the heart, whatever that means, exactly. You have to have a very deep primal pure release, deeply immersed in your heart.

It is hard to get the awareness into the central channel because the points through which we might access the central channel are knotted off. They are knotted off by the side channels, which are oscillating between stress and fatigue, or fight-flight-or freeze. This oscillation between self-protective energies knots off our abilities and blocks us from going deeper, into a centered state of profound wellbeing.

It is particularly difficult to get in and do this at the heart level, because, they say that at the heart chakra the side channels are knotted around three times, whereas at the other chakras they're knotted around just once, in double knots. In other words, the two side channels go around and form a double knot at all the chakras but the heart chakra, where they form a six-fold knot. That's why we feel tension in the chest sometimes, even though a Western anatomy map may put it in the brainstem. But the two systems are not so far apart. Think of it this way, neurons with cell bodies in the brainstem are just one axon away from the heart,

where they end. The same neuron can begin in the brainstem and end in the heart. There's not such a big distance. We shouldn't get so hung up on that difference.

Anyhow, going back to the practice, we're trying to unravel the heart's six-fold knot. And that's where we have to conjoin the vase breathing with the so-called "diamond recitation." I want to quote you something from Tsong Khapa's Vajramala, the Diamond Rosary:

Vitalizing energy stays in the heart center, born from the specific scepter clan of the immovable one. (Now comes the part about the five different kinds of energies related to each of the different clans of enlightenment. )  
Evacuative energy stays in the genitals, born from the jewel-mind clan.  
Ascending energy stays in the throat with the lotus family nature of infinite light. Metabolic energy stays in the navel lotus with the sword family nature of real success. Pervasive energy stays in all parts with the wheel family actuality of the illuminated.

And from another text:

Breath with the nature of the five wisdoms  
Is the reality of the five elements  
Arising in the form of a lump or a drop  
Imagine it on the tip of your nose  
That five-colored jewel drop  
Is called life energy and control.  
So abiding in the center of the mid brow  
The drop is truly taught as wind energy  
And is open through the reality of affirmation  
The practitioner, upon releasing the heart knot  
Knows the reality of that wind energy.

I'm just giving you here some lovely little snippets so that you get a taste of the practice. The idea is to try to take all of the energies that are normally associated with the peripheral nervous system, with the coarse experience of a body having a

mouth and legs and so on, breathing with the coarse equipment, trying to take all energies in and immerse them within a deeply internal state, like a dream state or a sleep state, in which all of those energies are going deep, to the root of awareness. We navigate within that depth awareness to the source of blissful openness within our nervous system. There we try to establish a direct connection to the source, and from there, as you will see, we learn to purge our minds and recreate our minds in a pure way. And that's where we bring in the vajra recitation, the diamond recitation.

When you start to get into the heart knot, according to this tradition that is the real practice, and vase breathing is extremely helpful, in terms of penetrating the nervous system, going into it, kind of burning a hole in it, or whatever, a point for melting away the cobwebs that normally keep us from accessing it. And when we get to the subtle level of unraveling the heart knot, we need the vajra recitation to bring our focus, not so much on the complicated breath-holding process, but rather on to the simple flow of breath -- in and out of us, within a kind of trance state, and gradually learn how to deepen that flow. If we get to that deep state, we can start to purge our symbolic minds, all the traumatic memories and inner narratives. And then finally, when we get to the indestructible drop, we can purge our minds thoroughly, even of the most basic instincts, of the natural capacity we have to be frightened, or clinging, or aggressive, or self-involved.

So, this is a long journey. Basically, what we're trying to do is go to the source of the bliss capacity within our nervous system, tap into it, and not just have a little taste of it but lots of it, go into it -- as, it is said, a bee drinking nectar. And when we get there the stage is set by creating a space of stillness, by "stopping the door where the life breath stirs," calming the mind and using our potential to instill a deep stillness within ourselves, and then using our mind as a

lamp in that darkness to see what's going on in the subtlest level of our mind. From there we can let go, we can recognize and let go of all the bad trips that come up through our past conditioning, our childhood, or through our instinctive conditioning, and that get us all worried and feed our insecurities. If we let go of them all and the light dawns we won't need to pay attention to all of the traumas, all of the negative instincts we have been carrying. We can slowly slip, dive and dip deeper and deeper into a pure bliss state. At this stage we have learned and we have the scepter, which is like a magic wand, we can magically recreate ourselves out of pure bliss and openness, instead of out of the three poisons.

So, now we're at the point of uniting bliss and voidness. Right now this all sounds like science fiction, or fantasy, something like that. How could you imagine ever doing this weird internal journey into the center of your heart and having all these amazing experiences? But the reality is that after you learn to master this practice, and it becomes kind of second nature for you, or at least it becomes accessible, you will start to notice things differently. You start noticing things with a deeply still mind, a clear, blissful and open mind. You start noticing things at their roots, you notice subtle patterns, like your patterns of thinking in terms of worst-case scenarios, or instinctive negativity, and you can stop them before they appear to your mind, blown-up as a rage, or panic, or a bad trip.

A few years back, early on in the program, we went through Tashi Tsering's book on the mind and mental factors; the book is the third volume of the series *Buddhist Psychology: The Foundations of Buddhist Thought*. And he did a particularly peculiar Tibetan thing: he divided the mind and mental factors into three zones. Why did he do that? Because he was trained as a Tantric psychologist, and in the Tantras there are always three zones: the coarse and rather superficial mind, the subtle mind, and the extremely subtle mind. And

everything begins at the extremely subtle mind. So, if you can catch all the afflictive emotions and all that confused distorted thinking from there, you can really cut them off at their root, at the subtlest level of misperception and reactive habits. That's where in this practice you have an opportunity to experience emptiness.

So you meditate on selflessness, or emptiness, which is really the selflessness of the body, the selflessness of breath. What does that mean? It means that our breath is not really, intrinsically, the breath of our neurotic self; our breath is more like a sort of pure life energy. And our body is not that neurotic body that feels so much like "me." Our body and mind are actually vessels of pure bliss and awareness. When we see that, meditating on emptiness galvanizes and seals these bliss experiences with the stamp of emptiness, or openness. And that really is fully disarming: it disengages our minds from the negative aspects of life that we normally get stuck on. It shows us that there's a boundless potential for us to be totally open, totally connected, blissfully connected with all things. That is really what happens.

Traditionally, meditating on emptiness in this practice is said to depend on the alignment of the different levels of emptiness insight with the different degrees of bliss-void intuition that are tapped by the inner fire, and also with the four luminances that come with each of the four mental dissolutions. There are four blisses here: bliss, sublime bliss, supreme bliss, and organic, or innate, bliss. And each bliss comes with a degree of voidness, or openness. So there are four levels of bliss and openness. The way I know them is bliss/void, sublime bliss/extreme void, supreme bliss/ultimate void, and organic bliss/complete void. And the point is that bliss is used as a light and a support for the luminous intuition. That luminous intuition is then experienced as a voidness or openness, and you



experience the potential of your mind, your body and nervous system to be free of afflictions, all afflictions.

One of you asked, does anyone ever practice this sort of thing? Well, why is the Dalai Lama so far out? There are a lot of Tibetan practitioners, advanced practitioners. These Tibetans have a very sweet, cheerful way of being, but without being dull. They're sharp, they're cheerful, free, and very nimble. And it's not like everybody who practices these practices realizes high levels of enlightenment. Tsong Khapa himself was said not to have realized the level of the ultimate objective clear light in his lifetime, because that would have required him to have a partner, and he didn't want to leave his monastic vow. So, the other way to do it, without using sex, is using your physiology to help you enhance your altered states of consciousness. You can use death if you prefer, you can have a near-death experience. So you can choose: sex or death! And then there's Kalachakra. The *Kalachakra* system is for those of us who don't want to choose either of these two. The *Kalachakra* system says you can actually do this through an internal yoga process. There are differences of opinion about this, but the point is that there are hundreds of beings, maybe thousands, who have been recognized as having gone this far, within the tradition. But it's not so easy. It's not like mindfulness. It's a little more challenging than that.

When we get to these kinds of higher stages of practice, all kinds of Buddhist practitioners, like Theravada practitioners, and Tibetan Dzogchen practitioners, get along well, because their practices actually are not so different, once you're past all the bells and whistles. It's like you are driving on a highway, and you go past a very complicated festival town – that's the Tibetan approach; it is like DisneyWorld, totally complicated. Then you're out in the desert, and there you get together with the Zen practitioners and the Dzogchen practitioners,

whose awareness is totally immersed in the simple natural rhythms of the body. But what is really different about this kind of practice, as opposed to, say, just ordinary meditation, even the very deepest concentration in ordinary meditation, is that the level of bliss is so much greater when we tap into the central nervous system, which is the fundamental source of bliss awareness. Tsong Khapa insists that you'll get a special kick out of this practice, because by taking the natural power of your body's altered states and chemistry you can cook up your own very focused enhancer for what otherwise would be just a normal meditation process.

And what about all of our mystics, like St. Teresa, and St. John of the Cross, with his dark night of the soul? Mysticism like this swept across Europe and Asia and was influenced by many cultures and religions, like the Sufis, Jewish Kabbalah and Christian mysticism. There were mystics cropping up all over the place. Many were burned at the stake. But in India they were tolerated. -- and not just tolerated, sometimes they became culture heroes, pop heroes. And the Buddhist tradition turned this whole practice and experience into a science. Anyhow, the point is, we have this natural potential. Once we start to work on it, it's not really that impossible to do. And all of these things that I'm telling you about are like signs, signs at every little step along the way so you can check where you are. There are very clear descriptions about what's going to happen to your breath, what's going to be in your mind, what's not going to be in your mind, what's going to happen to your physical body, your sensations, and so on. It is an objective science from their point of view. Think about this, if we all had taken the courses on that objective science, if we all got trained in elementary school, or in high school, along with sex ed or whatever, we might be producing many more mystics, maybe one in a hundred, or one in 10, or maybe all of us ... We'll see how many of us here get that far.

So, we're having all these blissful experiences where everything dissolves: "I'm overcoming my instincts for clinging and aggression and confusion ..." This is a slow experiential process. It's gradual. It's not sudden Enlightenment. Tsong Khapa says that even at the point where you're beginning to reach what is called the "mind objective," or the freedom of body state, or the freedom of speech and freedom of mind states, even at those high levels of realization, you do not see everything as bliss and emptiness in between meditations. Things return to the way they normally appear. And so Tsong Khapa says,

During the post meditational periods, one must consciously cultivate mindfulness of the experience of ecstasy and emptiness, and stamp all objects and events that appear and occur with the seal of this ecstasy and emptiness. This application causes a special ecstasy to be ignited, which one should foster." [page 438 in "Sustainable Happiness"]

So you still have to make an effort at this point. You're not fully enlightened yet. You can see why this tradition is very attractive to those of us who have analytical minds. We're all fairly highly educated, we've all been trained in critical thinking, unlike in the old days. And so isn't it attractive to hear that even high states like this are considered to be just intermediate, somewhere along the way, there's more, there always seems to be more ... This tradition sets the bar very high.

Anyway, let me read this to you while we still have a few minutes. This is from Atisha, the great abbot of Nalanda University who was one of the people who took the Gradual Path teachings to Tibet, in the 11th Century. Atisha was a yogi and a secret Yamantaka practitioner. By the way, did I mention to you that Gelek Rinpoche is coming in March and he is giving a Yamantaka initiation at Jewel Heart? Gelek Rinpoche is the spiritual director of Jewel Heart International.

He is a Tibetan trained Lama of a recognized incarnation, so they call him Rimpoche. Like the Dalai Lama he was recognized when he was just a boy. He's especially good for us because he's no longer a monk, and he understands the West and Western technology. Just by looking at him you can see that he is sweet, and he has a great sense of humor. And his English is good, you can understand what he's saying perfectly. He's sort of a paradox, because he's really an old-world Tibetan, but he's also an American kind of guy. We like working with him, He's the teacher of Alan Ginsburg, Paul Simon, and other people like that ... For those of you who want to get a traditional blessing and maybe even pick up a few ideas, this is a great opportunity.

Now, I want to read to you a few passages from a poem by Atisha. They are on pages 439 - 441 of *Sustainable Happiness*. The translation is by Bob Thurman.

Conquer the process of sun and moon --  
Otherwise in the door of the great sky  
The wind-sphere will not enter.  
By the yoga of opening and closing (the lower doors),  
You should compel the fierce goddess (of inner fire),  
The five Buddha (systems) and four goddess (elements)–  
You should burn them again and again.  
The ten directions' heroes and practitioners  
Gather and dissolve into the crown chakra.  
The four drops in the four lotuses  
Will generate the sixteen blisses.  
The self-luminous wisdom dwells  
In the center of the formful lotus navel.  
When Enlightenment dwells in the jewel tip,  
You gain Nirvana like a butter lamp.  
When you win Nirvana there  
In the tip of the jewel,  
The host of notions such as self and other,  
I no longer see them at all.

When the eclipse seizes sun and moon,  
[which means, when you move the energies from the side channels into  
the central channel, that is like an eclipse.]  
The mind and wind-sphere do not proceed.  
When all notions fully dissolve  
The mind becomes pure experience in the (reality) realm.

And then:

The energy gone into the heart-center lotus,  
In the likeness of a white HUM letter –  
You should visualize and be entranced with that,  
And you will not be bound by objects.  
The energy (normally) moving up into the life-cycle  
Will press downwards into Nirvana.  
And a totally non-local Nirvana  
Dwells in the heart center lotus' anthers.

And finally, just one more passage. This one is about the breath. Remember, we went through the three phases of the breath: in-breath, pause, out-breath. When you do the three phases of the breath, if you get to the point of being in a kind of real blissful flow, and you're totally immersed, at the deepest heart level, your breath will naturally slow, and you'll stop noticing the distinction between the in-breath, the pause, and the out-breath. And so Tsong Khapa cites this passage, which I am reading from page 441 of "Sustainable Happiness":

By (such a) sign (breath-)reality stays, (all) three,  
[that is breathing-in, pausing, breathing-out]  
The nature of natural recitation;  
Nameless and inexpressible,  
This is the supreme enlightenment spirit.  
Those very three become one,  
And neither go nor come.

So, for now we should stop here. I've given you some things to think about, something to chew on, right? And there's more, there's always more.

Chapter Five:Empowering Your Inner Mammal: How One Smart Nerve Tames the Beast

In this chapter, we're going to talk about the inner mammal, about liberating and empowering our inner mammal. And we will talk about the smart vagal nerve again; we've talked about it already, but this will be more than just a review. We will be looking at this practice from the point of view of Western science, and in particular neuroscience and neuropsychology, because these fields are speaking to our sense of what we really are, and what our real possibilities are, whereas the Buddhist imagery can feel exotic to us Westerners, and sometimes it's hard for us to know what to do with it. We are past the midpoint in our program now, it's time to try to get more clarity.

Someone asked a very good question about the guru: Is it an external guru, a particular guru that you should go to, or an internal guru? That is a challenging question, especially for us Westerners. There is a culture clash here, between two different views. On the one hand there is the very old traditional Asian culture, with its rituals and forms and hierarchy; and then there's our modern culture, an egalitarian, secular, pragmatic, straightforward culture that tends to want only the active ingredient. The question of whether the guru is internal or external is at the heart of the practices we have been talking about. The guru/student relationship is about bonding — bonding with the practice, bonding with the tradition, and bonding with the gurus, the mentors, as well. Maybe a simple way to answer this question is that the guru is external, the guru is also internal, the guru is both internal and external. The guru is whatever inspires you to see your potential beyond your ordinary self, to be larger, to be more. Although for some people that's not the case, it's different.

Within the tradition of this esoteric practice, the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, there are said to be four different levels of practice, often translated as Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra. The most introductory level, the one that people often want when they have the least sense of self, or self confidence, is to see the mentor as external. In the Buddhist view that's the position of people who can't see themselves as having that kind of quality, that kind of potential, and therefore can only really encounter it in the presence of another person. That would be more like what we would call a religious kind of relationship. But that is considered to be the entry level. It's not really recommended, and it's not anything like the favorite position. It's just where we are sometimes, when we can only see our bad side and we need to be rescued from ourselves.

The next entry point, the second level, is Performance Tantra. This is when you start to be able to identify, to see that "Well, this other being is actually a human being, and he is a mentor; and I am a human being too, maybe I can be like him." Another example is the priest, or rabbi, or imam, or whatever the case might be, that role comes with a commitment, and with a clear sense of having a personal connection with God, or whatever deity may be that makes one feel connected to the ultimate liberation of mind, of mind for purity. At that level you are confident enough to open up more, take the horse's blinders off a bit, like a teenager does to become more independent from the parents, not feeling totally good and comfortable about being autonomous yet.



The third level is Yoga Tantra. At this point the god or the goddess are within you. In a way, our modern culture is a practice of Yoga Tantra, because we've killed God, and we've decided that "my ego" or "me" is the closest thing to God. But maybe I have some genius, or a spark of something, in me, that is bigger than my ego, my "me ...". We're all sort of tied up in knots with our own self, in a kind of nightmare, or hangover. But in the Buddhist view that's framed in a positive way: We are like the mystic in terms of what we're looking for. Primarily, we're searching for an inner guru, we are seeking that full potential within us. And that's already close to the highest level. But getting there is a process. It's like a set of stairs, we're going up a staircase that leads to the guru within us. Buddhism is not trying to encourage dependence, or regression, like Freud would fear, or like we as moderns fear, "Everybody's into manipulation, everybody wants me to join their club, so watch out, be on guard." Here it's rather the opposite. The club here is offering to promote you to the point where you're "IT."

And here initiation becomes relevant. What is the purpose of the initiation? Interestingly, all Buddhist initiation rituals are modeled on the Indian rites of kingship, where the prince or the princess are consecrated, or anointed, as crown prince or princess, so as to be recognized as the next ruler. That is what happens when you get an initiation. So, as you are getting into a relationship with a guru, you're thinking, "the guru is so important ..." And, hopefully, at the same time, the guru is thinking about you: "This is the next Buddha, I recognize you, you're the next Buddha." This is Yoga Tantra. We start to be able to see ourselves as having that potential. You feel like, "Somewhere in me, underneath all the neuroses and beyond all the evolutionary instincts, freak-outs, meltdowns and so on, there's this pure essence within me, and I want to connect with it."

Then, at the fourth level, Highest Yoga Tantra, we can see the pure essence that rests within ourselves, and we can also see it in other people. When we see it in others, they become our guru. And when we see it in ourselves, that's our guru also.

Now, how do you go about finding somebody who will act as your guru? Buddhism comes from a nomadic tradition with an egalitarian culture. Nobody decides for you who your guru is; you do. So, if somebody inspires a hope or sparks a potential in you, that's your guru, go for it, give it a try. It's like when you were young and someone inspired you, the person in the big photo or poster you had near your bed. Even the most trouble-making adolescents, the most rebellious, self-asserting adolescents can find a spark of promise or potential in somebody who inspires them. For me it was Burt Lancaster in "Geronimo." I thought, "Wow, is he cool or what ... I want to be like that!" When you get that kind of feeling that's your guru. As they say in the 12-step program, you find somebody who has "what I want." It's that kind of feeling. It's not "Oh, you're better than I am ..." As Gelek Rinpoche, one of my closest Tibetan teachers, says, you feel like "I want that!" That's what establishes the relationship of the student to the teacher, "You are what I want." That's obviously a very personal relationship. Maybe it is like picking a therapist, in terms of finding somebody who you feel comfortable with. And reason doesn't really enter into the choice that much. It's a very intuitive thing, like "Around this person, I have a feeling of possibility within me that otherwise it's hard for me to feel and tap into, that I'm not so sure of. But around this person somehow I feel good, I feel more confident." That's your guru, whoever that is. Just be open to the feeling. For Naropa it was the old woman who cleaned and swept his office when he was dean of Nalanda University. There she was, sweeping away. Everybody thought she

was just a sweeper. But somehow he saw something in her. And he asked her, "Do you think I'm doing OK? Do you think I'm on the right track? Do you think I'm getting enlightened?" And she said, "I don't think so." She told him to go to see a woman, who taught him the Tantra. And so he went, he left on her advice, he gave up his position as chancellor of Nalanda University just like that! He dropped out and he got into a whole new thing because of his cleaning lady. So, go figure ... You have to be open to the vagaries of the world. We can never be sure that we know who is who, we don't know what is really going on inside other people.

I mentioned to you that there is a psychological essence to this whole tradition, an essence that is quite empowering and ennobling. If it doesn't feel that way then something is wrong, something is off, whether it's with the teacher or with your relationship with the teacher, or with the community. This kind of practice should feel empowering and ennobling. And that happens because you open up and become a larger person, and you are ready to do what you need to do. It's like you become your own therapist.

In the past, my spiritual friend and mentor Gelek Rimpoche has visited the Four Year Program to give initiation into Tantric practices such as Medicine Buddha, White Tara, or even the fierce form of Manjushri, Yamantaka. This is not something to be taken lightly. It is for those of you who have been around practicing for a while. There are lots of initiations that are more suited for you if you do not feel ready for this, like Tara, White Tara. Gelek Rimpoche gave that initiation to some of you last year. But Yamantaka is not sweet, like Tara is. Yamantaka is the bull-headed deity. Yamantaka literally means the one who slays death, and death is Yama. Bob Thurman calls him "The Death Terminator." And

what does that mean? He is the terminator of death, of fear of death, of stress and trauma that feel so threatening to us. The practice that Yamantaka embodies is the ultimate way to disarm, to tame and neutralize our fear of death and everything that comes with it. It is really the ultimate disarmament practice. The icon of the bull comes from the very early days of human history, when the lifestyle was transitioning from nomadic herding to agriculture, and the scariest thing around was the bull. That is where the tradition of bullfights and the Matador as hero comes from in the Latin cultures. The same is found in the Mythraic religious tradition, the Roman legions had this practice of fighting the bull as well. The idea is that if you can conquer your fear of the most fearsome animal on a physical level, then you've conquered fear, you've overcome the fear of death. And that's what Yamantaka represents. This is the practice of mastering the defensive and self-protective energies. And, again, it's not something to be taken lightly. It's a serious teaching about the fierce form of Manjushri, or Sheer Brilliance, the wisdom deity. We have talked about him and practiced with him. There is a question about purification and how we experience the karma we've created. Here the law of cause-and-effect is key. Within the Buddhist scientific tradition there are different types of causality. That may not be so obvious, but it is the way I read the Abidharma. First, there's physical causality, which is like the law of cause-and-effect in the context of physics' law of energy conservation. Then there's biological causality, and in this case the law of cause-and-effect is based on life, on gradual development and growth, and reproduction. There is also karmic causality, which I understand as a psychological causality, about the ordinary course of human life and the habits we develop, about how our activities create who we become, because we become what we do. Then, finally, there is dharma causality, or dharmic causality. This is the causality of healing and transformation,

including purification. We can see it as the process of healing and transforming old patterns, a process that is difficult, that takes time. Wouldn't it be nice if it were easy? But we know that it's not that easy. But that's not the main point here. The good news is that you can purge those negativities from your mind. And the healing and transformation accelerate the more we practice and the more we bring consciousness to bear on old patterns. All this indicates something very optimistic about our learning potential. We cannot totally get out of our responsibility for our karma, but we can actually purify it, we don't have to go through the negative effects of the karma for every single bad thing that we've ever done, or that our genes have ever done. Let's talk through an example so we can see how this causality might work when we want to purify bad habits. Let's say you have developed a bad habit, you have become an alcoholic. And so you've been neglecting yourself, you stopped caring for yourself, you are injuring your health, you may have harmed a few relationships, you may have incurred many debts, ... In short, you may have done all sorts of destructive things. But at one point you want to change that, at one point you see that you cannot go on with your way of being. You need a real transformation, at a deep level of your being. And so you stop drinking, you find a way to do that. What follows? First of all, you no longer suffer the consequences of future drinking. And you also have the healing consequence of changing your perspective on all the bad things you did before. Whereas before you might not have noticed what you did and how it hurt you and other people, and you might not have made amends with those you hurt, or you might not try to minimize the damage you may have caused, to yourself or others, now you notice. And you know better. Now you can set yourself straight, you can start to make amends and transform the consequences of things that you've done. And you will find at times that you can't transform everything.

Sometimes you're just going to have to bite the bullet, let it pass, let it go. But from now on you feel you could take better care of your health, you could go make amends with the people you've harmed, you could pay off your old debts. And so, to some extent, through a single transformation of consciousness, you can burn off a whole lot of negative karma. It's just a very simple real world example.

For another real-life example, let's say that you're having a fight with your loved one, and all the bad things that you've ever thought or felt about him, or her, and he has ever thought or felt about you, come to bear in that moment. Everything seems hopeless and terrible. And you're stuck there ... But then, somehow, channels shift and you start trying to see things from his point of view a little bit more, and he tries to see things more from yours. At this point you become a bit more constructive and kind with the way you say things, and he becomes a little bit more constructive and kind and he says things a little bit more constructively or kindly. And soon enough you get over that rut. The negativity just doesn't seem so powerful anymore, and you get access to all of the wonderful feelings that had seemed to be lost. In fact, you may be able to do some really profound healing, you may get over patterns that you've been stuck in and find yourself in a much better place than you had thought was possible.

And remember visualization. The purpose of this visualization practice is to use it as a flight simulator, and to plant the seeds, to suggest to our unconscious mind that something is possible, that something is going to happen. It's like a preview of coming attractions, or advertising. It's suggesting that something is going to happen. Your unconscious has a bit of a tendency to believe when you're envisioning things. And that's really important, because no other part of the brain

agrees, and we need optimism to make change happen . All the other parts of the brain are saying, "No, it's not going to happen, life's hard and it's going to continue that way, so I have to keep my armor, I have to keep my stockpiles of defensiveness, hurt and anger, just in case, for the next war..." We need some really positive vision, some positive advertising to counteract all that -- and that's part of what visualization does, visualization with the flight simulator. And it also plants seeds for more advanced practices.

Let me give you an example. We talked earlier about the five stages of the Perfection Stage. I briefly alluded to all five of them, but I focused on the first three that are part of the so-called "Ordinary Perfection Stage," which is somewhat of a paradoxical name ... Anyhow, the three stages are freedom of body, freedom of speech, and freedom of mind. At this point we are no longer in the theoretical part of the practice. With freedom of body your actual relationship with your physical body and the physical instinctive reactivities that are attached to a defensive, negative and limited image of yourself have been transformed. You finally break free of the old conditioning, you no longer see yourself as a victim, or as a helpless, powerless, little creature that has to be armed and appear dangerous. With freedom of the body we sort of get the first flow, like planting the seeds for the freedom of body practice. Then comes the freedom of speech, for transforming the normal inner tapes that keep us stuck between Scylla and Charybdis, between a rock and a hard place, moving between this and that, oscillating between energies like "Gee, I can't wait until this happens" or "I'm really afraid that this is going to happen." That is reactive energy that we need to transform. And then, finally, after that, comes freedom of mind.

These three stages can all be mapped on our nervous system very precisely. So, for example, only when we can purify our body image can we really begin to safely get all of our energies into the central channel. And it is only when we can bring the energies from the central channel into the heart that we can we really begin to practice freedom of speech for purifying our speech and symbolic processing energies. And then only when you get all the energies fully immersed into the indestructible drop at the heart can we realize freedom of mind. Again, whatever that means in terms of Western or biology, the language here is still inadequate.

It is important to at least have the general conviction that these things might be real and possible, that these things could be mapped on our real nervous system. What if I were to say to you that you can get rid of all of your negative mood states and negative speech, that is if you can gain control over all the mental functions in your limbic system and all the reactivity of your amygdala; that you can have total blissful equanimity;; that you can reach freedom of mind, you can be free of any mind state that isn't blissful, ... you can do all that if you have conscious self-regulation of your ventral tegmentum and your median forebrain bundle, where the internal reward system lives? Now, that doesn't sound very easy, right? (51:26). And that's essentially the same according to this Buddhist tradition. It says that it is hard, it's not easy. It's not enough to go "poof!" on the magician's smoke. On the other hand, what our Western map of the nervous system is saying, what that image is saying, is that you have the wiring, you have the potential to do that with the right methods and enough practice over a long enough period of time. You can learn to do that if you want to do that, you're human. And so it is more like taking the middle way, it's not easy peasy and it's not pie in the sky either.



In Christianity there is something similar. Jesus died for your sins, and by loving him or imitating him or becoming one with him you can merge with the Holy Spirit, which is the pure love energy that pervades all things. Christianity, I think, is actually fairly optimistic, but not as much as Buddhism. If you go to church and the priest says, "Jesus died for your sins and the best you can do now is be thankful, be grateful to Jesus," from the point of view of the Tantras, I would say that's like Action Tantra: "Jesus did it and if I love Jesus maybe some of his special qualities are going to rub off on me." And that's not all that Christianity has to offer. Christianity has many other levels for people to get closer to Jesus, like the mystics did, or even a good ordinary priest does, a monk or a nun, they can all experience some kind of identification, and even some kind of mystic union, or whatever you want to call this experience -- although I suppose if you came out saying, "I'm Christ," you might get fried.

Some people may think that there is a similarity between Buddhism and Christianity from birth, with the original sin. In the Buddhist tradition, they believe that because we have been conditioned, because we have been habituated to self-grasping and self-protectiveness through infinite lifetimes from beginningless time, it's very hard for us to be enlightened. But this is not like the original sin, this is simply that you made these habits and now you're stuck, stuck with them until you purify them.

The one great difference between Buddhism and Christianity is that in Buddhism there really is an empowering sense that does not come from God's approval or disapproval, or from anyone's judgment of you, and your fundamental nature is good. I think that in any good religious tradition that's the fundamental position. But maybe that is not the feeling that you get in some churches, in

some Catholic schools and places of worship. In any case, it's important to have the ennobling sense that Christ died for your sins. I believe that it's important to ennoble, and that's one of the things that the Buddhist tradition is good at, it tends to ennoble people. Although the Hindu traditions like to tease Buddhists because they say they're so dour, that they believe everything is dukkha – everything is suffering, : life is suffering. They make it sound like Buddhists are complainers and pessimists, while the Hindus are into bliss and transformation. These things are kind of interesting...

In my view there is a very big difference between the approaches in the East and West. I don't regret that in the West we have modernized science and we've reformed our cosmology. I do regret that our religious traditions are not more open to dialogue with modern science, and I do regret that our scientific traditions are not more open to dialogue with our religious traditions. I keep on hoping for a real conversation, a real dialogue, with both sides contributing to it, because there is wisdom in both.

In "Sustainable Happiness" I discuss the science part of the practice at much greater length, for those of you who want to dig in further. And I talk about some research on Sudharshan Kriya Yoga, or SKY. SKY uses the deep breathing practices that we have been talking about. It comes from the Hindu tradition, and it's teachable to lay people. Some teachers have been teaching SKY to victims in disaster areas, and to people who suffer from depression. And these advanced breathing skills really help them overcome their traumas. There are indications that SKY may be as effective as shock treatment, more effective than antidepressants for depression, and more effective than psychotherapy for trauma. So, that's interesting ...

This makes sense, that if you go tinkering around with the fundamental nerves that regulate the autonomic nervous system that you will be doing something that is chemically significant. Right? One of the best things about this practice is, as one of you said to me on the way in, "I love all this breathing stuff!" When you use these more advanced tools you are more likely to transform the very primal neurochemical balance in your nervous system more quickly. So, if you're in a rush to feel better, or to become enlightened, this might be a practice and an attractive system for you.

My friend Dick Brown and his wife Patricia Gerbark have done research on SKY; they have written some beautiful papers on it. By monitoring the blood pressure and blood chemistry the researchers could see and measure the responses to changes with this practice. Their research shows that SKY balances the autonomic nervous system, and so the stress response system. And that's just for starters. It also decreases chemo-reflex sensitivity. In other words, when we breathe differently, like going from shallow breathing to deep breathing, our blood chemistry changes slightly. We get a little acidic and we start to panic, or to feel threatened, unsafe -- and we react. Maybe the heart starts racing, stuff like that. But we also can have a baroreceptor reflex response, or baroreflex response, which means that our blood pressure goes up or down as needed. Our system finds a way to restore balance, and this reflex improves both responses, up or down. So you see how our deep breathing practices can have an impact at a very basic bodily regulation level.

How does this work? With deep breathing we get to parasympathetic dominance. We talked about this when we went over the autonomic nervous system, with its sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. Changing the

dominance here means that instead of having the sympathetic fight-or-flight system leading, it's the vagal nervous system that does. The shift to parasympathetic dominance happens by stimulating the vagus nervous system. And we can do that with these deep breathing practices.

The name of the vagus nerve comes from the Latin "vag" which means wondering, or straying. And so the vagus comes out of the brainstem, and then it branches like a net and goes through all the organs in your body. And the interesting thing is that when we became mammals we developed a new form of the vagus nerve, the new vagus, or the smart vagus, that has myelin sheaths, and that makes breathing something that we can voluntarily control. This is a whole new branch of the vagus, with a whole new nucleus in the brainstem, specialized and custom-built for this particular smart vagus nerve. And that goes up, and it connects up and down. Essentially, there are a whole bunch of cranial nerves that come out of the brainstem, and they serve the ears, the face, the pharynx, the eyes and the breath. Interestingly, all of these other cranial nerves co-evolved with the smart vagus, so that they all actually cross and react and influence the vagal tone.

Somebody at a recent talk asked me about mantra. How does mantra work? One of the reasons mantra works is that soothing voices or sounds stimulate the vagal nervous system. When we hear a certain kind of sound, the message goes over to the smart vagus and says "This is friendly, you can calm down." The same thing happens when we're breathing deeply: "Everything's OK, because if I can breathe consciously things must be pretty OK." The same happens with facial expressions. When I'm smiling I'm also sending calming messages down, to the brainstem, calming the vagal nerve, and the vagal nerve

then calms the heart and slows the rhythm of the breath. The theory behind this comes from Stephen Porges, *Mr. Vagal Nerve*. Let me read to you a brief description of his theory, which is on pages 446-447 in "Sustainable Happiness." The passage is a bit lengthy.

Functionally, when the environment is perceived as safe, two important features are expressed. First, bodily state is regulated in an efficient manner to promote growth and restoration ... This is done through an increase in the influence of the mammalian myelinated [smart] vagal motor pathways on the cardiac pacemaker that slows the heart, inhibits the fight-or-flight mechanisms of the sympathetic nervous system, the stress response ..., and reduces inflammation by modulating immune reactions ([like] cytokines). Second, through the process of evolution, the brainstem nuclei that regulate the ... "smart" ... vagus became integrated with the nuclei that regulate the muscles of the face and head. This link results in the bidirectional coupling between spontaneous social engagement behaviors and bodily states. Specifically, an integrated social engagement system emerged in mammals when the neural regulation of visceral states that promote growth and restoration ... was linked neuroanatomically and neurophysiologically with the neural regulation of the muscles controlling eye gaze, facial expression, listening and prosody...

The human nervous system, similar to that of other mammals, evolved not solely to survive in safe environments, but also to promote survival in dangerous and life-threatening contexts. To accomplish this adaptive flexibility, the human nervous system retained two more primitive neural circuits to regulate defensive strategies .... It is important to note that social behavior, social communication, and visceral homeostasis are incompatible with [those two older defense

strategies coming from the sympathetic system and the old vagus] .... Thus, via evolution, the human nervous system retains three neural circuits, which are in a phylogenetically organized hierarchy. In this hierarchy the newest circuit is used first; if it fails to provide safety, the older circuits are recruited sequentially.

So, one of the things he says about the autonomic nervous system is that it's organized in a very interesting way: the newest system to evolve, the highest level of potential, is the default system. Why? Because this system evolved for social engagement. So, his argument is that the smart vagus and all the modified forms of those cranial nerves that I mentioned to you just now evolved when we came out of the water, when our environment wasn't water any longer; now it was other mammals. So we essentially learned to "breathe" other mammals like we used to breathe water. The air we breathe is our relationships, our communication, the sound we're sharing, the facial expressions; the emotional tone of those other mammals is the new environment that we have evolved to be in, that we have adapted to, to swim in. So, when we're feeling safe we're socially engaged. All of the new parts of our brain, the cortex and all these interconnected new modes of the cranial nerves, they are all feeling like "OK, it's safe to be sociable now, it's safe to be a mammal, it's safe to be sensitive and caring and empathic." And so it's easier to open up, and we're going to do that. Then, at some point, when we feel unsafe again, the smart vagal dominance might shift to sympathetic dominance, fight-or-flight, the older system. Then, if that doesn't work, we shift to old vagal dominance, and we just freeze. We experience the freezing mode when we faint out of fear; that's the old vagal nervous system in action. Or when we feel deeply depressed and we can't move; it's like our systems give up, we go into our own self. Some people – like Sean, our neuropsychology fellow -- believe that this may be active in autism. It may be that autistic kids are more stiff about social

engagement because they feel fundamentally unsafe. He is a master at measuring vagal nerve response. His work has produced extremely unusual vagal nerve profiles for autistic kids.

And so the nervous systems is set up hierarchically. And the most highly evolved, which is the most recently evolved, is set as the default. So we're sociable until proven otherwise. But then we revert back whenever we feel unsafe. This is why I've talked to you on numerous occasions about how important our traumatized child is, how that child plays out when we feel threatened by social interaction. It just changes the whole way our brain is functioning.

All this is quite fascinating. And it may help to explain why we have religion. Think of all the religious images. Why are they so beautiful? Why do we surround ourselves with beautiful images, including images of the human face? Think of the Buddhist iconography. And it's the same for other religious iconography. Most images are fairly reassuring, even if they're not cheerful. Think of prayer, symbolism, all the warm facial expressions and all the gestures of ritual, and the dances. They all promote a feeling of safety. They make us feel like "This is a safe environment, we're safe, we're in a warm, holding environment, and therefore it's safe for us to use our newer equipment, our mammal equipment." I have to say, though, that the Christ on the Cross is an exception, right? But remember, that image didn't come into being until after Constantine.

And so you can see why human beings would try to develop these kinds of networks that keep us in the love mode. Right? Because it works better for us. In "Sustainable Happiness" I tried to compare the Western model with the Buddhist model of our nervous system. As we've seen before, the Buddhist map has three channels running up and down the center of our body, with the chakras in the

middle channel and the side channels knotting around the central channel. What does all that mean

I think the Buddhist map must be understood as a map to teach the conscious control of autonomic responsiveness, and how to disarm the autonomic nervous system. All of those turns and knots correspond to internal armor, for guarding -- either flight-or-flight, or freeze. Those knots are locking up the bliss that supports the sense of wellbeing, safety and confidence that supports the social engagement system, that is in the central channel. The smart vagus taps into the engagement system but the other parts of the nervous system, the two side channels, can block it.

So, we can increase and improve our self-regulation through our breath. Yoga, meditation and tantra all use the breath in a major way. Deep breath increases vagal stimulation in the abdomen, and that increases vagal tone. So we're consciously increasing vagal tone with deep breathing, and we're actually building a greater network connection between the part of the vagal nerve that we can control with our breathing and the other parts that we cannot control well. The more we use it, the more we build the network. As neuropsychologists like to say, neurons that fire together wire together.

So, every time we use the smart vagal nerve to calm our old autonomic nervous system we're building up the connections in our neural network that allow us to control the old nervous system, to gain conscious control over it, to modulate the sympathetic nervous system and the old vagal nervous system. And by holding our breath we can trigger the diving reflex, which moves us to this paradoxical state of profound physical disarmament and calm combined with increased alertness. In that way we can have a freeze response that isn't coming



out of fear. And so the old parts of our nervous system can be used by its newer parts. I like to quote T.S. Eliot, and these lines of his are relevant here:

"I said to my soul be still and let the dark come upon you,  
which shall be like the darkness of God."

We actually have the capacity to still our deepest mind by consciously regulating the old vagus nervous system. That system is there to put a brake on everything; it just shuts down. And, in a sense, the same happens when we do things like making love, or taking care of our child, or of anyone: we're there for somebody and we don't budge, we are unconditionally present, we stay present in the face of no matter what. We have to have this focus, this quality that does not budge. One of the five wisdom Buddhas is called Akshobhya, the Immovable One. We have to have that quality, to be able to not waiver, not be thrown off. To be caring without shutting down, or to be loving without becoming frightened, we need to learn to use the vagus smartly, we need to modulate that old part of our nervous system, so that we can freeze without fear, at will. Porges calls that "fearless immobilization." He says that mammals learned how to have fearless immobilization. Other animals have a much harder time freezing like this; and some will never learn. For example, you can't pet a reptile, you can't be caring towards a reptile and have the reptile respond in kind. But you can pet your cat, and, eventually, with enough times of positive reinforcement of caring behavior like petting, your cat will sit there, very still, and purr as you pet it, ever so caringly. Cats love that. But you have to train the cat, and the cat has to train its nervous system so that it can stay immobile without fear while he enjoys the petting. And we humans are the same way.

In order to be unconditionally loving we need to overcome our fear and disarm. If I want to be loving and caring the last thing I need is to be self-protective. The inner fire practice promotes the mind/brain/heart arousal while keeping the calm overall. This is because inner fire promotes blood flow shifts and chemical shifts, and so we get into an altered state of mind and body.

There are three stages. The first is simple social engagement through the smart vagus. With simple mindfulness, or simple breathing, we're already more socially present. Research studies show that this is true. We go deeper to the next level through breath-holding practices or through greater immersion in immobilized states, and we start to secrete vasopressin, which controls the sympathetic nervous system. And so it speaks to the sympathetic nervous system, and it says: "Nothing to fear, this is all play, you can be aroused, but be aroused playfully." In this way, the sympathetic nervous system gets modulated into a kind of a playful mode, one we might say is consistent with flirting. So, first we have courtship: "I'm just present with you." Then comes flirting, which is driven by vasopressin. And then we have blissful engagement or consummation, mediated by oxytocin. Both vasopressin and oxytocin are chemicals that came along with the new mammal nervous system. And I think that the experience of melting you have in these practices is related to the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, and the way in which they disarm the nervous system and stimulate the forebrain circuitry of internal reward and emotional release.

I don't want to go over every single detail with you, it's way too much information. The point is that, eventually, you have access to this stage, this kind of fearless loving immobilization. Then, by adding insight to it, you can start to decondition your nervous system. This is the taming process, and it is similar to

taming your cat. If you want to tame your cat you give it a positive experience that short-circuits the instinctive fear or whatever early traumas it had. As we go through the taming experience, and we start feeling safe, a new bonding experience opens up. It's like we're falling in love, again. And you get the sense that the nervous system learns that's it's really safe, and so you to let go of the defensive reactivity. Vasopressin promotes that sense of safety, and oxytocin promotes social bonding, love bonding; that's why it's called the love hormone. With the release of oxytocin in the presence of the partner, when we mate, we develop that deep sense of, "I know you, you're safe, you're mine, I'm yours."

One more thing about deep breathing practices. In the diamond recitation practice we breathe calmly, repeatedly, over a period of time, and then we bring in vocalization, we bring in mantra, and we imagine that the breath is actually the sound of the body. We do that with "Om Ah Hum." We take the mantra to be the sound that the breath makes when we inhale, pause and exhale. We imagine that the breath coming in and out of our lungs is the sound of the Buddhas Vairochana, Amitabha, and Akshobhya speaking to us. And all that slows and stabilizes the common cardiorespiratory oscillator, which is a nucleus in the brainstem that is very close to the nucleus of the newer, smart vagal nerve. And when calm has set in, the smart vagus can help with brain synchrony and integration throughout.

The last thing I want to say about deep breathing at this time is that the aim is to slow your breath to a near-stop. The idea here is to push to the limit, and experiment with it. It's like building up desensitization to the death states. Normally we don't trust being in a deeply disarmed state of mind for long. We don't want to know what happens when we're asleep, or we're having a sexual

experience, or a near-death experience. Disarming just doesn't feel safe to us. We like being alert and aware, and analytical, that's how we feel protected. But the idea here is to go beyond and get used to those deeply primal states of consciousness. And we can do that by slowing our breath, more and more, and feeling comfortable doing that, knowing that we're not going to suffocate, that there is nothing to fear.

You will find that if you slow your breath, to a near-stop, gradually, and always very gently, at a certain point you start to feel oxygen hunger. Initially, that feeling triggers a little bit of panic. You feel like "I have to breathe, or else ...". And you give in: "... I gotta take a breath!" But every time you do that you're sort of reinforcing the fundamental fear setting, which says, "I'm not safe, I can't relax much." The reality is that if you hold your breath for longer, like a diver, or like some opera singers, you can move through that panic response, and you can see that on the other side of "I have to breathe" there's actually more space, more room where you don't have to breathe. And you get into a state of, "Well, I'm not dead ... and yet I haven't breathed either ...". And while in that state you're really disarming, you're desensitizing the nervous system from the fundamental self-protective setting and gaining more conscious control. And you're not doing anything fancier than a pearl diver does. This is not so fancy. You're just retraining your nervous system to actually stay submerged for much longer, to hold your breath longer, stretch it out. But I wouldn't try it for a very long period of time. There's a limit, and you'll know when you get there, believe me, your body will know. Just pushing the envelope is a good experience. And what happens then is you start to reset the smart vagal nervous system, the sympathetic nervous system, and the old vagal nervous system. This is like telling

them, "Calm down, you're not dying; this is just playing around. Just relax. We're learning how to be, learning how to just be."

I believe that it may be possible to link the disarming of these three states, or networks, or circuits, as Porges calls them, to the three intuitions – that is the moonlight intuition, the twilight intuition, and the deep midnight intuition that we talked about earlier, in the context of the eight dissolutions of the death meditation practice. First, the anxiety that comes with the social engagement system is about connecting, attachment, a need to belong; this system seeks attachment anxiously. To disarm these attachment instincts we let go of that anxiety. We cool down. We cool these instincts by telling them that there's no need to attach so urgently, there are always other people around, there's always somebody else. "Don't worry, it's OK, you're OK, there are other people, and you can also be OK on your own."

And the sympathetic nervous system is saying, "Look out, there's an enemy, there's danger." We need to calm down, calm our aversions. At that stage we are ready to be still and fearless, to get to a state of fearless immobilization. Now we know: "I'm awesome, I can handle whatever comes, I'm big enough, I'm strong enough, I'm smart enough." Just like Stuart Smalley, the popular fictional character created by Al Franken, senator from Minnesota and former comedian says: "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!" The twilight vision helps calming the sympathetic nervous system. And so we're calming things down and we're feeling a kind of warmth, and a sense of deeper safety and security, because we're being fearless.

And then, the deepest level is like the midnight intuition. When you trigger the freeze reaction, when you trigger the old vagal nervous system, it feels like a faint, or a swoon. It has a way of shutting everything down. If we can learn how to go through that, if we're able to stay immobilized in a very profound way, we can tap into the primal source of awareness, wellbeing and satisfaction within our nervous system, until now accustomed to be all siphoned off by fears and knotted up in defensiveness and reactivity.

Wilhelm Reich would say that if we do these practices and we take them to this level, we'll increase our orgasmic potency! I can see why he wound up locked up! He was a bit unusual, to put it mildly. Anyhow, the point is that the capacity we have to feel bliss is enormous. Yet, generally, we don't feel much bliss and life is not happy, we feel we have to keep getting to the other thing, or the other person, or the other place. And if we ever feel bliss -- because the chemistry of bliss abides within our nervous system -- we never stop to think, "Well, this is bliss and there must be a source of it, what am I doing to tap the source?" Instead we're always beating around the bush, trying to get something that triggers a little bit of happiness within us, even if only a shadow of happiness, while we're sitting on this gold mine. We are sitting on these bliss reserves that we're not tapping into. Why? Because we don't feel safe, we don't feel safe enough to open up. We are like the squirrel in the ice age running after the little acorn out there on the ground. And we don't know how to stop and enjoy the inner acorn, if you will.

So, that's a little take on what this practice is about, from the angle of Western integrated neurobiology. I'll share with you a little more specifically about all this during the two classes we have left, and then again during our retreat. We'll talk about bliss as a basis for emptiness meditation next week.

Assuming we can experience greater states of bliss, how can we use that bliss? Neurologically speaking, this is very possible. We have the wiring. All we have to do is tame the wild nervous system that we've carried along with us for all these hundreds of millions of years. And we can do this with the right technology and the right understanding. Once we get to the source of bliss, and we have access to a continuous supply of bliss, how do we use it for insight meditation? How do we use it to open up fully, to take the veils off our mind and see things more clearly and objectively, apart from the constant shrouds and the blinders of fear and myopic insecurity and self-protectiveness? That's what emptiness meditation using the four blisses and the four voids is about. We will talk about all this next week. And we'll talk about the psychology of how the four blisses and four voids allow us to dismantle the instinctive patterns and conditionings and self-protective instincts that are wired into the same parts of our core brain. In the

Tantric psychology they describe a number of them – I can't remember the exact number, it's around 116 or something like that, organized in different categories. That's not so important. What's important to understand is that we can iron out the wrinkles of all of our compulsive instinctive reactions and bad habits, we can use this bliss practice to disarm them, to correct them, to understand that "I don't need you anymore, I don't need to be reactive, I don't need reactive knee-jerk violence, I don't need fearful clinging, I don't need to hide my head in the sand ... Goodbye isolation or withdrawal, I don't need these things anymore." We can unlearn all that.

We may have time later on to talk a little bit about neurobiology and the notion of epigenetics. For now, I just wanted to give you a deeper taste of the East/West cross-mapping, of the links between the two cultures for increasing wellbeing, all the way to enlightenment. Otherwise this stuff would seem so far-

out that maybe we would think, " ... it's not for me." But when you think that just because you are a mammal, just for that, you have the equipment, it's built in, you're already three fourths or four fifths on the way there. Your nervous system is set up for this. All it takes is some new software. We need to install the final software and to operationalize the full potential of our mammal nervous system, to set it for being socially connective, socially happy with others, living well with others. As Cicero said, ultimately, "man is his own worst enemy." For each of us, "I am the main reason why I can't live well with others." And this is because of our evolutionary hangover, our overly self-protective hangover and our childhood nightmares; that is the real reason why we can't live well with others. The reason is inside "me," not in others.

Someone asked me, what about the insomniac monkey brain? What about the inner tapes that play, usually out of worry, usually, or maybe distraction? These tapes don't come out of nowhere. It's like turning on a radio to hear music: there has to be a radio, there has to be a radio station, and the station must be transmitting music to your radio. And the same is true of the monkey brain. There's a reason why it's there: the monkey brain is a frightened animal, over-excited. Traditionally, monkeys are known for having a high capacity for overexcitement, they are jumping all the time, from branch to branch. There is a lot of jumping around, and that is because they don't have quite as powerful a neocortex as we do, even though they're close to it. And the idea is that when these older parts of our brain are activated by early experiences and sociocultural conditionings, our mind is jumping around without much focus, like a monkey's brain. A monkey brain acts by upsetting interactions with people, traumatic interactions in childhood, and a social situation which is like a whirlwind of fear. Basically it's a feeding frenzy. In economic terms, in our market economy, it would



be like a buying frenzy before a market shortage -- "I've gotta get some more before the market closes ..."

So how do you stop your monkey brain? You've got to have the confidence that you can control your brain. First of all, stop identifying with the monkey. How can you do that? You start at the simplest level, the mindfulness level: you watch it. Ideally, you watch it not as a frightened, lonely animal who's all alone in the world, but as a Buddha would, as Green Tara would. And if you can't imagine it as Green Tara would, imagine then that your head is resting on the lap of Green Tara, Tara is sitting on the bed with you on her lap. She's just there, and you're putting your head in her lap. She's stroking your hair. And you're with her. You can chant her mantra; or you can hear it going through your head. And then you can possibly try some of these deep breaths to go deeper.

Because our minds are multi-factorial and our brains are made of highly interconnected modular networks, some part of our brain can feel perfectly fine while another part can get activated, by anything -- a word, a smell, a song. So, when we're talking about synchrony, it refers to getting the whole community of the brain on the same wavelength, so to speak. And the prefrontal cortex leads. Some people compare the prefrontal cortex to an orchestra director: as the orchestra director is able to get in a dialogue with all the parts of the orchestra, the prefrontal cortex has to get in dialogue with all the different part of the brain. That's the practice that we're going for here.

The orchestra director does not want to alienate any of the orchestra members. She learns the language of each section, and she helps them to get in sync with the piece that they will play. There are preliminaries before the orchestra starts to play in synch and beautifully. In the same way, there are preliminaries to

this practice. You can befriend your inner monkey using your imagination, and using mantra, and using even simple mindfulness practice, or simple lovingkindness. Ask your inner monkey, "Inner monkey, why are you squawking, why are you unhappy, what's the matter, are you tired, or are you hungry, or are you lonely, are you frightened?" We can use all these different tools to prepare the ground, to gain enough stability and set the base for deep transformation work. I would say that we shouldn't go very deep with this kind of practice until the vessel is quite secure. Wait until you are feeling fairly safe and secure. We should first find out why you're not feeling safe, and practice with some antidote for that. That's what the preliminary practices are all about.

Once we're beginning to feel fairly safe and secure, we continue to use these practices to deepen the sense of safety and security. These practices help us to go far deeper than we thought was possible.

Another practice that might be helpful to tame your insomniac monkey brain, the monkey brain that does not let you fall asleep, is vase breathing. Try some simple vase breathing if your monkey mind is racing when you are in bed trying to fall asleep. For thought patterns that need taming, like obsessions, try mantras, they are very powerful for changing thought patterns. And if your inner monkey wants to sing a song, try chanting. Come to the retreat next Saturday, Mary will chant with us. You will learn how to hum like a bee, to hum like a bee to your inner self.

And so there are many ways, many techniques that can be used to win over the monkey brain. They speak the language, the language of the older part of the brain. And they are childlike, they are like fairy tales, they can win over the other parts of the brain and get tuned in. But it is essential that we get the brain

somewhat tuned into a state of safety and security before we try to go really deep. Otherwise you end up with conflicts, fighting with yourself, with one part of your brain saying "I'm not safe" and the other part saying "Yes, you are!" which just doesn't work very well.

Somebody emailed me once to ask about this practice. "I have a mantra practice, but then I start feeling this pressure in my jaw whenever I do it ..." This is a perfect example of going too fast. People who practice kundalini have contacted me after feeling overwhelmed by the practice. That's another example of going too fast. The fact is that before you get to this level of depth, with deep focus and robustness, it's important to prepare the container well. The container is your body/mind. We prepare the container with a good preliminary practice.

What is a good preliminary practice here? It's personal. If you are particularly good at visualization, then visualization practice may be enough for you. You know that it's working fine when it speaks to you like a fairy tale, and you're just a happy little puppy, or a happy little kitten purring away. But if that does not seem to be forthcoming you have to use a stronger medicine, or the same one but a stronger dosage before you start going into a deeper practice. You want to disarm yourself, you don't want to be fighting with yourself internally. I hope we are all clear about that.

## Chapter Six: Turning Bliss to Light: The Four Bliss Voids and Four Pure Intuitions

I'd like to begin this chapter with a very good question from some of you: how can we best handle witnessing great difficulty, great suffering or pain? Many of us have been watching the news about the typhoon in the Philippines and are shaken by it. How can this practice help us in such situations? That brings up some really important practices that we've talked about in this program, like generating bliss, inner fire, and inspiration. In bliss there are no problems, nothing to worry about. We don't have to worry about anybody else's problems if we're all blissed-out. The mechanics of being able to tap into our bliss network is part of the art here. That's what we're trying to do here, because bliss energy is clean energy -- it's pure, it's uplifting, it's disarming, and it's inspiring.

There are a number of things we're specifically doing with bliss energy. If you can generate bliss, this is already a meditative achievement. But, if you remember, in basic Buddhism meditation is not everything; there are also ethics and wisdom. And today we'll talk about wisdom. We're going to talk about how you use the blissful openness energy to purify the instinctive in us -- and that is the childhood conditionings, the reactive conditionings that make use feel guarded or overwhelmed, and also the innate instincts from evolution. And then we will look into how this relates to the emptiness practice.

So, there's meditation, which gives us the ability to tap into the bliss network within us. But being blissed-out doesn't make you a Buddha. It may be a big help, but you've got to have the direction. It's like flying: you need two wings. One of the wings is wisdom, the wisdom to know where to fly, how to fly. The other is ethics, about how to connect with other living beings in a helpful way, and how to live day-to-day in a helpful way.

If you remember, when we did the Hero's Journey last year, I shared with you some experiences of my own journey. My first initiation was when I was a young man, in South India. I was excited because I thought it was all about the great bliss, and I wanted bliss. But then I discovered, twenty years later, when I got the initiation the second time, that the question that really matters is not about how to tap into bliss, but the one that comes after the bliss.

In the initiation it goes something like this. You knock on the guru's door, and he says, "Who are you and what do you want?" And you answer, "I'm the lucky one and I want great bliss." This I did well and remember well. Then the guru asks a second question, which I didn't hear the first time. The second question is, "And what are you going to do with it, what do you want it for, what is your motivation?" You are supposed to think, and to answer, "I want it to keep the commitment of the Buddhas." The commitment of the Buddhas is to liberate all living beings. And that is also the commitment of bodhisattvas. Maybe, when you become bodhisattvas, each of you will have your own specific commitments – to liberate a specific group of people, or transform a specific kind of problem, or embody a certain kind of quality. In all those cases, and in general, the commitment is a commitment of altruism, and the purpose of the bliss is to fuel compassion and altruism, to be a natural fuel for compassion and altruism.

I also shared with you the fact that one of the unusual ways in which we chemically evolved is that most of our social behavior evolved out of sexuality. And that makes a lot of sense. If you think about it you can see why: because if you're trying to reproduce you need to take care of your offspring, whatever you're reproducing. And you need a lot of help for that. That help comes from your chemical system. It is the chemicals in our system that prepare us to take

care of our offspring. You recognize your offspring as you, because it is you, in a manner of speaking.

And so out of the sexual chemistry and energy of bliss comes the chemistry and energy of caretaking -- and, specifically, the ability to stay with the other, to be unshakably, immovably, and in a blissful state, with another living being, not afraid, not conquering and not being afraid of being conquered. But to just be. That's this immoveable love energy, or fearless love energy, that I think Stephen Porges, the neuroscientist, is referring to when he talks about the vagal nervous system and immobilization without fear, which becomes possible when we open up and connect, connect to another being.

How do you actually use this on a day-to-day basis, how do you connect without fear? There is fascinating research that is relevant here, and that I've mentioned to you before. And that is research first made in Richie Davidson's lab with experienced compassion meditators. The results showed that the brains of these compassion meditators work differently.

To be more specific, the experience of the untrained bodhisattva is the experience of somebody who has the compassion gene, the gene that makes you feel like "I can't stand other people suffering, but that doesn't mean that I want to just leave the world's problems and drop out, go to my private corner, my private sanctuary. I won't be able to enjoy it, because I can't stand it, I can't stand all this suffering." The compassion gene is the bodhisattva gene. All of us have that capacity, most of us naturally do. But some of us lean especially in that direction, and that is the bodhisattvas. The challenge is what to do in order not to get overwhelmed by all the suffering. That's the challenge of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. As some of you know, legend says that after making the vow to eliminate suffering he broke into a thousand pieces when he became

overwhelmed by all the suffering, and all the work there was to do to eliminate it. That's the reason for his 1,000 arms, to help all those who are suffering. And for that we need compassion training.

There are a number of different labs that have tried to replicate Richie Davidson's findings. At the beginning it was difficult. But since 2009 many have replicated the results, for example at Emory in Atlanta, at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, and at the Stanford Compassion Research Center (CCARE) in California. The same results were obtained even when the subjects were amateur meditators, sometimes after just four or five sessions of compassion training. The subjects were not expert meditation practitioners. They were ordinary people. And yet the way their brain worked changed, and so quickly. And how it changed, specifically, brings up the issue of the role of bliss. Normally, what happens when a person looks at somebody else suffering is that unless you know how to solve the problem and heal that suffering, you feel a little trigger inside. Your mind goes to the suffering and your amygdala gets triggered a little bit: "This could happen to me." Your mirror neurons are probably acting up, bringing up whatever bad experience actually happened to you that made you suffer. It's sort of like a bad trip and you are having a post-traumatic flashback. Reactivity is playing up, and that involves the brain's right hemisphere -- the prefrontal cortex, and the amygdala. And it's not that pleasant an experience. That's what happens when you are facing suffering and feeling powerless, and vulnerable. What do you do next?

Richie Davidson showed that with as little as four or five sessions of training on compassion people's brains shifted, to a way that is more like that of skilled Tibetan meditators' brains -- and that is with the left hemisphere of the prefrontal cortex operative, instead of the right hemisphere, so that there is a little more

optimism, and less fear. There was more activity in the anterior cingulate. The anterior cingulate is about jumping into action: "I'm getting ready to respond to this now. I'm not overwhelmed. I'm not pulling back, I'm not trying to avoid this. I'm thinking about how I can jump in and help. So what can I do?" And there is less connectivity to the amygdala; instead of connectivity to the amygdala in the limbic system, there is connectivity to the nucleus accumbens in the corpus striatum, and that goes all the way back to both the limbic system and the core brain, to a very integral part of the internal reward system. So what those meditators were feeling was a deep sense of wellbeing even in the midst of the other person's suffering. Why? Because they care! And that's a good thing. Suffering is a bad thing. But caring about somebody's suffering is a good thing. If we didn't care, we would never get out of most of our problems. This is all about "shifting" -- to use the language of modern affect theory, modern affective neuroscience. It's a shift in the way our brains work, where there are many layers. I think I addressed this when I spoke about Tashi Tsering's model of the three different layers of the brain -- or the mind. He actually described it as the "mind" and he used a Tantric model, with the three levels: there's the surface mind, there's the subtle mind, which is kind of subliminal, and there's the extremely subtle mind, the very deep mind.

In any case, in affect theory they talk about these deep visceral states. You can basically be feeling really really bad and yet on the surface you are experiencing wonderful things. Have you ever had the experience that, when you feel like a total fraud or failure, somebody says to you about your work, "Oh, you're really good at this ..." or something like that. You get your great victory, the victory you've been working for years and years, and you say, "OK. What was all that worry and anxiety about? I'm ready to move on, what's next?" The opposite



can also happen, you have a negative surface affect, like something terrible is happening, maybe "my two sons are fighting!" but on the deep level, the deep visceral affect is positive. (28:15) You feel like "I love my boys, they're so cute, they just haven't learned how to deal with their anger, and so I'll help them, I'll teach them, so that they won't continue squabbling with each other." And so, deep at your core you can have a positive affect and still there is room to register that something distressing is happening. This does not mean that you are living a life disconnected, somewhere in la-la land. It's not like you don't know what is happening, that you don't realize what is happening. You can see that it hurts, you feel it, you remember what it feels like to hurt; but it's not what you're feeling deep in the core of your being, because now you see that the human condition is not a trap in which we're all stuck. You see that there are opportunities and solutions. And you are finally close to integrating in a truly happy way. You'll get over it and they will get over it. And if others are hurting you can always help them deal with it.

To train to be a bodhisattva there is a Sutric way. We talked about it earlier in our program. The Sutric way is a compassion-based way: you slowly build your compassion, towards one living being after another, you adopt each living being and treat each one as if it were your only child. And then there's also a Tantric way. In this case you generate a deep primal experience of blissful openness and then harness it, or you get into experiencing a blissful loving and narcissistic investment in all life. This is what Heinz Kohut called "cosmic narcissism." This is narcissism that transcends the self. We are all one. We're all in this together, as our president likes to say. The Tantric way is quicker, as I've told you many times. You don't have to spend three incalculable eons to build up enough merit; you can do it in one to sixteen lifetimes.

There is a question about empathy and sympathy. How are they different? With positive experiences sympathy may help, but with negative freak-outs it doesn't really help. What good is another freaked-out person for? It's nice to know that somebody else is in it with you, but if they're going down in the ship with you, it can't be that positive. Empathy, I discovered, in its origin, isn't even a Greek word. It was in a way invented by some British poets, a translation of the German word, "Einfühlung," which means just what it sounds like, "feeling yourself into another person." For me it means understanding correctly another person's state of mind. Empathy is correct understanding. If I feel empathy for you it doesn't mean that I feel what you feel, it means I know what you feel, I know what's going on inside your mind. Sympathy on the other hand means that I feel what you feel. If you're freaked out, I'm freaked out. So sympathy is not so helpful. In the Buddhist tradition it's called sentimental compassion, like "I'm such a nice person, I'm freaking out with you." But here we run into an inconvenient truth: this is not really helpful because you're less able to help when you're freaked out. You need to calm down, then maybe you can do something helpful.

We value empathy. Why? Because it's much better, much more productive, than the alternatives: to freak out in company, or to simply not care. And there is a whole realm of mature compassion to work with. For example, think about your kids, or anyone you are taking care of. You've seen them get into trouble. And it's sort of weird, you've gone through the same old things. Your kids get freaked out, but it doesn't freak you out much when you know that it's child's play, that their freak-out episode is not really such a big deal. But the kids are excessively freaked-out, they don't see their own capacity to overcome the problem, and they don't see how you or others can help them overcome the

problem. They're just in the problem for the moment, absorbed by it. A healthy parent eventually gets the wisdom to know what's going on with those you are taking care of. Like the grandmother at the park—maybe it was Thich Nhat Hanh that first talked about the grandmother at the park — who watches the children with a smile on her face, whether they're playing happily or fighting. She knows by now that the fights are really part of childhood, part of growing up, part of something that's really a wonderful thing, a positive thing. And so you can experience the growing pains and even the temporary angst of those you love and care for with a deep sense of happiness and love. That love actually makes us able to respond skillfully. With your children you see how the first couple of years you feel like giving up at times, you feel that you're always doing the wrong thing. But after a time you really get to know your kid -- or any other person you're taking care of -- you really get to know yourself with that other person, and you get to know what they need from you. At that point the relationship becomes a lovely play: they need something from you, and you give it to them -- and it's all very lovely. With practice in taking care of others you get to master the art of compassion.

People always ask me, "How can you sit listening to people talk about their issues all the time? Doesn't it drive you crazy?" And the answer is no, it doesn't drive me crazy -- not most of the time anyway. It doesn't drive me crazy because I see people getting better. I see the people I sit with getting over their obstacles, whatever is holding them back. And so I think, "Isn't it amazing, how people can get over their garbage? Isn't this wonderful?" When somebody comes in with real garbage, I say, "That's great! How can we move on with this?" But that's not what they're experiencing. More likely they are thinking, "I'm never going to get over this, he can't help me, nobody can help me, I'm stuck here forever ..." And

then that doesn't turn out to actually be the case. Realistically speaking, freaking out is not only unhelpful, it's a mistake, it's a miss, a false assessment, because most of the time something can be done.

Today we're going to talk about how you harness the bliss to experience emptiness, to realize emptiness. It feels like everybody's talking about emptiness; but what does it mean? Is it like floating in space somewhere? Or like the isolation tanks of the 1960s or 1970s, which desensitized your senses, making you feel like everything just dissolves? Actually, that is more like when you're asleep without being asleep. But that's not emptiness.

If you remember, we started up on this process following the lead of Saraha and Tsong Khapa, with four elements in the bliss practice. First, tapping into the vital points and becoming attuned to our nervous system; then, balancing the polarities of our reactive nervous system; then we go deeper, to the place of fundamental, or core, wellbeing, which comes after we have succeeded in unknotting our nervous system by stopping the constant oscillating. Now we're able to be still enough to go deep, all the way, so that we can get to and ignite our inner fire. In Western terms, it's self-stimulation, it's positive feedback, or "feedforward" as some neuroscientists call it. We do that by paying attention to the positive feelings within us, so we can build them up, slowly. It's like feeding a fire, but of course it's not a real fire, not literally, as you can see from all the hats and coats I wear, even if I am doing this practice. It's a particular type of energy, this blissful energy.

As we practice, as we continue to kindle the inner fire, and with enough inspiration, enough energy of bliss experience, we start to enter into a state of blissful flow. At this point action becomes chemical. The change is not just about energy anymore. When the nervous system starts to take a state of mind seriously,

it begins to secrete chemicals that build up into the fundamental instruction. Now we're getting to the fourth point. So far we're tapping the sensitive points, balancing the polar energies, and deepening our experience, kindling the inner fire and releasing the flow of blissful experience for blissful chemistry. The fourth point is "Sublimating bliss to light." I don't remember how Tsong Khapa put it, exactly. It's about harnessing and uniting the blissful states with the realization of voidness, of emptiness. And that's what we're on now, we're at the end. We have one more class, but basically this is it, this is the highlight. And this is where we are in the practice of freedom of mind. We completed the third of five perfection stages. And we are beginning the fourth.

So, to review, first we free our body of the ghost of feeling like a cornered animal and we start to develop a body made of mind. We override the ordinary sense that we're living in a body which is always threatened and instead we start to develop a sense of a fully adequate body: "I'm a divine being, and I can handle anything. I'm a cosmic, creative, powerful being."

Second, we free our speech. We overcome the trauma of remembering all those bad things that happened to us and that we have been replaying in our worst-case memory loop. And we start to rebalance our nervous system and dismantle all the disturbing memories by reminding ourselves that those memories are a thing of the past, they are not actually happening now. And to keep thinking about them and expecting them to happen is not useful. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, it keeps us stuck in a nightmare.

Then, third, we go deeper, to the heart energy of the mind. We can free our mind, entirely, even if only temporarily, from our body image of being a threatened animal alone in the world.

So it's freedom of body, speech and mind. With freedom of speech we can be free of our mental discourse, our inner tapes, even if just momentarily – but stably and consistently from all the negative tapes that say, "Something bad is going to happen, look at what happened, that was bad." Now we can experience the affirmative wellbeing. Our body temporarily becomes inseparable from the deity body. Our speech becomes inseparable from mantra and the energy that supports it. And then, ultimately, mind becomes free of all taints, afflictions, and instincts that are not blissful.

That's where we're headed to be able to distill our mind down to the core of our brain, where the bliss factory is. The awareness factory is there too. And so we learn how to keep cranking out the blissful awareness and nothing else. We are not diversifying, we're not wasting our energy, we're not cranking out worry awareness, or angry awareness, or clingy awareness. We're just cranking up bliss energy and awareness. That's what's flowing in, we're flowing in that. And that's all we need, really. We're OK with that. That's the mind objective.

To get to the mind objective we have to unknot the heart, whatever that means exactly. We have to get a very deep sense of conscious self-regulation for self-attunement, for integration of the core brain so that we can be clear about which states we want to get rid of and which we want to preserve -- and that is the bliss states.

The arts that we use to get there are the inner arts of vase breathing, inner fire and diamond recitation. That is to say, we need to breathe with an awareness of the sacredness of the breath energy, and the purity of the breath energy. That is the purity of the body, speech and mind of enlightenment. It's the purity of Vairochana, Amitabha, and Akshobya. And here we find another inconvenient truth: according to this tradition, if you really want to tap into the Tantric way of

doing emptiness practice, you need to use some sort of prop for your neurophysiology to induce the deepest possible altered state of blissful openness. You need either a near-death experience, or some kind of orgasmic experience. But, as I mentioned before, if you subscribe to the Kalachakra tradition, and if you have an extremely sensitive nervous system, you don't need either a virtual or an actual relationship. You can actually do that just through the sensitivity of your relationship with the mentor. You let yourself be touched by the mentor's state of consciousness. But for most of us, we need a little bit more than that.

The idea here is that we're keeping up with the same methodology. But now we're not just going to reform the symbolic habits; and that's about the speech isolation. The speech isolation is all the brainwashing, all the negative things that happened to you in your whole life; all that gets stored in the amygdala. And it has to be purified. You can do that in different ways. With basic mindfulness practice the amygdala can shrink over time. Good to know, right? But this practice, presumably, would do that purification even more intensely over time. With bliss we're going deeper: it's not just about the limbic nervous system, the system that thinks in images and memories. It's about the core nervous system, that is the system that thinks in affect, in feelings and emotions, in experiential states.

Actually, you can change your brain through almost any meditative practice sustained over a long enough period of time. Meditation changes everything, and it certainly changes the amygdala. Normal mindfulness practice has been shown to shrink the amygdala. And the same should happen with the compassion practice, because compassion reduces the connectivity between the frontal brain and the amygdala. With less connection there's less reinforcement; and it will eventually shrink. The brain is always changing and growing. And, basically, it's

either getting crazier or healthier. Those are our choices. Staying the same is not really an option.

Within the core nervous system there is more than just bliss -- as you know, because we have had millions of years of evolution, and so millions of years of developing instincts. According to this tradition there are 80 instinctive patterns. And many of those patterns, whether they're positive or negative, are compulsive, they're coming from a knee-jerk, instinctive, evolutionary training and programming, not because we choose them. We'll go over them on Friday, this is really quite fascinating. They include things like love, violence, clinging, grief and all the things that we normally experience. In this mind practice the aim is to purify those 80 instincts and wind up with only one kind of energy in our nervous system, which is the bliss-openness energy that we're harnessing for compassion, to live well with others, and also live well in our own nervous system.

How does this work? In the standard practice, the shift is like we're going from the insight stage where we get a few glimpses of insight, to the meditation stage where we work through that insight deeper and deeper, way deep into our nervous system. And there is a subject and an object in this practice. That's why it becomes important here to have a mother and a father, for actually understanding the duality in all, and we have to bring two things together. It's like, as Coleridge used to say, the "reconciliation of opposites." We have to bring together a certain kind of subjective experience with a certain kind of objective realization. The same thing is true in the Sutric form of emptiness meditation: you bring together two things. First you develop the motivation of compassion: "I want to be extremely happy and helpful so that I can really make a difference benefiting others." Practicing this way you eventually attain samadhi, which is a deeply concentrated mind, a single-pointed unshakeable mind. It is hard to imagine



having that kind of mind, none of us can really imagine ever having it, right? But think about how it is singly focused when making that perfect morning espresso ...

Anyhow, with single-pointed meditation comes a realization of emptiness, an intuitive understanding of emptiness that we work on to deepen. That's vipassana, or insight meditation practice. In vipassana you bring together samadhi, or concentration, with analytic insight. And then it's like rubbing two sticks together: you get fire. But you need both to produce fire. You may have an intellectual insight, or you may have concentration; it's nice but it doesn't liberate you. You put the two together and that's a winning combination: you get liberation!

Emptiness is the same in the Tantric and Sutric traditions. It's the same emptiness. But we can say it has the same mother, but different father. The father in the case of Tantra is the deep visceral experience of bliss. Bob Thurman likes to call it orgasmic bliss. In any case, it's innate bliss, spontaneous bliss, unconditional bliss, the deepest possible bliss that you can ever imagine experiencing. That's what's really important. According to Tsong Khapa, in Tantra, bliss is the extraordinary cause for realizing enlightenment. More specifically, we develop a body that is a total embodiment of bliss, of joy. We develop an experience in our body of being totally made of bliss, filled with bliss. And when we have that we use it to meditate on emptiness. Using bliss we will have a quicker and deeper result, according to Tsong Khapa. And I think, for us ordinary practitioners, bliss is easier to get to than samadhi. Shamatha, as I said earlier, is the practice of developing single-pointed concentration, or samadhi. And it requires a lot of exclusive time to develop. There are some projects, like the Shamatha project, with retreats that go on for several months. But I say, "Who are you kidding? How are we going to have samadhi, with all our addictions and our busy life? We're all addicted to the Internet, right? Also, most of us don't have

a lifestyle that allows us to take off for months at a time and sit in meditation. We just don't live like that. However, because we're moderns, and because we're secularized, we can have bliss. We can really enjoy our cup of espresso blissfully. We can have a passion about things and learn how to harness that passion. It's part of our life. Actually, in some way, we modern people are all Tantric practitioners, in that we all go for the joy, the pleasure. In my own view of history, which some people think peculiar, what this modern era is about, what it says is, "Enough already, enough of trying to be Mr. Nice Guy or Mrs. Nice Guy. Now let's go for happiness, let's be happy, quickly, let's become happy." That's my view, only things have gone a little astray. These times feel like Tantra without emptiness, without wisdom and without ethics. We're going for the joy, and only the joy, in things. We're focusing only on enjoying things -- and it ends up not being so enjoyable.

When we have enough bliss, enough primal bliss that we dissolve into it completely, that we become completely immersed in it, we can dissolve the reactive energies that normally support all of our instinctive patterns. And then we can really dismantle those instinctive patterns. Emptiness yoga in this practice is really understanding that, in a way, we don't need to be living in fear or for desire of something outside of. It's that kind of emptiness. We need to understand that there's nothing outside of us that we should get that freaked out about, or that hyped-up about. We need to understand that we are really it, that we've arrived. I'll come back to this and talk about it in more detail; and I'll flesh it out as we go. So don't worry if it's just kind of vague at this point.

So, we're talking about a Tantric form of meditation on emptiness which is like the other form of meditation, the sutra style of meditation that we all know and love, but this one is based on bliss. It uses bliss instead of samadhi, and bliss

generates samadhi. No one tells you that this is a quick route to samadhi. And we're all modern people, we want quick results. Who wouldn't want a quick route to samadhi? Also, practitioners say this bliss goes deeper, and it produces a deeper, more powerful form of samadhi. Why? Because it kind of goes deeper into the nervous system than any other kind of meditation normally would. We'll flesh this out during the retreat. We'll talk about dream yoga, sleep yoga. We'll talk about the sexual yogas to some extent. And Mary Reilly Nichols will be there. She'll be making jokes; and she'll be there with her Shiva lingam ... Anyhow, the point is that we're going down to a primal state of consciousness that normally we don't access; maybe we get a glimpse of it here and there, in different experiences; but that's it.

So, that's the first element, bliss. The second element is emptiness. If we now understand that this is about a blissful mind meditating on emptiness, how do we view emptiness? How do the emptiness and the bliss come together, and how do they work together? How do we align the emptiness with bliss? There's a very elegant way of doing that, with the eight dissolutions, the eight stages of dissolution. Dissolution in this case is changing from one state of consciousness that's coarser to another state of consciousness that's more subtle. We have talked about this kind of experience happening at death. People who have had near-death experiences describe them in this way. Like Jill Bolte Taylor, an American neuroscientist who had a stroke, and described her experience in a book, and in a very popular TED talk. At first you have a sense of losing your grip with reality. Obviously it's not the same experience for everybody. But, the point is that this mind and body can run on coarse consciousness, that is consciousness that's cortically supported, like a waking state consciousness. And it can also be running on a very subtle consciousness that's supported in our brainstem, where it

feels more like in a deep sleep -- and that's the mind that comes out in near-death experiences.

Certain kinds of drugs like Ecstasy, DMA and LSD chemically stimulate the brainstem pathways that secrete serotonin. They actually alter our normal waking state consciousness so that we experience our life more from the brainstem, if you will. I remember somebody asking the Dalai Lama about using drugs, chemicals, to reach enlightenment. He said, "Well, as you know with drugs the experience is not very precise, not very accurate, so I don't know. But if you come up with a pill that really does it, then I'll take it." In that same conversation he said that the Creation Stage itself is an artifice, it is imagining that you have a deity's body, and that you're making offerings for all living beings, and you're transforming the planet. That is all great, but you have to remember that this is all basically an artifice to get you inspired, to get you out of your normal little rut, out of your normal ordinary self and into an expansive, positive affect state, to use Western language. And it turns out to be a more reproducible artifice. It's a safer and more reproducible artifice than chemicals. If you hear the stories of people that have taken LSD, or if you've taken it, or ayahuasca, you know the trips. Some people have life-transforming wonderful experiences and other people have a bad trip and freak out. It's just not reproducible, it's not reliable. Sometimes the magic works and sometimes it doesn't, while this practice does. And at least it doesn't do anything harmful. Generally speaking, this is pretty safe, pretty tame stuff.

So, let's get down to the dissolutions. First, the coarse physical sensations melt into the body's fluid sensations. Then the fluid sensations melt into the body's heat sensations; and the heat sensations melt into the breath/gas sensations ... Let's just assume that this already is a little bit of a mental simulation

of what dying is. According to this map, you will experience the same thing if you don't lose consciousness when you fall into a deep sleep, or if you're really paying attention to what happens to you when you have an orgasmic experience.

Something similar happens. It's not totally specific, it's just a question of going from a highly differentiated state of consciousness that is supported by the cortex, to a highly undifferentiated state of consciousness that is supported by the brainstem. You can see the homology, the common genes, the common ancestry: all those different state transitions involve going from something very complex to something very primal.

Anyway, going back to the eight dissolutions, after the four dissolutions of the body, after we lose our normal body sense, we get to the four mental dissolutions -- and the four lights. You remember, I talked about the moonlit sky, and then the sunset sky, the midnight sky, and finally the clear light sky, or predawn sky. Those are the four luminous intuitions -- or the four lucid intuitions, as I like to call them. Tantric emptiness meditation joins these four lucid intuitions with four different levels of bliss. That's where the term "inseparable bliss-void" comes from. So, if you're using "bliss-void," if you're using a bliss state to learn something about the way the world really is, if you're using a bliss state to see that it's not really so important to be chasing after things, that they're not the source of great happiness, that's a little bliss-void experience. That's bliss being used to experience emptiness. With that, what I desire isn't really as desirable as my coarser mind makes it out to be. So that's the first level of bliss-void.

The second level is called the "sublime bliss - extreme void." When you conjoin a blissful experience with the letting go of aggressive instincts or patterns, you have a deeper realization: "I don't need to be protective, I don't need to be guarding myself all the time. I don't need to do that anymore." Then you're said

to have this sublime bliss-extreme void. You're more able to let it all go, you realize there's nothing you need to worry about outside of you, and you don't need to worry about anything inside you. So, no more aversions.

In the third phase, with the midnight light, the third bliss-void is about letting go of the delusions, the self-referential, or self-centered notion, the ridiculous notion that this body of mine, that is this sack of matter over here is somehow different from any of the other sacks of matter around me, which are actually lovely, beautiful bliss bodies, just like mine is. It's all the same stuff. So why do I think I'm over here, separate from the person over there? That's not a very good show of awareness. Is there a little label on this little bit of consciousness inside of me? Is there a bar code somewhere, or anything that says "this is Joe's consciousness"? Will I find a little sign if I dig down deep enough? No, and actually if I dig down, deep down, it becomes less and less like Joe, and more like something I don't even recognize, some cosmic thing, pure, whatever. It may be some thing more primitive than Joe or more elevated than Joe, but it's not Joe.

You may remember that I talked a bit about these things when I talked about the vagus nerve. When we're letting go of the compulsive mode of the smart vagal nervous system, that is opening to something like the first bliss-void. Then we let go of the sympathetic nervous system, the defensive nervous system; and that's like "sublime bliss-extreme void." Now we're letting go of the old vagal nervous system, the "freeze" nervous system, the play-dead nervous system that becomes active as a reaction to fear; and we have something like the "supreme bliss-ultimate void." And then, finally, we go into the fourth level, "orgasmic bliss-complete void." You can call it "spontaneous bliss-complete void" if you don't like the sexual connotation -- although literally that's the meaning.

Those four bliss-voids are aligned with the four intuitions: "bliss-void" is aligned with the luminous intuition, or the luminescence intuition, like a moonlit sky, luminescent; "sublime bliss-extreme void" is aligned with radiance, feeling like the warm glow of the sun, like a twilit sky; "supreme bliss-ultimate void" is aligned with the immanence intuition, it's like a midnight sky, very deep and dark, like the dark night of the soul, "running silent and running deep" kind of intuitive experience. And finally, fourth, "spontaneous bliss-complete void" aligns orgasmic bliss, or spontaneous bliss, with the clear-light intuition which is like a predawn sky.

So, here we are, learning about this tradition that tells us that we all have these special intuitions, that there are these four luminous intuitions somewhere inside of us. It all sounds kind of weird. And what does it mean? There are some traditional similes that help us understand. So, what is that like?

First of all, we need to realize that the understanding of the lucid intuitions is not very different from basic Buddhism, when the Buddha said of his Nirvana experience, "Nirvana is the sole supreme truth. All other truths are false and prove deceptive." What is he saying? He's saying that this world is not Samsara; it's all really Nirvana -- that is if you can tune into the Nirvana channel, that's what it really is. And how is Nirvana, how did the Buddha describe Nirvana? "Profound, peaceful, blissful, and luminous." In other teachings he talks about the mind as "naturally radiant, naturally luminous, primarily radiant and perceptive." So, "primarily radiant and perceptive," that's what awareness is. And this is somewhere in our very nature.

In a sense, the purpose of the first three luminous intuitions is to get to the fourth one, which is like Nirvana. The purpose of the first three luminous intuitions is to serve as a trail. We're following the trail. It's like snails' trails. Have you ever

seen snails' trails? Snails leave little glimmering, shimmering trails on the sidewalk as they move on, and you don't see the snail. You wonder where the snail is...

Anyway, on to similes. There are a couple of useful similes that I want to mention to you. They are functional similes. One example is in the theory of mind of the Yogachara, that says that there are three layers: mind, mindset, and deep consciousness. Think of this as Freud's ego, superego and id: The "mind" accumulates experiences, the "mindset" supports those experiences, and the "deep consciousness" maintains a continuity of experiences. So, think of these three functions as fundamental functions. Western neuroscientists might think of them as three different neurotransmission systems: one that supports the smart vagal nerve, with its serotonin and oxytocin and vasopressin systems; then perhaps those that support the sympathetic nervous system, which is norepinephrine and dopamine; and then there's the cholinergic nervous system which is acetylcholine and others. There are other neurotransmitters, but those three are the ones from the brainstem, the primary brainstem. And they're chemical.

Another simile from Yogachara is the three layers of reality: the imaginary, the relative, and the perfect. Has anybody ever heard of those three realities from the Yogachara cosmology? Well, there's nothing wrong if you have not. Tsong Khapa said that understanding idealism or Buddhist constructivism is like getting stuck in the mud -- you can get out of it, but better not to get into it at all!

In any case, let me give it a try, let me get into it. These are deconstructive insights. First we have the understanding that the world as we perceive it is an imaginary world, that we're actually living in a virtual reality. But if we stop and pay attention, real attention -- like an artist, for example -- we start looking at what's put in front of us in a completely different way. But without the attention we don't



see it. If you've been trained as a psychotherapist or something like that, you have learned to read right through a person's face. Or if you love someone, you know what's going on inside of them. You don't have to be anything special to do that. You can imagine it, it's imaginary.

So the first level is about deconstructing this imaginary sense we get that the world is like a really wonderful place or a really terrible place. We dissolve that construction, the one that makes it seem like there's a separateness between "me" and the world, that there's a mental process working on that situation of "me" and "the world." And we finally get to the sense where we experience the deconstruction of that sense that there's a difference between "me" and the workings of my mind and the world that it produces. We develop a sense that "I am the world." We become more realistic. "I kind of realize that I am a region in the world." If "I" refers to this body that I feel is my body, then this body takes up matter and space in this world, and I am a nervous system.

We view these things in a certain way because of how we construct our reality. And this practice is there to help us understand that our reality is constructed from the beginning by these basic modes of our brain. This might be related to Rodolfo Llinás's quantum theory of consciousness, and the notion that our brain constructs our experience out of the energy that comes up from the brainstem and through the basal ganglia, in waves of energy that go through our brain every 40<sup>th</sup> of a second. Every time a wave of energy goes through, it networks, it joins a whole bunch of different neurons that are firing at that point, at the same time, and that brings up a state of consciousness. That's what produces our experience. It's physical, and it's chemical; and our brain functions as a virtual reality generator. It takes a whole bunch of experiences stored in our memory, it generates them and projects them onto the world, into our world. That is taking

place most of the time, we live as if we were having a dream, only this perceived reality is interactive. And that's really the insight here, the understanding that basically what we take to be reality is our own dream, our own production, and we are mistaking it for reality. Also, ironically, that dream of ours is part of a bigger reality, maybe it can be networked, or linked up, with other people's own dreams to produce a BIG dream -- like in the movie "The Matrix." Did you see that movie?

Moving on to another simile, a more important one that I've already shared with you, is the three emotions that get us into trouble: attachment, aversion and delusion. Each intuition has to do with an emotional mood or tone. The first intuition, what's called luminance intuition is about attachment, and understanding the effects of attachment. Like the forebrain, like the primate cortex, it wants to connect with people. That's what it wants. It always wants things, it wants people, it wants more, ... it's the perfect shopper! The second is the radiance intuition. Its tone is aggressive; it's defensive, guarded, it's "I'm trying to avoid what I don't want. " Third is the immanence intuition. It is delusion-oriented, responding to an instinct that says "I'm trying to maintain my sense of separateness, withdrawing from the world because I need to avoid it to protect myself somehow."

There are more of these similes, which I'm not going into now. Now I want to read to you some definitions of luminance, radiance, immanence and all these things, which are really fine and cool. I am reading to you from "Sustainable Happiness," pages 463-464. From Aryadeva's Lamp of Integrative Practices we get the following definitions:

(Luminance) ... is formless, without body or speech; it is taintless like an autumn sky filled by the illumination of light rays from the moon, perceived in the form of the natural clarity of things – this is the ultimate compassion, the first void, the wisdom-luminance.

(Radiance) ... has the form of freedom from subject and object. It is without body and speech; being the perception of all things in the reality of extremely brilliant taintlessness (freedom from separateness) like the autumn sky flooded with sun rays ... and so on and so forth. It relates to the extreme void.

(Immanence) has the form of nothingness, the character of space, ... it's as if in a state of fog-bound midnight, subtle and selfless, motionless, with no movement of life-energy ... without a [normal] sense of mind, unwavering it has the characteristic mark of delusion, the ultimate void.

And then, from Nagarjuna:

With the nature of twilight, day and night,  
There are luminance, ...radiance,  
And ...immanence;  
Thus the mind is said to be threefold.  
And thereby its basis is explained.  
The wind-energies, in their subtle form  
Having become fully mixed with those consciousnesses,  
Emerging through the paths of the senses,  
Thus cause the perception of all objects.

When you have these three luminances  
Mounted on wind-energies,  
Then all the instinctual natures  
Fully arise without remainder.  
Wherever the wind energies remain,  
There the instinctual natures function.

This is Tantric psychology. You might say that Tantra looks like an art form, but it also has a very interesting and elaborate neuropsychology in it. It is very far out, and very, so to speak, precocious, way ahead of its time if we compare to ours. Anyhow, the point is that the three intuitions, when driven by the reactive instinctive patterns, or reactive energies flowing through those primitive layers of mind, produce instinctive responses; and those instinctive responses generate an experience of reality that is driven and colored by our delusions, our aversions and our attachments. So, the energies stimulate the instincts, and the instincts produce the afflictive states of mind on a deep level. However, what Nagarjuna doesn't mention here is that if you can get all the way down to the fourth intuition, that is clear light, you can transform the energy of afflictions into something positive. And that is the purpose of this practice, to get to the clear light intuition so that we can turn all negative into positive, so that we can purify our system of negativity. It is called clear-light because it's free of taints. And that's where the mind is naturally radiant. And, actually, that mind can support either Samsara or Nirvana. It can be experienced as the foundation for a miserable life of chasing after our instincts -- a compulsive life being pushed around by the id, Freud would say. Or, if we want to unite and integrate, and we sublimate and transform the energy, then we can have a purified experience, an experience of life unfolding in

a blissful and open awareness, one that's not pushed around by reactive energy, and therefore is not triggering or reinforcing instinctive patterns. Is that clear?

If we get to pure bliss and we start living in pure bliss energy, that state of mind and that experience start weakening all of our instinctive patterns. Bliss takes the wind out of their sails. And then, as a result, the consciousnesses that would normally be pushed around by those patterns and tainted into suffering are no longer suffering consciousnesses. They become lucid intuitions and the world appears as Nirvana. And how is that? It is said that The Buddha experienced Nirvana as "profound, peaceful, blissful and luminous."

Here's another comment from Aryadeva, about the way these things are related (page 465 of "Sustainable Happiness"):

The three consciousnesses (are) rootless, unlocated, foundationless, signless, colorless, shapeless, beyond the senses. Nonetheless, (they are) luminous; thus, one is aware (of them when they are) conjoined with the wind-element. For the same reason that the formless air-element may be perceived by inference by observing the actions (of trees and such) moving and shaking, and so on (in the wind), just so the formless luminance of (subtle) consciousness may be perceived by inference, as it is inferable from the (perceptible) prototypes (or instinctive patterns), such as passion, dispassion, moderate passion, and so forth.

The metaphor goes like this: the mind is like space, and it's like the sky; the reactive energies are like the wind; we don't actually see the space from the sky, and we don't see the wind until we see the trees moving; and the trees are our instinctive patterns. As long as we're focused solely on the trees not much

happens. But when we get a strong desire, or a violent feeling against a living being, or whatever, the next step is to see the wind -- the reactive energy -- that's driving those feelings. That's the only way we see it, and catch it, when the instinct comes up. Essentially, we're talking about going deeper, to the root. You might say this is like stopping the weather before it breaks into a storm. And that's kind of far-out, awesome power we can build.

This practice brings up many questions. One common question is Tantric meditating on emptiness. It's actually fairly hard to do. Tsong Khapa has this beautiful passage which I hope to read to you at some point, where he says that after you go into the immanence intuition, where you swoon and it's total blackout and you're in the dark night of the soul, then you try to remember to bring up your emptiness intuition. You are in an altered state of consciousness at the time, but you try to remember, " .., now I'm going to meditate on emptiness." Of course, the best way to remember is to be meditating on emptiness all along.

The best way to meditate on emptiness is to start from your coarse body. You can use the eight dissolutions meditation for this. The key thing is that you start meditating on the emptiness of your coarse physical body. You realize that this body, this physical body I have been thinking of as me and mine, this body is not intrinsically "me" and it's not intrinsically mine, it's not even intrinsically matter, and it's not intrinsically a body. It's like quantum soup, whatever else ... You realize that it is not what you think it is, that it's empty of the projection that you have put onto it, and the sense of separateness that you put onto it. Then you look at the bodily fluids and you meditate on their emptiness in the same way. Next comes the dissolution of the bodily heat, and you meditate on its emptiness. Then it's the winds, the breath energies, and again you meditate on their emptiness. Then you get to space, and the mental dissolutions. First is the

luminous intuition and all the desire-oriented instincts; and you meditate on their emptiness: "This is not leading me to great happiness. That's a delusion. It's just wind, blowing through my mind ..." As you let go of those desire-based instincts, you get the luminance, you get the light. Light in this case, as the realization of emptiness, comes from having a very deep positive experience, a bliss state that allows you to let go of the red herrings that you might normally chase after, either desirable things or things that you fear. When you let go of them you experience their emptiness. Emptiness is in the letting go. So, in the moonlight intuition, or luminance intuition, you let go of objects of desire, one way or another.

Next comes the twilight stage. You let go of fear. In meditating on emptiness you experience the emptiness of objects of fear. Then in the midnight stage you let go of yourself as an object, of your subjectivity as an object. You realize that it is a delusion. You realize "I'm not even a separate thing ..." And then you enter the clear light. Then, because you've been meditating on emptiness all along, at every step of the way, it will be easier to remember to meditate on emptiness when you get into the clear light. And what you're doing there is purifying in the clear light. We'll be talking about that more, next semester. This is kind of getting ahead of our map for the journey, the familiarization journey that we're taking, the guided tour that we've taken so far. Next semester we'll be talking about this in greater detail, we'll be actually meditating on emptiness and the emptiness of all things. But here, at this point, we're just defining the basic parts of it.

Another question is, when exactly do you meditate on emptiness in this practice? As I was saying, the best is to be meditating on emptiness all along. And it's the same actually, as a continuation of Creation Stage practice. If you remember, as beginners we're focused on trying to see ourselves as Buddha, or to

see the Buddha coming to meet us, coming to visit us for tea. Once you can see the Buddha actually coming to visit you for tea, and you can see yourself as a Buddha, then you meditate on the emptiness of the Buddha coming to see you, and the emptiness of you as a Buddha. That's what creates, or unlocks, the "divine pride." The divine pride arises not because I look like Buddha. "Wow, I look like Buddha, I'm so amazing!" No! It's because I realize that I'm not a body. "I'm not a Buddha body, I'm not a Joe body, I'm not a separate, solid, reified thing." It is easier to see that, they say, when we're imagining our self in a deity body. It's easier then to feel like, "I'm going to let go of my body because I'm god." So, what's going to happen to "me"? If you feel like it's not so easy to let go of your body when you're Joe or anybody else – it's not so easy – but if you're god, then it seems like, "Well, why not?" Actually, during the Creation Stage we're supposed to be meditating on the emptiness in all that we're imagining, all the time. And this same practice then moves on into the Perfection Stage. We will continue meditating on the emptiness of experiences that we're having here too, right down to the core.

As one of my students phrased it, the road to emptiness is like loosening our grip of what we conceive of as reality. Our state of mind is mostly delusional, untrained. It is delusional because it is mistaken. It may not be delusional in the ordinary sense, because everybody else may share the same delusion; hence we all think we're sane. But we're actually, from the tradition's point of view, mistaken. Reality is not what it appears to be, as it appears to be, until we become much more conscious. If you want to compare it to psychoanalysis, not as a medical treatment but as a system of self-knowledge, and if you take the self-analysis within psychoanalysis, you understand that, as Freud put it, it's about recovering the territory within us that has been unconscious, and making it



conscious. He said, "Where it was, there I shall be." First we have an unconscious, and after practicing we can have a consciousness that is totally integrated, a consciousness that is aware of what's going on at a deeper level, in the unconscious. And when we get that we have what nowadays we call "neural integration," when the higher levels of consciousness and brain function tap into a network and bring their light down into the primal level of the natural light of the primitive layers of mind -- then we've totally arrived. Now we have a totally integrated system. We have an upgraded system. It's like we got a new kind of central processing unit that upgrades the old hardware, the one that's been around for millions and millions of years of evolution. And now, with a little extra light, it can function quite beautifully.

So, when we do this kind of practice we're essentially going back in time, to childhood and before that, back in evolution, to the origin of life, if you will; and then we re-evolve, we re-experience ourselves, now directed by a consciousness that is a play of bliss and creativity. It's possible now for everything to feel different. We can be wired quite differently under those terms, on the basis of bliss. And it is amazing ...

Most of us live in denial, oblivious to reality; and that's because of the way we're wired. It's not that we're bad people and that we don't want to be enlightened. But this is the way we humans come out. On some level, all of those old programs that were there for our protection in the past are still there. It's just that the things that we needed them to protect us from no longer exist. We are no longer in danger because of the saber-toothed tigers and other threats in the wild. We've done pretty well insulating ourselves and conquering these threats over the course of civilization. And we've been able to do that as mammals, taking 70 or 100 million years to become very sophisticated animals, mammals that can work

together in very creative ways. But the rest of our nervous system isn't functioning at that high level. The rest of our nervous system is still functioning as if it's back in the wild. And so we need to go down to visit it and re-create it, rebuild it, or rebirth it, with this higher awareness that there really is nothing to be afraid of anymore. We are awesome, we are gods. This old equipment that we developed when we were just little rodents, or little shrews, we don't need all that any more. The dinosaurs bit the dust; and we are pretty awesome. Our main problem now is that we're being pushed around by the dinosaur energies inside of us that we've been accumulating over all these millions of years of evolution, and we don't really know what to do with them.

This is a very far out practice, isn't it? I see how sophisticated this is; for me as a modern person, this really speaks to me because it's embodied, it's physical, it's physiological. And this is part of the reason why, in my own weird cosmology, I think things like psychoanalysis and neuropsychology are really Tantric. And now we're crossing all the "t"s and we're dotting all the "i"s, now that we understand in greater detail how the brain functions. Although actually only a few of our top neuroscientists and neuropsychologists understand the brain from this point of view, about what you can actually do with a human brain. They're more interested in trying to figure out where the shinbone connects to the thighbone; you know what I mean? But the people that follow this tradition are more interested in finding out how we transform our bag of bones into a translucent Buddha body, or a network of bliss, or openness. What they're trying to do is actually much more far out and will eventually be popular, because we need it. People like Dan Siegel and Rick Hanson are out there spreading the word. They are both Buddhist practitioners and neuroscientists that work with the psyche. They are trying to

upgrade Western neuroscience and neuropsychology to bring this wisdom into it. But it's going to take time.

Another question is, after death how does the mind continue? What happens to consciousness? That's the 64-million dollar question. I have been thinking about this for a long time, I have some theories. But the fact of the matter is that nobody really knows. Science hasn't gotten there. What we're learning in the last 20-30 years is that when a body is supposedly dead there is still a consciousness process going on in it. The Idealists, the people who say that mind can separate from the body, see that as proof that the mind can separate from the body. But it's not a proof of that at all, because the body, in some ways, continues to grow after you die. Some processes continue after death, they are natural processes. Like your nails continue to grow. The brain, with its neurochemistry, organically supports awareness. Even if the physical body has died the clock for the brain doesn't stop right away. The reason why we have wakes as part of the rituals for the dead is because people used to wake up after they died, or after they were declared dead. That's why we have them -- "we'll watch and wait to see if they wake up...." It's like an insurance policy. So, we've known this for a long time. But our modern health and disease science with its white-coated scientists forgot. Now we think that once somebody's body dies, they just go "whoosh!" The button has been pushed, it's all off, life disappears.

The traditional way that Buddhism and other religious traditions see the continuity from one life to the next is that there's something other than the body that's separable, like a soul, or spirit. Most Buddhists, even highly educated, sophisticated Buddhists like the Dalai Lama, will say that they feel somehow that something goes on from one life to the other. But if you ask the Dalai Lama he may say that it's not so, or he may laugh, or he may say nothing, or he may say "I

don't know, really." But there are other ways to explain the continuity between one life and another, or one mind and another. For Buddhists it is the continuity of karma. All that Buddhist psychology really requires is a continuity of karma. Bob Thurman translates karma as evolutionary action. Action patterns are never either created or destroyed; they are preserved and transformed. Activity is conserved and transformed. It's like a thermodynamic theory of mind. But it's not necessarily that the mind itself continues from life to life. The habit pattern consequentiality continues, that's all that's required. The Buddha himself said that in transmigration from one life to the next nothing transmigrates, nothing goes from one life to the next.

The basic belief, the doctrine, the religion in modern neuroscience is that there is no consciousness other than what depends on the brain. So the dogma of contemporary neuroscience is that it's all about the brain, and the mind is just a function of the brain. It's just a property of brain.

Now, I don't want to believe that. Why would evolution go through such great effort to generate a property that just sits around and does nothing? Yes, it emerges from the brain, but it does something. That's why, when you run into a mental construct that isn't yet installed in the hard part of your brain, it makes a big impact on it. Where do you draw the line between mind and matter? Basically, ultimately, it all comes down to language. That's my point of view. I can't say that I have fully developed my own theory. From the Buddhist philosophy point of view, it's like a convention, the result of an agreement among some members of society. It's like the question of where does life begin? It depends on who you ask. The pro-life people say it begins here and the pro-choice people say it begins there. Is a virus a living thing or isn't it a living thing? Everybody gets all hung up on whether it is or it isn't. But Buddhist philosophy teaches us that

this is not the way to see things; it's all related, all relative. In relativity, where you draw the line between this and that is conventional. So, when I say this is mind and that's matter, this is mind and that's brain, it's a convention, a result made of consensus. A group of us humans met, sat down and agreed that anything that's just electrical information processing is mind, and anything that's chemical is brain.

Actually, there's no clear border between the two. And I would say it's the same for the earlier question about death, about what happens to consciousness when we die. In fact, it's one of the questions that the Buddha refused to comment on. He said not to waste time wondering whether the mind can be separated from the body or not, or whether a Buddha exists after death or not. It's a waste of time. We don't really need to know that. More importantly, the reason why Buddha refused to comment is because it wasn't a helpful question. It's not a helpful question, because if you're asking things like "where does my life stop and another life begin?" or "how does my life go from here to there?" you are still living in the delusion of thinking your life is separate and not part of the big picture of Life. It's like, here we are, fiddling about with little things while Rome burns ... As if we're miserable, life is so miserable ... So, are we going to get happy or are we not going to get happy? Where is the bar code that says "this is my life"? Where is the bar code that says "this body is mine"? There is no such bar code.

Another question is, do we purify our mind to ensure that we have a more fortunate rebirth? Well, that's one interpretation of one spiritual practice, at one level. There are many different levels of Tantric practice, of spiritual practice, and in Buddhist psychology. At first the goal is to get a better rebirth -- but that's only the first level. Then comes to achieve Nirvana, which has nothing to do with

rebirth. Once we achieve Nirvana, who cares? In Nirvana there is no separate self that's being born or reborn or dying, so rebirth is no longer an issue. Then, at a higher level, if our goal is to become an altruist, a bodhisattva or a Tantric altruist, a master altruist, the only reason for concern about reincarnation is so we can help more people over a longer period of time. And what does reincarnation in that context mean? Does reincarnation mean that I, that there's a little piece of Joe that separates from my brain when I die and goes into somebody else, a little baby, or something like that somewhere? Or does it mean that through experiencing liberation from the grip -- or the trap -- of evolution and childhood I set an example, a kind of frequency of freedom that somebody else might tune into? Then, there I am. If that's really me, because in Buddhism, in the Buddhist psychology, I am my Truth Body. The Buddha said -- I paraphrase, "You hear me talking, you see my body, but that's not me. I am Nirvana. I'm blissful, open, luminous, peaceful awareness." So, that's what I am. And you, what about you? You are luminous, blissful, peaceful open awareness. So, p, am I not you? Are you not me? What's the difference between you and me? What's the difference between your luminous, peaceful, blissful awareness and my luminous, peaceful, blissful awareness? There's not much of a difference. There is a difference in context, or history, or something like that, but beyond that we get into a kind of non-local, quantum kind of feeling.

And so the whole notion of death and rebirth kind of dissolves in the Tantra, as it does in Mahayana if you look at it closely enough. You see, when you get into this level of the practice it's all very far out. It's like suddenly it becomes very primal. And remember how to focus on it. It doesn't require any cosmology. It requires science. It requires an understanding of how the mind works, and how the body works. It doesn't really concern itself so much about where we're going

and where we're coming from. It is about where we are and what we are. Right here.

Chapter Seven:Taming the Eighty Instincts: The Neuropsychology of Inner Revolution

In this chapter we explore the psychology of purification, the neuropsychology of clearing the mind. I think, fortunately, we've done a lot of our work already and so we can spend a little time retouching on some points. Also, we can do a little bit of an intellectual review. Then we may be ready for some basic practice. Ways of easing into this include breath work, maybe some chanting and trying to get a more experiential feeling for the breath energy and how it can help us tap into states of positivity, states of release, bliss and openness.

Let's review this awesome practice of tapping positivity, of tapping the natural energy and chemistry of bliss and openness within us ---so we all can have access to that. We need to learn how to run on bliss, and how to use both bliss and openness to purge our minds. So, this is what we're really doing technically at this point in our journey together: first we are tapping into states of wellbeing and deep visceral calm and wellness using deep breathing and priming our vagal tone, and activating the love-growth nervous system; and then we harness the energy of those states to let go of our traumatic patterns, memories, conditionings – like amygdala kind of conditionings, or, as we'll talk about today, even deeper instinctive patterns that aren't necessarily reinforced in this lifetime, but come from having a human brain that's evolved from hundreds of millions of years through lots of tough jungles. Right?

We're talking about not just the possibility that we can generate lasting positivity within us, but also we can shift our basic tone from worry and neurotic malaise to a fundamental sense of blissful wellbeing. In the language of basic



Buddhist psychology, we can find Nirvana within us, here and now. And, once we've found it, what do we do with it? How can we use it to purify the human mind and body, which is the best instrument for not only personal enlightenment but for transformation of the whole planet? How do we purify it – or, more exactly, let's say update it, from all the aeons of survival that are sort of wired into our instincts, and into the memories of survival from our childhood? How do we purge all that and get the sort of pure, integrated and fully conscious human mind and body, which is the ultimate instrument for personal happiness, as well as sharing happiness? In a nutshell, that's where we are.

I'm going to explore the neuropsychology of inner revolution, of inner transformation, of transformative inner visceral affect work. But first we must address any questions or reflections about where we're going to or where we've been. One question is, how do you balance the bliss work with the healing insight for self-analysis, which is applying the bliss to understanding and disarming our patterns of suffering, whether they are learned in this lifetime or intergenerational patterns of suffering, or natural innate instincts that are also patterns of suffering?

I want to remind you all that this teaching, at least within the Tibetan tradition, is very much seen resonant with all the other forms of Buddhist contemplative healing and transformation. In a way you can think of it as an inset map for the healing process. If you're going to take on the process of healing, we have the different vehicles for it: simple mindfulness to deal with violence on a coarse level, love and compassion to deal with neurotic social violence or fears, and then, at a more advanced level, for going in really deep, we are using bliss to disarm our reactivities, our whole reactive nervous system. You can think of the Tantras, of this esoteric psychology of transformation, as a little inset map that

looks at the most advanced stages of any path of meditative healing. As they say, there's one final common pathway, there's only one vehicle.

There is an interesting debate in the Mahayana tradition, in the practice of social healing, around this question: once we learn to have peace and happiness ourselves, to what extent should we bliss out and go into the realms of formless absorption in the heavenly realms? The Mahayana teaching is, if you get lost in the realms of formless absorption, then what about all the other people who are suffering? What happens to the planet? And what happens to your own development? You get stuck! There is this traditional joke about the meditation practitioners who get stuck in the formless realms, in bliss states of higher absorption. They have these bliss states in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism also. The bliss is not just for the esoteric tradition. Bliss is everywhere; it runs through all of these practices, and it can be accessed in different ways.

People can get seduced and beached in, stuck, at certain levels. And if you get beached in, eventually you have to come back down to earth, one way or the other, because bliss doesn't produce freedom. Bliss produces relief and wellbeing, but only temporarily. Ultimately, we can't get out of the cycle, the repetition, of neurotic suffering, or whatever, what is called Samsara, unless we go to the root of the suffering and we dismantle the causes of our suffering. We need to dismantle what makes us suffer. No matter how beautiful the state of absorption we might find that gets us wonderful relief, like a fabulous vacation in Big Sur or something like that, when the vacation is over, we still have to come home. In a sense, we're still embodied. That's the assumption: neither bliss by itself nor meditation by itself really free us. It can't free us; it just makes life easier.

There's a joke about the bodhisattvas or altruists who go into the realms of bliss and they wake up as beached meditators, stuck there in their complacency, and say, "Wait a minute ... what happened?" What happens when you wake up and come back down to earth? You're going to be miserable again. And think about all those people who are still stuck on planet Earth, still stuck in everyday mind and body; what are you doing to help them? You're not developing your compassion. Even from the standpoint of personal liberation, in their view, no amount of bliss equals liberation. Bliss is just a method, it's a methodology. Wisdom is what cuts the root of suffering. We have to really learn how to stop suffering. We have to understand what it is about us that's making a misery or a nightmare out of Nirvana. And unless we understand that, it will not stop.

On the other side, in terms of our ethical or moral development, we have to understand that even if we're blissed out, we're still connected to a universe where other people are suffering; and unless we're using our bliss to be more effective altruists and make a bigger difference, we're really not participating in a bigger solution either. So, we're not really being so helpful. The thing is that the bliss is necessary but not sufficient. It's the best surgical tool to get to the root of the problem, but it isn't the scalpel. The scalpel is analysis and wisdom. It's the ability to discern the patterns that are causing suffering and those causing happiness, and then to decisively correct the mistakes and let go of those patterns. And that's kind of what we're talking about now.

We have spent some time thinking about generating bliss through deep breathing exercises like vase breathing, and learning how to trigger the flow of endorphins, or serotonin, or oxytocin, or whatever drops we want to fill our system. But then, where does it all lead to? Once you get the great bliss, what are

you going to do with it? The answer to that is: in order to keep the commitments of the Buddhas, in order to reach full personal liberation and then share that liberation with others, we need to cut through our delusions, whether they're from this life or they're innate from just having a nervous system. That's where we are.

One question is, how do people who have taken a vow of celibacy practice these teachings? Tapping into sexual energy using either visualization, which is like a virtual intimacy, or an actual real-life relationship if you're a lay person and you have a partner who is doing a similar practice, are very controversial practices. That's partly why I haven't gone deep into them. Today I will, a little bit, and maybe we'll continue tomorrow. This is a big deal in the California community, Tantric sex workshops. But here we try to get to the technology and the real psychological basis of this.

So, the reality is that there is no vow against having romantic fantasies or bliss within a Brahmacharya, or celibate, lifestyle, at least from the Buddhist point of view. Though there is a lot of talk about, say, attraction and desire as problems, Tibetan culture is inspired more by what we might think of as modern sensibility, or liberated sensibility: whatever goes on in your mind is fine as long as there's no malice, only genuine love, warmth or affection. But it's the behavior that's out.

We have also talked about the practice of developing inner fire. This practice is very important. It has four supports, or tools, two inner and two outer. The inner supports are vase breathing and diamond recitation, which is breathing mindfully in and out with a sense of the resonance of that energy as sacred. The outer supports are a visualized partner or a real partner. We will talk a little bit more tomorrow about the other things you could use, like the death process, or your sleep and dreams, as physiological supports.

So, to put the question of how people who have taken the celibate vows practice the Tantras in context, within the traditional Tantras, that is to say, the ancient Indian unexcelled yoga Tantras, Anuttara Tantras, the oldest of which is considered to be the Guyasamaja, or the esoteric communion, there are only two ways that one can actually reach the so-called "mind objective." One is unraveling your heart knot -- or, let's just say, totally accessing the sources of bliss and awareness at the brainstem and immersing your awareness completely within that; and the other is being fully able to self-regulate, to network those deep primal sources of positivity. In order to do that one needs an external support of some kind. The inner support is necessary, but you also have to have an outer support, either virtual intimacy or real intimacy, or you have to have death.

The way that this is traditionally done is different in different lineages. In some Tibetan lineages, for example, people can be lamas and be married. So, for them it's not a contradiction. They're not maintaining Brahmacharya in that sense. But for a monk like His Holiness, in the Sakya and Gelug traditions, they can't do the sexual practices. And so that's how they do it: they don't! They have to use their imagination and their inner sensitivity to try to tap into their bliss experience, and then maybe they'll do it in the Bardo after they die. They'll use the death process to totally open their nervous system. Or, of course, they can stop being a monk, which some people do.

What's interesting from my point of view is to look at the larger culture of monasticism and celibacy. I was raised Catholic, and there you have all of these scandals about the Catholic priests and their inability to keep their hands off of people. The bottom line is, from the Tibetan point of view, there's a lack of methods to mature the nervous system so that people who have committed to

celibacy can have access to bliss; and so they can tap into their own sexual energy in a way that is spiritually or ethically whole. And so these kinds of practices, even short of any kind of real intimacy practices, could be very useful for people living a celibate life, because it means that you could develop psychosexually even without a partner. It's nice to know as a single person that you don't need a physical partner, right? You can develop your nervous system using and cultivating your imagination and your sensitivity to your own sexual energy.

Another question is, how do you actually integrate the bliss practices with the compassion practices? The way it actually works is that they're integrated totally from the beginning. So, say, for example, we opened the session with a meditation where you visualized, in a sense, the biggest source of bliss, the Mahamudra, the communion with the teacher, the sense of being loved so much that your teacher sort of dissolves into you and you melt into your teacher. Also, if you're really good at vase breathing and at working with the mind, then you might actually be able to generate some inner heat just that way. Once you do that, you instantly harness it and you imagine benefitting others.

So, you see, from the very beginning these practices are ethical in their nature. They empower you but they instantly also put you to work on taking care of others, and liberating others. You do this by imagining the lights and nectars, the mantric energies or other messages going out from you to the world around you. It's kind of like the original Internet: it's a virtual transforming of the environment, transforming the planet. You imagine the planet and you imagine really benefiting the people on it; then you imagine them responding ... And so you get sort of a sense of the give-and-take -- and that's what makes the difference between this kind of bliss and the bliss of sadism, like in the movie

"Clockwork Orange." Because bliss is everywhere. Bliss is a neutral reinforcing process; it doesn't have to be ethical.

I think it's true that in general, when we humans are blissed out we tend to be kinder and gentler. And usually our nasty side or self-protective side only comes out, not when we're feeling blissful but when we're feeling threatened, or some other negative feeling. The fact is that, in this practice, from the very beginning, we're establishing a network connection between our bliss experience and the socialization of it, the sharing of it with others. From the Mahayana point of view, it is a sort of social psychology, or a social development standpoint, that we develop our full potential for blissful engagement with others -- what I call ecstatic altruism-- only when we engage in active dialogue or interaction with others. In other words, we can't really develop that capacity, we can't become a Tantric Buddha without the benefit of others to help and others to sort of look to us. And it's a dynamic process. In a way, you can think of it as leadership or charisma, something like that. You know, you can't have leadership without people who are able to engage in a kind of teamwork. It's a dialogue, and a person has to learn how to lead by working with others who want to learn or do something together. The idea is that we all have that capacity. And so all of us can be leaders in our own way and in our own community. But that capacity will emerge only through a real interactive dialogue with others, and by finding out how to be of help. We need to engage in learning how to actually do that, this is not just an abstraction.

Shall we talk about the instinctive patterns? To locate where we are, we can do a little review. We first went through the Creation Stage. The Creation Stage is like the flight simulator for the Hero's Journey. In that stage we are

learning how to pilot our mind and body through the Hero's path by virtually imagining that we're already there, on the path, going through it virtually, even though we're not actually doing it. We re-envision ourselves through role modeling, and then we re-envision how we are carrying the process of transforming our environment, transforming the world, creating an altruistic community around us and then, together with that community, transforming the world in some way or another. We re-envision all that in the Creation Stage, using a creative imagination process.

And now we're in the Perfection Stage. Once you've got the vision, once you're inspired and you have a vision that, " ... maybe I actually could transform myself and the world around me ..." how do you get the energy to actually do it? How do you get the nervous system that's necessary to make that kind of impact, and to sustain it? That's the Perfection Stage: rewiring our nervous system so that we're actually able to live in the heroic way we want to, now that we're more able to tap into our natural sources of inspiration.

In the Perfection Stage there are five sub-stages. I know this is kind of arcane, but I think it's important not to be vague about this because that's not the way this tradition works. In this tradition you need to understand. Tsong Khapa, the great fifteenth century renaissance synthesizer of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, structured his commentaries on this kind of practice, and he said that you start from the goal. That's why some people refer to Tantra as a result-based practice. You start where you want to be: this is what it's like to be a Tantric Buddha, a master altruist who achieves that state in one lifetime. You imagine it: "So this is what it's like ... And what are the causes of becoming a master altruist, and the conditions right before becoming that? what are the proximate causes of



the state immediately before you become, that has also certain causes and conditions, and then what are the causes of that? And what are the causes of that? And the causes of that? ... " That's the way that Tsong Khapa actually organizes it. If you want this, you have to cause that; if want that, you have to cause this; if you want this, you have to cause the other thing. It's a very interesting study in demystifying mysticism, in a way, it is demystifying these extraordinary states, seeing that they are causally reproducible -- and you have to causally reproduce them! God is not going to come and do this for you. But you may be inspired by the genius in God, or your guru, or in Buddha, whatever or whoever inspires you. Realistically speaking, you really have to know what you're doing and you have to go step by step, gradually. It's just like you're assembling a Lego set of the "Lord of the Rings" castle: you have to follow the steps or else it just doesn't work.

So there are five stages in the Perfection Stage. We only really talked about the first three. (Actually, I mentioned three, but it's really only two stages and three objectives.) The first stage, or the gateway into the Perfection Stage, is what's called the "freedom of body." What that means is not, of course, that we're now floating around in La La Land, just like a pure mind somewhere, or like an air balloon. What this means is that we are free from seeing our body in the conditioned form that our body has taken through our development, the neurotically identified form that we think of as "my body." Of course it's really just a mental image; it's not really a body. We know that when people have eating disorders or whatever other psychoses, they see their bodies in very distorted ways. So, when we develop enough of a sense of inspiration, we can develop a vision of our better self, we can actually imagine our self as our better self. That's the role-modeling practice. I like to say that this is like putting on the prosthetic

self. Bob Thurman likes to say, "If you're going to go into outer space, you need a space suit." And the space suit is the better self. We all know about that if we watched "Gravity," the movie that won the Oscar recently. You need a space suit, otherwise it's scary out there. And so, we can part with our ordinary body image, even though we're very attached to it. So, if we're able to generate a mentally created better body image, that is like a divine body image, the image of ourselves as a genius or as a Buddha or as the ideal being that we would like to be -- that's attaining "freedom of body."

Once we cut the cord with our ordinary neurotic sense of our bodily limitations, of our body as a precarious, vulnerable, physical thing that we have to cling to, we move to "freedom of speech." In order to move to freedom of speech we have to move beyond the Creation Stage methods and move into the energy practices that allow us to tap the central channel -- that is to say, to create a very profound balance and integration between our left and right brains, of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and get into a deep integrated state of wellbeing and wellness that may be tapped in our internal reward system. We do that and then we can start to deconstruct our neurotic speech patterns, our neurotic negative thinking, our worst-case thinking, our traumatic memories, all those conditioned memories which say, "This is how I'm going to be hurt, this is how you're going to hurt me, this is the bad stuff that is going to happen to me..." And because we perhaps have had childhood memories and experiences of feeling hurt, this is like psychotherapy, intensive deep psychotherapy. Just this phase. Because we don't even dream of going this deep in normal psychotherapy. Imagine your therapist could promise that you could be, challenge you to be totally free of your neuroses at the end of a therapeutic process and never think a negative thought again! Our normal sense

is that we learn to live better with it; that's the best we can hope for. And, you know, that's worth seven years on the couch and however much money it would take. But this is a different kind of practice. Here we have to take a lot more responsibility and be a lot more active. Think about having speech isolation. As we stop, we learn how to separate our discursive mind -- our thought process from all negative thinking and really be able to be in a radically positive affirmative stream of thought, in a continuous, ongoing way -- and be comfortable with the positive energy that it stirs up, that energy that is needed to support that. Think about what it would be like to be somebody who can really live in inspiration, like a poet or an artist or a great speaker or something like that, all the time. So that's the "freedom of speech."

Freedom of speech purges our mind. It frees our mind from the conditioning of all of the traumas that happened to us in childhood, either real or in our imagination. You know, like when you felt, "My parents are going to get rid of me, they are going to sell me or throw me down the river ... " But for some strange reason they didn't! As you can know from fairy tales, our imagination is usually a lot crueler than our parents, although not always. Sometimes it's the other way around. But, nonetheless, our minds are a great source of suffering to us as children because we're able to imagine terrible things happening. And so now we learn how to deconstruct the ruts that we built for ourselves by having traumatic experiences and reacting to them, or over-reacting to them, or by imagining in our own mind bad things that could happen to us. Now we can learn how to stop that.

Then we go to the next level in the Perfection Stage, which is called "freedom of mind." What's entailed here is underneath what you might think of as

limbic traces of operant conditionings, or Pavlovian conditionings, from suffering in this lifetime. Then there are the instinctive natural self-protective reflexes that are probably wired into the brainstem or the core brain, the basal ganglia and that kind of thing. Freedom of mind is about learning through self-regulation, through channeling or relying on our capacity, to consistently generate bliss states, or positive affect states, to disarm those inner instinctive patterns that may never have been activated in this lifetime, but are just there because we have a nervous system. So that's where we are.

The discussion about the practice is framed in terms of "dismantling," "disarming," or "deconditioning" the 80 instinctive patterns. We have talked about these patterns as they relate to three different groups: the attachment-oriented group, the social clinging, which has 33 instinctive patterns; the aversion or aggression-oriented group for avoiding harm, or more exactly, avoiding displeasure and getting pleasure, with 40 instinctive patterns; and the third group, the delusion-oriented group of instinctive patterns, of which there are seven.

So the three categories are desire, or attachment-oriented instinctive patterns; aggression, or aversion-oriented instinctive patterns; and delusion, or confusion-oriented instinctive patterns. And we have made some tentative connections between those three categories and the nervous system, relating them to the functioning of the smart vagal system, the sympathetic nervous system, and the parasympathetic nervous system. But that's probably way too simplistic. It might be one way of thinking about them, but it's just one way, one angle.

These instinctive patterns are very important. That's where the rubber meets the road, it's the nitty-gritty of this practice, it's what we need working on.

And now we're really in the realm of what's normally unconscious, which can operate in one of two distinct modes: The normal unconscious compulsive mode, in which these things just happen, these patterns play out, and we can't do anything about it; or the enlightened or self-regulated mode, in which the unconsciousness is taken out of it as we learn how to dismantle or disarm these instincts, we learn to "sublimate" them if you want to use Jung's language. In this second mode the three layers of consciousness, including subtle consciousness or unconscious mind functions, become luminous intuitions, or lucid intuitions. This is the case when we have gained the intuitive awareness that we don't need to be clingy, we don't need to be defensive, and we don't need to be isolated. On those three levels, when we have that intuitive awareness in a very consistent way we can let go of all these instinctive patterns and focus on the bliss -- and that's when we've succeeded in generating the three luminous intuitions.

So, what are the compulsive instinctive patterns that are normally in these three layers? They are listed on pages 466 - 468 of "Sustainable Happiness." First, the 33 instincts that are attachment-oriented:

The first three – mild, moderate, and strong detachment – refer to letting go of objects of attachment or desire.

So that's like slightly unpleasant, loosening up and letting go. Moving on:

The fourth, extroversion/introversion refers to the mind's tendency to approach objects of desire and avoid objects of fear. Patterns five, six and seven -- mild, moderate and intense grief – refer to anguish caused by loss of an object of attachment or desire. The eighth, gentleness or benevolence, refers to the mind being at ease or at peace with others. The

ninth, antagonism, refers to the opposite: the combative activity of an agitated mind.

These instincts are neither all positive nor all negative. Mixed into each of these categories is what we would normally consider positive states of mind and negative states of mind, but they're grouped together because they all have to do with attachment. So, whether you're losing somebody or you're feeling averse to someone or benevolent towards someone, it's all an attachment-related kind of mental function, it's all about your relationships with other people, whether you're losing them, charming them, hating them, whatever. I move on:

The 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, mild, moderate, and intense fear, refer to the fear, panic, and terror of the mind facing threatening adversity. The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup>, mild, moderate, and intense craving, refer to the mind's longing for an object of desire. The 16<sup>th</sup>, dependency, refers to an addictive craving for a stimulating object. The 17<sup>th</sup>, discouragement, refers to a disinclination to engage in positive actions.

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> are hunger and thirst. You'd think that's not attachment-oriented at all, but remember, as human mammals we get our food and water from people. Mother is our initial source of satisfying hunger and thirst.

The 20<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup> are mild, moderate, and intense sensitivity to pain, pleasure and indifference. The 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, receptivity, retention and discrimination, refer to capacities for social learning. The 26<sup>th</sup>, conscience, refers to an aversion to harmful actions based on personal values. The 27<sup>th</sup>, compassion, refers to wishing others to be relieved of suffering. The

28th to 30th, mild, moderate, and intense love refer to the wish for others to be safe and happy. The 31st, being startled or alarmed refers to the insecurity of a mistrusting mind. The 32nd, greed or hoarding refers to an obsession for collecting possessions. the 33rd, envy, refers to feeling disturbed by the good fortune of others.

These are standard Buddhist psychology concepts; it's interesting that you hear the "good" and the "bad" thrown in together in one instinct. What we would normally call positive and negative, or wholesome and unwholesome mental factors, are all thrown in together, the categories are not defined according to good or bad. Then there are aggression-oriented instinctive patterns, and there are 40 of them:

The 34th, attraction, refers to aggression in terms of acquisition or conquest. It's being attracted to and wanting to conquer another person or object of desire.

The 35th, passion, refers to longing for an already attained object of desire. The 36th through 38th, mild, moderate, and intense joy – or satisfaction -- has to do with enjoying or pleasure with what's obtained or who's obtained. The 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup>, delight and rapture, refer to the joy to attain a desired goal, and the joy of repeatedly savoring that attainment. Awe, the 41st, is enjoying something astonishing or new. Elation and satisfaction respectively refer to the mind's exuberance at an enjoyment of something delightful. The 44th through 46th, embracing, kissing and sucking refer to the primary urges of social bonding.

You would think, do these belong in the attachment-oriented ones or are they aggressive? But certainly when you see a child nursing you realize that there's a certain amount of aggression involved.

Constancy, the 47th, refers to the mind's ability to persist without changing course. Courage, the 48th, refers to an impulse to undertake a positive challenge. Pride refers to an inclination towards arrogance. Effectiveness refers to the urge to engage challenges. Covetousness and aggressiveness, 51st and 52nd, refer to the impulse to dominate others. The 53rd, enthusiasm, refers to the impulse to initiate positive action. It may be more like playful energy, rough-and-tumble play. The 54th through 65th, mild, moderate, and extreme transgression refer to the urge towards increasingly violent action towards others. That means defying or trouble-making in increasingly violent ways. Hostility is unprovoked aggression toward others, especially authority figures. Seduction is trying to manipulate others for one's satisfaction or gratification. Resentment is harboring a grudge. Virtue is the aggression required to persist in a positive action. Transparency is the impulse to communicate clearly and openly. Honesty and dishonesty – communicate truthfully or deceptively. The 64th is conviction, refers to a strong mindset of certitude and determination. Dispossession – that's no longer wanting to accumulate things. Generosity – giving things away. Leadership -- to rouse more inhibited others. Heroism -- an urge to face inner demons like addictions and compulsions. Incurability – an impulse to indulge negative actions without qualms of conscience. Deceitfulness -- intent to mislead others. Malevolence -- indulging malice. Domination -- urge to oppress others.



Cunning -- urge to defraud or manipulate others.

Those are the aggression-oriented instincts. So they're not all bad aggression; some of them seem to be good aggression, like courage. And then finally there are the seven delusion-oriented instinctive patterns:

Moderate attachment. That's residual clinging to objects of attachment and desire. Forgetfulness or mindlessness. Loss of memory or mindfulness. Confusion. A tendency towards disorientation, distortion and error. Withdrawal. An urge to stop communicating or engaging. Exhaustion. A tendency toward depression and fatigue. Apathy. A disinclination to act. Dullness. A tendency toward mental fogging and doubt.

You see how those seven patterns are kind of withdrawal-oriented, like when you feel "I'm going into my cave, I'm going into myself and forget the world." So, this is fascinating, right? I just wanted to give you a flavor of what we're talking about. But what does all this mean? I have talked a little bit about the distinction between the luminous intuitions. Tsong Khapa describes this as a distinction between subtle layers or levels of consciousness which have these instincts in them, versus lucid intuitions which are conscious subtle layers of mind, self-regulated or fully integrated layers of mind in which we are already not just aware, we have a subtle awareness of what's pushing us around unconsciously, but we're actually in there, steering the boat and deciding how we want that particular layer of consciousness to operate, which aspects to keep and which to let go.

And, remember, we talked about the intuitions and how they depend on our mastering the energies. There is a famous metaphor that goes like this: the intuitions are like the sky, the energies are like the wind, and the instinctive

patterns are like trees; and the only way we know that there's wind is because we see the trees moving. So, in this case, when instinctive patterns are operating we become aware that there's reactive energy running through our nervous system. So, when we start to be angry or crave something, that's a sign that something's going on with our reactive energies. And the way to disarm those energies, the practice of harnessing our energies comes from the understanding that if we can consciously withdraw our energy from the normal compulsive vagaries and invest it in a continuous experience of bliss, then we can starve the compulsive patterns of the energy that drives them. By redirecting our subtle mind and energy into the bliss network, we're actually taking the wind out of the sails of these instinctive patterns. And we can then have the strength to recognize these patterns, and let them go so we are not driven by them. In this way we slowly decondition them, we disarm them.

Some of you have commented about how slow this process is. I know! We'd like to be able to do this instantly. In fact, there's an interesting debate about whether this happens suddenly or gradually. There are some traditions that teach that all of the instinctive patterns dissolve immediately once consciousness goes beneath the layer of the subtle consciousness. That is to say, once the first luminous intuition appears all of the instincts suddenly and immediately dissolve. A lot of Tibetans actually teach this. But not the traditional commentators like Aryadeva. Tsong Khapa himself says that what does dissolve instantly once you go into the subtle layer are the constructs, the symbolic interpretations or rationalizations of those instinctive patterns. So, you've got two parallel things here: you've got instinctive patterns, which are not verbal, they're just instincts; and then you've got thought processes or symbolic processes that layer over them, like rage. For example, the thought, "This is a bad person, I have to defend

myself" or the recognition that this person is the enemy. You have the symbolic layer and then you have an instinctive layer, and they're distinguished here by the fact that one is learned versus the other which is natural. The way that Tsong Khapa interprets this -- as I read him, and I think as Bob Thurman and another student of his, Christian Vedemeyer, agree -- is pretty much in the same way: the sudden dissolution applies only to the symbolic constructs, and the instincts themselves have to be repeatedly purified.

The way this happens is that, if you remember in the opening meditation the hero and heroine came into us and then we slowly dissolved into the heart, because the heart is where these patterns are supposed to swell out of. We're dissolving into the heart, where we experience the luminous intuitions. But what might be keeping us from experiencing the real intuitions is that swirling out of our brainstem, if you will, or our core brain, or the most primal centers of our nervous system, with feelings like, "I'm hungry" or "I'm angry" or "I'm lonely" or whatever. What this means is that it's in the dissolution process that one can get access to these deep levels. It's with experiences like a near-death experience or a meditative death experience, that you melt down to your primal awareness, that's when you get access to these primitive impulses, and that's when the opportunity comes to let go of them, to see them clearly for what they are, reactive or compulsive patterns-- and not to invest in them.

That process must happen very gradually, as we get deeper and deeper within, because to go deeper requires increasing disarmament. It's like a chicken-and-egg thing: the deeper you get, the more you can disarm, and in order to go deeper you have to disarm. So, you just have to keep doing it over and over again, and keep saying "no" to those patterns, and keep telling yourself that it's

safe to let go of them. "I don't need all these things, happiness isn't outside of me, I don't need to acquire so much, I'm strong enough. I don't need to be on guard all the time, I don't have to behave like an aggressive animal. And I'm not alone in the world, I belong here, I don't need to freak out and go into my shell."

Tsong Khapa talks quite a bit about how you can do this. There are many different ways in which to access the deeper layers of the unconscious mind and unraveling the heart knot. We have talked about that. This is a symbolic way of talking about disarming the reactive stress energies that normally block our access to the deep states of wellbeing, what we call deep transformational affects. So, as we dismantle those patterns we can go deeper and deeper. And there is no one way to do it.

You can use the imagery of lights, or syllables, for example. Some meditations involve imagining the heart drop at the subtlest level as a moon disk and around it a bunch of syllables, while saying recitations as you breathe in and out. You say the three seed syllables "Om Ah Hum" imagining that all the consonants are in a string around the outside, all the vowels are in a string around the inside, and then the seed syllables are at the heart. I'm giving you here an example of one part of a complicated visualization practice, actually from Naropa.

You then imagine that the consonants dissolve into the vowels, the vowels dissolve into the seed syllable, the seed syllable slowly melts. First the seed syllable has a body, and then it has only a little hat, and then it is reduced to a little drop at the top ... you can see these in the traditional iconography. In other words, it's complicated. Let's just say it's like an "I" or an exclamation point upside down ( ¡ ) which has these different layers, and then it slips into the clear light. You can imagine, for example, that as the consonants slip into the clear light you

experience the moonlight intuition, and then as the vowels slip in you experience the twilight intuition, and as the exclamation slips in you experience the midnight intuition -- and then your mind is in clear light.

These are all basically just mental aids designed to help your mind focus and compress itself into a subtler and subtler, deeper and deeper absorption. You can either use those imageries, you can use lights and syllables, or not.

Normally we would envision that, as the guru melts into me, it's like I'm dying, my ordinary self is dying and I am melting into my primal awareness, and then I am being reborn. But I could also imagine that it's happening as I'm embracing my partner: I'm imagining that I'm the subjective male aspect and I'm embracing the objective female aspect. Or I could imagine that I'm the objective female aspect embracing the subjective male aspect. Or I could image that I'm both subjective and objective, male and female together, I'm androgynous and I'm kind of dissolving into myself, embracing the other half of myself. And one way you could use the arousal of sexual energy as an experience of a kind of blissful melting, as chemical support for an experience of dissolution.

So, to sum up, you can either use internal props, like lights and letters; or you can use external props, with a visualization of a partner or even a real partner. In any case, however you do it, you're aiming at dissolving all your energy into your heart chakra, which again in our map is at the brainstem – it's not really at the heart -- and then disarming whatever innate or learned reactivity swirls up as we're trying to dissolve.

To give you a very simple metaphor, or an example of this that most of us can experience quite easily, and that is when you do the vase breathing practice and you hold your breath, at a certain point you start to feel an urge to breathe; and if you hold your breath for long enough you start to biologically feel a kind of panic, like "I better start breathing now, this is not very comfortable now, what if I don't breathe now, what's going to happen to me?..." So, right there your self-protective instincts are swirling, and you could sort of give in to them and panic. Or you can tell them, "Calm down, we're still living and breathing, we are just trying to calm ourselves now, we don't need so much air, we can wait another second or two, just chill out and let it be." You go through that panic like that, and you weaken it, just decondition it. Now you're saying "no" to the panic: "No, I don't need you, panic, you don't have to tell me that I have to breathe, I know I have to breathe, I'll breathe when I'm ready."

This is just a very simple example of how this works: You expose yourself to these primal urges, and then you use your higher awareness to essentially relieve them of duty: "I don't need you anymore, I'm going to be aware of everything, I'm going to ride everything on my higher awareness, I don't need you primitive instincts, I'll take your energy, I'll take your vitality, I'll take your bliss and reward, but I don't really want all of this mess pushing me around, here and there." So that's kind of what you're doing. I'll give you another example, a beautiful verse with instructions from Tsong Khapa. I'm reading from page 471 of my book.

Thus, by the inner condition of the method of life-energy control (that is, breath-energy control) however you do it (that is, whatever method you use to control your breath-energy), and by an outer condition of relying on union with a (virtual or actual) consort, the wind-energies and blissful

enlightenment spirits are compressed into the heart center from the top and bottom of the body.

So those are Tsong Khapa's instructions, that's the subjective, experiential way that he's describing this yoga, this practice. There's a kind of distillation, or condensation process, a compression process. It's a deconstruction, or a shift in the state of consciousness. And it's going from a more differentiated state of consciousness to a more subtle one. It's a shift in the state of consciousness, but unlike the normal shifts in the state of consciousness, like when we fall asleep or even when we have sexual experience, or obviously when we have a near-death experience or die, normally we don't experience that transition because we're so identified with the surface -- and we just kind of panic. We may even black out. But if we bring awareness when we go through the whole transition process, then when we get to the bottom of the process we're absorbed in a very subtle state of consciousness, and we can actually get all the way to our instinctive patterns and say "no!" We say no to our instinctive patterns. Do you see what I'm saying? You go through the transition -- and these are normal physiological transitions, we go through them all the time, only not lucidly -- but now with awareness, when we get to the subtle layer of consciousness, we're right there, actually, where the instincts are. We don't have to talk down to them. We can have a conversation, a dialogue. We can actually work directly with them.

Tsong Khapa provides a description of the eight dissolutions quoting the Concise Five Stages. First, there's the mirage-like experience, then smoke, sparks, flame. So that's the coarse body. Second, at the subtle level, there's the moonlight luminance, then the twilight, sunlight or radiance, and then the night luminance, or immanence; and that leads to the clear light intuition.

As a therapist I find all this quite fascinating. Normally we think of analysis or insight as a rational process, right? However, what we're talking about here is not just a rational insight, a symbolic discursive analysis like, "I don't need to be so up-tight, or "I don't need to be panicked, or whatever. Underneath this there's also an instinctive pattern. And the two are moving together like a rider on a horse. The symbolic awareness is like the rider; the instinctive energy is like a horse. And, the idea is to get them to coordinate, to act together. Although the horse doesn't think like a human being, it has impulses like a human being. By understanding the pattern of fear and suffering symbolically, one can also identify it intuitively. One can similarly see through, have insight into the nonverbal, instinctive pattern that's coordinated with the thought process. In other words, you can have an insight that "Oh, I'm thinking I'm in danger" and you can also have an insight that "This is how my body feels it's in danger." The insights have to be parallel, with the rational insight speaking to the intuitive layer of our nervous system in order to penetrate, in order to reach that deepest visceral level of insight.

I'm quoting now from another book by Tsong Khapa about meditative, contemplative self-analysis. I hear that this is the book that Bob Thurman is going to ask His Holiness to explain in November when he comes. It's a very subtle, very beautiful book, translated in Bob's *Central Philosophy of Tibet*.

Although this unconscious instinctive mental habit does not hold onto its object in a discursive way, after analysis of the meaning of thought patterns of expressions, if the object thus held is objectively real (that is, an



enemy or a fear) and were to exist, in fact, it would have to be discoverable by rational analysis ...

So, Tsong Khapa is saying that what we want self-analysis to change is our instinctive patterns. We don't want the self-analysis to be just intellectual, like Woody Allen's 20 years of psychoanalysis. We want the analysis to penetrate deeper, to go to the instinctive, emotional, reactive patterns that are underneath our intellect. So, even though our discursive mind only makes analytic negations or analyses on the intellectual or theoretical level, meditative analysis does not merely negate intellectual mental habits, but also negates the unconscious, the thing that's underlying the habits. So, what he's saying is that we humans think of ourselves as very different from animals, but actually the way our minds think is parallel to the way our animal minds think. Where the discursive mind has fear is parallel to the way our instinctive mind has fear. And so, by resolving the thought pattern -- i.e. by recognizing at the "freedom of speech" level that "I'm not alone in the world" and "my parents were not trying to dump me," -- we can then, gain the deeper visceral understanding that "I have nothing to fear, I'm not abandoned, I'm not a cornered animal fighting against all odds." But, rather, "I'm socially connected and a part of the universe."

Maybe that's too fine a point. Maybe I have to apologize for sharing that, but, nonetheless, I think the point is important. We're talking about the way in which the discursive process of analysis is connected to what we call the visceral process of analysis. It's like the relationship between psychotherapy and bodywork. Or between meditation and yoga. Meditation speaks to our minds and yoga speaks to our bodies. And they both have to work together if we want

to really be resolved, fully deeply resolved -- resolved "from the attic to the cellar," as they say.

And, finally, Tsong Khapa repeats that the way we do this ultimately is with "diamond recitation" practice, which is applying breath awareness in a totally disarmed, peaceful way, using the smart vagus. So we apply this deep awareness to the nature of breathing: breathing in, holding the breath, breathing out; and repeat ... This is how we ultimately tame the whole nervous system. The way I like to think about it is, by gradually deepening the tone, or the network connections, of the smart vagus, we eventually gain the capacity to control the sympathetic nervous system and the old primitive vagus as well. And so we get the capacity to totally disarm all the self-protective mechanisms and totally calm our nervous system.

Tsong Khapa quotes from the Diamond Rosary:

By strong application of the Diamond Recitation, having known the nature of wind energy, you cut off the instinct driving wind energies and you will obtain the mind objective.

That is, you will obtain the "freedom of mind." Freedom of Mind, remember, is being able to cut the umbilical cord with unhappy states of mind so that we never have to experience another state of mind that is miserable, that is not blissful. Our moods are totally shifted over to positivity.

Another question is, how do you distinguish between a knee-jerk fear and fear that arises in the presence of actual danger? My answer is, you don't do this when you're in real danger. You wait until there's no danger, and then when your fear comes up you remind yourself that there's no real danger. You can't let your

mind continually keep you armed and dangerous by thinking about all the bad -- and worse -- things that could happen to you. Even in the presence of danger, fear, from a human point of view, is relatively useless because most of the things that we're really facing actually will respond much better to our presence of mind -- perhaps with teamwork and communication -- than to our fear.

That's why the kung-fu master is more fierce than the Lone Ranger, because his mind is calm. It's not vengeance, there's no anger, there's no fear in him, the mind is totally calm. The only function that the stress reaction in the nervous system is designed for is to run from a predator. Think of how many times the nature of our fear, what we really fear, is some predator chasing us. But that's just not what it is, really, it's not what we're really afraid of, that's not the bad thing we fear is going to happen to us. At this point in our evolution the fear is triggered more because somebody's going to hurt us emotionally, or say something that will get us into a mess or trouble with some social system, or we'll get into an argument with our partner, ... something like that. But it's not a saber-toothed tiger chasing to rip our throat open, which is the only thing that the stress response is good for. So, you really should get rid of your fear. It's not helping you.

You can use the swimming analogy, and think of how swimming relaxes you, how calming it is for the body. One of the ways that the depth of this appears to me is in my experience with yoga. Ironically, not my experience with meditation, although, again, like I say, yoga is coming from the body up, meditation is coming from the mind down, and they have to meet in the middle somewhere -- hopefully. And it's the recognition that comes when you do yoga -- that is when you practice consciously relaxing your body from its normal state --

that your body is always a little uptight, and sometimes very uptight. As you practice relaxing your body with yoga you start to realize, "Oh, my normal default physical state is that I've got a lot of tension in my pelvis ..." or maybe it's in my shoulder joint, or wherever. And you realize when you have that insight that your whole life up to that point you never knew that. Your whole life your pelvis has been tense and your shoulder joint has been tense, and it just felt normal. That's the power of this visceral insight, that our deep instinctive settings of self-protection are gripping us. They have us in their grip. When you look at the Bhavachakra, the Wheel of Cyclic Existence, it is in the mouth of Yama, the Lord of Death. Have you ever seen the picture? Yama's got hold of the whole wheel and everybody on it with his mouth; everybody is cycling around, whether they're gods or hell dwellers, humans or animals, they're all on this wheel and they're all in his mouth. And that's our existence: we're all living in the grips of the fear of death. Yama isn't actually dead – there's the fear of death, and it's got us. And this practice is all about truly disarming that fear and triumphing over death.

About working with your body – and the question of why we have to be patient, why transformation doesn't happen just like that -- is often discussed in the Mahayana tradition in terms of sudden enlightenment versus gradual enlightenment. This is a big debate actually. And it is the first great debate in the Tibetan tradition, which determined that Nalanda became the paradigm of the Tibetan university system rather than the Zen system. The Zen master was advocating sudden enlightenment and Kamalashila, a Nalanda master, believed in gradual enlightenment. In the Mahayana tradition, and the Nalanda Tradition, the notion is that intellectual insight can come all of a sudden, but visceral somatic insight, which has to work through or with the embodiment of that insight, cannot come that way because the part of our brain that is emotional and visceral is not

as quick a processor. It has to take these messages in a slow and experiential way. It doesn't listen to words. You can tell your mind, "Oh, calm down." Or you can tell your mind, "Oh, don't worry about that person." Or "you have nothing to fear" but it still feels exactly the same way, until it has what we call in psychotherapy a "corrective emotional experience." The limbic brain learns by having emotional messages, experiences that are counter to its fears and that are positive. The body learns by having visceral or physical – what we call "visceral affect" or "transformational affect," feeling a deep sense of wellbeing in my body, feeling bliss, relaxation, openness. It's a physical experience. That's how the instinctive layers of our mind work. The work of unknotting them, and relaxing them, and bringing clarity and bliss into them is actually much slower than our intellect. In other words, there is this contrast between sudden enlightenment when we get it mentally but we can't feel it, and gradual enlightenment, where we come to really feel it, embody it.

One question about practicing for death is, at which point do you practice that? From the Buddhist point of view, one of the benefits, one of the perks of having this kind of sophisticated Tantric practice is that you can do very powerful death preparation. That is, of course, if you're doing this practice correctly. And that means you practice on a daily basis -- and at the highest level initiation or commitment you practice six or 8 times a day. In the practice you're imagining your mind and body melting down into a death-like state and then re-emerging out of it. So, you're training your mind for death. But it's not just mental training, you're also training your nervous system and your body to respond differently as you go through that process. With that training, or having a near-death experience, you will know what to do when death comes.

My guess is very few people who have a near-death experience actually are conscious, get the white light, feel liberated, and so on. A lot of people who have near-death experiences just black out. And some people have bad trips because the unconscious is projecting their worst fears, so it can turn into a panic experience. But, some people, somehow, intuitively, just let go and let it be blissful -- and they get those near-death white light experiences. So, if you don't want to leave the death experience to chance, you do the training. Gelek Rimpoche calls this training karmic insurance policy. One question is, what is the role of jumping into what frightens you? To gain control mastery?

The answer is that this is not about control mastery. It's not about jumping in to what scares you or toughing out the threat or danger process. The essence of this enlightenment, this liberation, is that there really isn't anything to fear and that it really isn't such a bad world. And we need to recognize that. When we recognize that what frightens us is not really external but is a bad habit internally, then when we let go of it, and it manifests as blissful dissolution and liberation. Forcing oneself into it isn't necessary; forcing is necessary if some part of you is still convinced that this is going to hurt you, then you need to push yourself. But as in Western desensitization techniques, the best way this works is when you're really absolutely convinced that there isn't really any danger, so that the experience of disarming yourself isn't mixed with any bit of adrenalin. It is just pure melting of the fear. Like in the traditional Western formulation, desensitization is exposure in a safe setting. You expose yourself to what you fear but knowing it's safe, in a safe setting. Then, when you have the fear, you have no question about whether the fear is warranted. You don't have to force yourself because you're not thinking the fear is warranted.

On the other hand, jumping into what frightens you is a form of the fight-or-flight reflex, and it presupposes that something is actually dangerous and "I have to quickly jump into it! Maybe if I grab the saber-toothed tiger by the jaws, I'll end up as the victor instead of lunch." But here there is no saber-toothed tiger threatening your existence. The only saber-toothed tiger you need to worry about is the one in your mind. And you just have to say to it, "Calm down tiger, we're just walking along here, we're just walking through our day, merrily going along and you need to calm down." That's what you're working with here, calming that overkill in your mind, the overkill of self-protective reflexes, knowing that there's no need for them. That's the spirit here.

The workings of the mind are truly awesome and inconceivable, and we do all kinds of things, crazy things. Accident-prone behavior, or self-destructive behavior, often is actually a cry for help. This mind disarming is all quite complicated. And there is not one single way to do the untangling. Still, the safest and most reliable way to do it from the Buddhist point of view is this kind of practice. As I have said, drugs like LSD might work, but the experience with such drugs is not very reproducible. It might conceivably have worked for some person at some point of time, but it's not how you want to set up the system. You want to set up the system in a way that's reliable, that's pretty assuredly reproducible.

PART TWO:

COMMUNING WITH ONE AND ALL:  
EMBODYING THE GREAT SEAL OF  
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE





Chapter Eight:The Alchemy of Integration: Living and Dying Within the Great Seal

Welcome to the last leg on the journey of our four-year program in sustainable happiness. This topic is exciting to me because the material we will cover in Part Two is so inspiring and special, I expect you will enjoy exploring it. In this Part, we will learn about Māhamudrā, which means "Great Seal" --that is: the seal of communion with all things in and through "blissful emptiness."

Māhamudrā is taught openly by some people, and maintained secret by others. It has many common elements with other practices, like Dzogchen, or the "Great Perfection," which is central to the teachings of the Tibetan Nyingma masters; also with Kashmir Shaivism and Advaita Vedanta, and with Christian mysticism as well. So many traditions relate to this experience, there is a lot of traction in this terrain already. And that is because there is something very special about the state it generates. This is an exalted, ecstatic, energized, open state that spiritual traditions throughout history have sought and found, a state that raises the promise and the potential in all of us who have tried it to help us connect better in various ways.

At Nalanda Institute we do that to connect better with the self and the world, through the Dalai Lama and the Geluk Buddhist tradition. We believe this is one of the purest streams of enlightened awareness and mentoring for enlightenment, mentoring for altruistic being, on the planet. It is a Tibetan Buddhist tradition. But our institute is named after Nalanda University in India because Nalanda was a great university and the place from which all schools of Tibetan Buddhism drew their inspiration. Nalanda's influence went far beyond

India and Tibet, to China, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, all through South East Asia, and across Asia. Many Buddhists from those countries went to Nalanda to study. At Nalanda Institute we try to maintain the Nalanda tradition's sense of radical openness. We are keying in on specific lineages, because it is through the mind stream of one person connecting with another that we have the living essence or what Tibetans call the "moisture" of these teachings that promotes and feeds positive change, going way beyond just the words. With tantra we actually get the feeling -- what is it really like? The tantras are an art, they teach an art form, one that is designed to transmit as quickly as possible a whole better way of being, not just some ideas but also some positive emotions like compassion or kindness. With practice the whole nervous system can be reconfigured to embody, "quickly quickly," a better way of being that is really suited for the incredibly awesome challenges of life, particularly life in our age.

In this program we are not just in dialogue with other traditions; we are weaving together this tradition with other consciousness traditions, and with modern science, in particular modern psychology and neuroscience. We are trying to help to bring together all of these great ancient traditions and update them with modern science, to bring out the best in each of us, and each other, to find out how each of us can complement the other. We are using science, neuroscience, and other sciences, in large part because this is our common language, the language that we all speak. We may come from different traditions or be interested in different things, but we all went to science class. It is a kind of vernacular language that we believe in. It is our mythology. So we believe that we have a brain, and that brains do certain things. Whether I think that that is true or not is not at issue here; it is more about whether we want to look at the world in

that same old way or not. We have been trained to doubt, and we need to respect that, to do that.

In this book, we have been covering the final culmination of the Nalanda curriculum, the curriculum that was developed over hundreds of years at Nalanda University, beginning with and going through the most basic elements of spiritual non-violent living and presence. We begin with the Four Noble Truths, Buddhist psychology and mindfulness practice in the first year. In the second year we learn about compassion, about transforming the mind to embody our full potential for compassionate openness and connectivity to protect ourselves from overreacting, and to try to stop other people from handling distress in a traumatic way. In the third year we begin to learn how to use the power tools of our imagination, our cerebral cortex if you will, that super equipment we all have, the super computer we have and we need to enhance to speed up the process of our transformation. We do that by taking the old software and replacing it with one that can serve us better. The old software is embedded with many kinds of fear and shame, separation, hurt, anger. We are replacing it with a new software that is transparent, healing and transformative. This is the software of the mandala. The vision with that new software is one of a better way of being human, a way that is not just about survival, a way that is not running from evolution, or childhood, or interconnectedness, but a way that enables us to triumphantly use our full potential to face and embrace life, embrace it all. That is a better way of being.

As a model for that vision we may embody an archetype like Vajrasattva or *Kalachakra-Vishvamata*. We are now able to see our self in some ideal form, as a way of preparing the flight simulator, preparing our minds to learn how to live in our best way, as our best self. The purpose of that vision, that software if you will, is to counteract the doom and gloom, the nightmare that we are constantly

broadcasting, projecting from our inner scared self to the world. That nightmare is made of all sorts of garbage, all the things that are happening to me that are going wrong now, and that will go wrong in the future, and without all the things that are going right, and that will go right. We have talked about that vision and we have rehearsed it a little bit, we have been revising our whole story, our whole narrative of what life is.

We rehearse imagining that instead of living in a universe like the one we perceive and we are taught we live in, that universe in which matter drives the show, we live in a universe that is quite mindless from the beginning. Instead of our ordinary view of the universe imagine taking on a view that is more tuned to the present and to action, to doing useful things. An example of that is the Tibetan view, a view that sees the universe as having the potential for consciousness, and that potential is an elemental aspect of it. With that awareness imagine recreating your view of what your story is, how you got here. Many of us are doing this, tracing our steps back. Neil Degrasse Tyson, the head of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, is hosting a TV series called "Cosmos," on the history of the universe. In it he is doing that. And it is lots of fun. But what we are trying to do is different. Here we are trying to prepare our minds to act on the good news that we humans have arrived, that we actually have the right tool for the job, the job of being blissfully interconnected, blissfully happy with all other life on this planet, this little green planet, our little spaceship Earth. At this point we know how to turn off our survival equipment, the equipment that makes us act as if our survival was constantly under threat -- in a way like turning off Hal, the supercomputer in the movie "2001 Space Odyssey" when it became paranoid, and therefore dangerous -- and turn on our awareness equipment, be reborn with our awareness more focused. And now, now that we

know that our brains are plastic and our genomes are malleable, we can crystallize our whole way of being in our neural network, our wetware, and even in our epigenetic core blueprint. So we have the capacity to embody what we need to embody to be happy.

That is the broad sweep. The wonderful thing about the Nalanda tradition is its radical optimism for our planet. If you go through the history of Buddhism, you've got basic Buddhism, Theravada, purifying the mind, and for that you can go to Barre, in Massachusetts, for some insight meditation at the Insight Meditation Society and get a feel for it, and for a quiet time. For more compassion-oriented Buddhism there is the Mahayana, the Buddhism of interconnection; you can go to the Zen Center for Contemplative Care to get a feel for that. Then there is this newer Buddhist tradition that goes into some other dimension using culture, using the imagination, and using the full range of our neurobiological raw material to more quickly embody enlightenment. This is the Vajrayana, the tantra way. We integrate all of these teachings as components of a science, a spiritual contemplative science. In the Kalachakra vision, for example, we are going to do it, we are actually going to save the planet, and we are going to save ourselves in the process, we are going to figure out how to live here in a blissfully interconnected and happy way. We will succeed because we have what that takes. All we need is to put contemplative science at the heart of it all, of our scientific, technological, media, economic and cultural engines. We put that new enlightened cultural DNA in the center and we weave it into our global culture. We will be able to spread the art of taming the human mind, and of adapting the human mind and nervous system to civilized living and blissful connectedness. And when we do that, we will have solved all the problems, basically one person at a time, one problem at a time. We do that as we aim at optimizing our full

potential through contemplative science education. From that standpoint we are right on target, we are in sync with the Kalachakra vision, we are trying to integrate this contemplative tradition with contemplative science. And Buddhists say the same thing, that the marriage of science and spirituality is fundamental, it is really what is needed to turn this lifestyle around.

Anyway, that is our overview. I know even a little Kalachakra is expansive. So I have to try to be as expansive as possible. Now we can go back and fill in the blanks, go one step at a time. In the spirit of the Nalanda tradition, which is systematic and scientific, and cause-and-effect based -- but at this level, it has a certain amount of awesome -- we'll try and fill in the blanks now, a little bit at a time.

I want to provide some orientation for the amazing journey recorded in these Nalanda Contemplative Guides. I invite you now to pay particular attention to the alchemy of integration. I would like to explore with you how the science of the perfection stage comes to a very critical culminating point. Let me explain what I mean. In a way, the tantras use everything that has come before and they package it, they are like a media-driven form of meditation, which may sound like a contradiction in terms. I will try to explain how that works. It works like homeopathy.

What do you need in order to consider a tantric practice? When are you fit for this kind of heroic approach, what some people call a transgressive approach, this kind of activist approach, a forceful activist approach that says that I am going to make a difference? For this you need first to be able to let go -- let go of craziness, let go of stress, let go of trauma. Obviously this doesn't mean we have to cease all stress or trauma, in which case we probably wouldn't need to be here. But we need at least to have an inkling for getting off this rat race: "I can get off

the wheel, the wheel that is the cycle of violence and trauma, and start to move in the direction of peace and disarming, disarming myself and adjusting to peace, being more at peace." We need that peace and we need to disarm in order to have the right foundation for this kind of practice. This is a rigorous practice, and we need it to build the capacity for positive connectivity, for compassionate kindness and openness, for being a part of the community, to sit down and learn. Of course it would help if we had that feeling every day when we walk out there and deal with people. That is the best protection, they say.

We also need the capacity for radical openness, and you can see why. We are straining our capacity for radical openness this evening talking about this, having an awesome vision of how our lives are not really a mess, or they are not just a mess, we are not stuck here, like little helpless children or cornered animals, to be run over by our lives, or whatever. We really are amazing, we are the most amazing creatures. And we are the heirs to a journey of consciousness, a consciousness that has been growing and gaining momentum throughout, a consciousness that actually has transformed our planet deeply, and that is now threatening it. This consciousness is a little too wild, right? We need radical openness to be able to see things from a radically optimistic point of view. And in tantra we start with the vision, at the goal, at the result, not at the problem. With that optimistic vision in mind we ask, can we see a solution, can we see a way so that our life can really be integrated and fully happy, can we see a way that life in this planet can be truly sustainable and fair?

Then come the preliminaries, the ordinary preliminaries. First we have to deal with the poisons: we have to learn how to let go of violence, of anger, and of clinging to our own little world, to being defensive, and to delusion. We let go of

delusion, of narrow-mindedness that keeps us in the state of "I know the way of the world and it sucks!... " Then we can develop empathy, compassion, true love. After the ordinary preliminaries we go to the tantric level of preliminaries. We use our mind and body as the raw materials to build a new way of being, a way that can make a difference, and that can be a truly happy way to be. Nietzsche thought of happiness as a a lucky hit for humanity. He believed that we had the potential for it, but that it was hard for us humans, as a group, to really take it in. In this tradition, what we need is a different culture, and a community with a subculture of support and mentors who say "Yes!" And it is not only possible, it's necessary. If you are not becoming the most effective, happy, liberated, integrated person you can be, you are wasting your time. You're wasting your time if you are not on the path to become enlightened, in order to be happy in this crazy world. Think about it, what are the alternatives? If you choose materialism, you feel like you can never have enough stuff, there is never enough insulation from information and advertising on what we need and lack, it is 24/7. So we have to have mentors who encourage us, who empower us to see that it is possible to be happy. And we also need a community that can help us with that.

We get the mentors and the community that we need in a process called "initiation." At the close of our Four Year Program, we often invite a Tibetan Lama like Gelek Rimpoche to offer an initiation for those interested in pursuing practice. The initiation may be for White Tara or Medicine Buddha, or for one of the higher esoteric tantric vehicles like Yamantaka or Vajrayogini. Initiation is important because it connects us to the tradition. We need to feel part of it, we need to belong, we need to come in the door and bond with the mentor. Because, as you know, if we don't have someone to guide us, to hold our hand and help us keep sane through this trip, it is going to be scary, and probably too scary for us to do



anything like this practice. We have mentors for our neuroses, we have mentors for depression, we have mentors for whatever. If we have mentors for enlightenment we are going to have enlightenment. So we need mentors of enlightenment.

If you are reading this as a liberal arts exercise, there's no need to bother with initiation. But if you have enough of a taste for this practice and feel you want more, these practices may be a good vehicle for you. If you like the visualization practice, if it works for you, go for it. Obviously this isn't for everybody. If you already have toyed with some kind of regular visualization practice and you want to take the next step then come to me and talk about it. Some people might want to come to take refuge. Come if you feel ready to commit to it, if you feel like, "I like the Buddha and I want to rely on him to become a more peaceful person, and I want a ritual, I want to celebrate my connection with the Buddha in some sort of ritual." Come if you love compassion in your life, and you know you want to become a more compassionate being, you want to develop that capacity, or at least you strive toward realizing some kind of universal compassion, so that you could feel positively disposed toward all life, and not just one or two other beings. For that you could come and take refuge on Friday night. You have to let me know if you want to do just that. Then you would not need to come for the rest of the initiation, which is Saturday. If you feel comfortable going that far, that may be a good kind of graduation ceremony, from a Tibetan point of view.

This is a serious practice. And if you already have a visualization practice and you feel inspired and connected to all the teachings that we have been going through, especially the esoteric or tantric teachings, then the full initiation may be for you. In that case there is a commitment, in the order of 20 to 30 minutes a day. The practice includes specific kinds of visualizations and recitations and things like

that. It is for every day, seven days a week. It is a practice for people who really want to sink their teeth into.

Usually these teachings are not complete unless you have the initiation and the teaching. In other words, you have this powerful meditative technology but you have to know something more about it to use it well. You have to know what you are doing. In any case, like with all meditation forms, learning how to use these technologies takes time. You get a little start-up with the initiation and teaching, and then you have to work with it yourself, over time. If you have another practice already, like Vajra Yogini or the Six Session Yoga, for example, you could ask your teacher how to integrate it all. If not, you might just modify the practice.

So, as I have been saying, we have to start to see ourselves as good enough, like Stuart Smalley, the funny guy who kept saying "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!" We are good enough to be here, to be awake, and happy, awakened and happy. Can we do that, can we really see ourselves as good enough to be happy and awakened? For that we have to totally retell the story of our life. We humans tend to cling to traumatic stories. Just consider our history books. Historians cling to all of the disasters and wars and forget the other stuff that happened in between and got us where we are. But now we're going to do it differently.

From the start we need to have a positive vision, a specific vision. That is what I try to give you here, with a run through the whole practice. If you want more, you can find specific meditation practices on the Nalanda website. Some of them are less daunting or awesome, and maybe a little more accessible, like the Healing Mother, or the Healing Buddha, the Healing Mentor. We have to have some kind of positive vision to use our imagination to be able to see a solution.

And we have to have what they call "Buddha pride:" we have to be able, from somewhere in our depths, the depths of our inner child and our evolution, to say "why can't I be like Buddha? What's wrong with me that I can't? What makes me think that I don't have that in me? I am made of the same stardust stuff, I am made of the same basic genome, why do I think he's got it but I don't?" We have to be able to have that Buddha pride, the pride that asks, "why not? Am I Buddha or am I not? Am I just Joe or am I really more than that? Can I be something more than just Joe?" We have to be able to ask ourselves that question.

Now we have covered everything up to the Creation Stage of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras, or the Highest Yoga Tantras as some people call the practice. Am I speaking total Greek to everybody here? Not everybody, because many of you have been here before, but if anybody is really getting lost who is new, you can speak to me. Speak to me!

What is the Creation Stage? Let me do a little review. In the history of Judeo-Christianity there are three phases: first comes Judaism, which is about law, and if you do the right thing you are going to be all right. Then, many centuries later comes Christianity, which is all love, love is the law of all the prophets. After that comes the third phase, and that's mysticism. At this point we humans start to engage with things like alchemy, total transformation, ecstatic states of oneness and interconnection, and we get practitioners like Saint Teresa of Avila or Saint John of the Cross. In Buddhism there are also three phases. And I don't think this is by accident. Throughout Eurasia people were developing this kind of knowledge and tools that came out as different forms of mysticism, and as cultural challenges to the civilizations that they were changing. The tantras are part of the world's esoteric spiritual practices, they are a form of mysticism, like Sufism. Tantra evokes and taps into powerful states of mind, states that help us get out of our

own self and experience openness and interconnection with all living beings, "quickly quickly."

In the Tibetan system there are many levels of tantra, and many levels of experiences of oneness, of total interconnectedness. At the simplest level, I can have a very simple sense of oneness or awesome openness in love, while being taken care of by mother, any healing mother, or a buddha; or I can have it by imagining and feeling that inside of me there is a goddess or a god, within me, like they do in California, like Walt Whitman or Ralph Waldo Emerson would say. Then, at the most complex level, there is the Highest Yoga Tantra, or Unexcelled Yoga Tantra. This is a system of esoteric practices which bring to us transformative states of blissful openness, where the divine is present, where the potential deity or potential Buddha is felt in all of us. So the potential for being a Buddha is in me, and in you and in all of us at the same time. It is inside and outside and everywhere, it is a possibility everywhere.

Unexcelled yoga tantra works with a specific kind of meditative technology that approaches life in that way, meaning that divine connectivity is everywhere, that genius is everywhere. So, how do we cultivate that state? We cultivate that in two stages, the Creation Stage and the Perfection Stage. In the Creation Stage we use our creative imagination to overcome our sense that "I am not Buddha" and "you are not Buddha." We try to envision what would it be like if I was Buddha, if you were Buddha, if we were all Buddha. What would that be like? What would it feel like? What would it look like? How would it work as a way to getting us closer to our vision? And so in the Creation Stage we use our imagination, and we use facial expression, gestures, affirmations or mantras, to try to establish a new form for us, a form that brings us a little closer to that vision,

that state of consciousness, that way of being, and that makes us feel like we can relate to that, like "I can see it, I can feel it..."

Then we come to the Perfection Stage. Now we have beautiful vision, a vision that works like a flight simulator, and we are practicing being Buddhas. This is on-the-job training. And so we practice that we are Buddhas living this amazing life and guiding ourselves using this amazing technology, the ultimate technology of the human body and mind to cooperate with others, and to produce a Buddha land.

The thing is, it doesn't feel like that to us. We start thinking, it is just in my head, it is a crazy fantasy, like "Joe, what are you thinking? Don't you know you have to pay the bills, that you are vulnerable and many bad things can happen to you?" But the real question, the more relevant and practical question, is, how do you get the chemistry and the energy, how do you reconfigure your nervous system so that you can actually feel it, you can feel the vision? You ground the vision in sustainable positivity, you adopt a positive, can-do attitude towards the vision. And the thing is, this is consistent with the affect theory of positive psychology that is part of modern psychology and neuropsychology: positive affect is extremely empowering, extremely beneficial, and it gets out the best in us. Athletes practice that way. They envision themselves jumping or running, or whatever they are competing in, before they do it. And pilots, before flying a plane or a space shuttle, practice in a flight simulator. The imagination actually primes the nervous system to develop a neural network for action, even though it is virtual, it is a mental experience. We have research that supports that view.

Then, in the next level, we make that experience natural and sustainable. We actually have to fly this shuttle, we actually have to live that. For that we have to restructure and rewire our nervous system, we have to understand it as a

network of bliss, and then we can find at the heart of our nervous system the extreme positivity that is there. It is an extremely euphoric, open, connective awareness. You feel that in babies, or puppies. Their defenses and personalities are not yet so developed, and their playfulness and their happiness are just infectious. For the rest of us adults it feels like we've lost that. We had it in childhood but we lost it, we don't have it anymore. But, actually it is still inside. And so in the third year essentially we work through the Creation Stage, learning to use our imagination as a means to find and identify with our potential for blissful openness, for inner ecstatic awareness.

In the Perfection Stage, the challenge is to prepare our nervous system to actually experience blissful openness and other such things -- in the words of my friend Rick Hanson, this is about "hardwiring happiness," which is the name of his latest book. In this case we are hardwiring not just ordinary happiness, but something more -- and that is radical happiness, euphoric happiness.

Do we all have a sense of where we are now? We should review what we did last term, inner fire, and the practice of inner fire. This is essentially about getting inspired. The practice feels challenging, in part because it has complexity, and we all have so much complexity in our lives already that we would rather have a very simple practice. This practice is not like breath mindfulness, although some elements of it are. Both require focus. But in this practice the focus is not just on your breath, or on kindness, but on a state of mind that we rarely experience, a state of inspired positivity and high enthusiasm. It is not easy to feel like that. People normally talk about "let's all be enthusiastic!" But these are only sporadic moments, like shooting a picture, we all say "cheeeeeese!" But that's not real enthusiasm.

Why don't we focus on these things, positivity and enthusiasm? The point of this practice's complexity is not to make life difficult, it is not to come up with the most complicated practice. The point is to generate the most positive states. And today there is research on the power of positive affect, by experts like Barbara Fredrickson, a Stanford trained psychologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Anyway, the research shows how positive emotions help not only to make us happier, but they change how our brains work, in a way that protects us better from stress. They stimulate the left side of our prefrontal cortex. They help reduce our amygdala reactivity, our amygdala hijacking. And so they not only protect our brain and our nervous system, they protect our relationships, they increase our capacity to engage and stay connected in good relationship, more open to people and to the world.

A positive affect has an expansive, opening quality. It can feel a bit weird, it can be a strain, so that you end up feeling stressed, like "Are you asking me to be positive now? I was feeling fine being kind of a nerd, stuck with my body all hunched over my computer, and as a friend said, in cringe posture..." That was my yoga, my cringe yoga, until I started basic hatha yoga and met a few wonderful hatha yoga teachers who helped me to practice how to open up my body. I eventually learned about the research in body conditioning that shows that the posture of your body changes your affect. How you stand and how you sit changes your deep visceral affect. So if you walk and stand up with your chest open, and your heart open, you feel more proactive and enthusiastic, your testosterone goes up, which may be a good thing or a bad thing. Basically this posture is the open, disarming posture. Think of it as creatures that still live in a shell, like turtles, and what it would be like, coming out of the shell and opening

up. On the other side, negative affect makes our bodies feel like bending over, closing in, shutting out everything.

So, opening your heart, shoulders and chest area promotes a positive affect, and then you feel more energy, you feel like doing things, like disarming, and opening up, and connecting.

And so there is a reason, for our mental health to cultivate not just mindfulness, but also positive affect like kindness, compassion. And I say to you, if you want to take it even further, if you want to be kind and compassionate 24/7 in our 24/7 globally interconnected crazy culture, you could use not just kindness but profound enthusiasm, and inspiration as well. Again, this is not our ordinary posture, our ordinary way to be. But do you want to walk around like you need to protect yourself for the rest of your life, feeling small in this big world? I don't. So we need to exercise a more open posture, we need to exercise our positive affect potential. This posture is just as natural as the negative affect posture. But it is not as connected to the stress response and the self-protective system, which is our default system. The stress response of the self-protective system wants us to stay in the shell, be totally careful; it doesn't want us to use our enormous potential for positive affect, for opening up and connecting with people. However, the reality is that our positive affect with open awareness is our best protection, even when we are dealing with the toughest cases. Positive affect is the right tool for the job of being a human being. It is the right tool for managing human relationships of all kinds. It is certainly the right tool for good living in the 24/7 interconnected global environment.

If you start thinking, "my world is coming to an end, somewhere in the Middle East, or in Crimea, or somewhere in Afghanistan or North Korea, ..." then your world will be coming to an end. If you don't feel ready to embrace all the



craziness of this planet, your resistance will show up in your nervous system. And you will have to put on your armor, your armor with its stockpile of fear and hurt and anger, in order to feel comfortable with what a bad world it is. But if you have asked yourself where and what is this attitude going to get us other than more illness and reactivity, and if you want to take this other approach, then start taking this type of practice seriously. This might be a reasonable solution.

This isn't just some whacky Tibetan cult of altruism. I think it will become increasingly popular, as we translate it into modern science and modern psychology, into modern language. How else can you counteract the 24/7 news cycle, how can you see through all this incredibly tempting, individualized e-marketing targeted to you, your preferences, the social media e-marketing, if you are not generating your own utopian world, a world in which we are going to triumph? How are you going to do it if you don't have your own better vision? If you don't have it you are going to fall for the vision that is in front of you, the vision that is put in front of you. I don't want to sound paranoid here, when I say that the experts on Madison Avenue, in Silicon Valley and so on, know how things are sold to you, and that is by your own frightened imagination. The primary seller here, the primary vendor is our own mind. And our culture doesn't help, it actually uses it, because we have a culture that feeds our fears, fears of inadequacy, of not belonging. The Tibetan culture, on the other hand, offers a radically positive alternative that makes us take responsibility for our own wellbeing. It is uplifting, and I think it is also catchy enough, zesty enough to catch people's attention. There is a little sex and a little violence involved, as life is, and as it goes on, complete, because it is not just light and sweetness. This positive culture is what we need to counteract our addictive culture. And I think that it can be powerful enough for that job.

Some of you have asked about different postures for meditation practice. In the Indian tradition, the best posture for meditation is the lotus posture. It is seated, so it is not sleeping and it is not running, but somewhere in between. It is sitting and reflecting, just being. When your feet are up in a lotus pretzel, your hips are open and your shoulders are open. And so the full lotus is an open seated posture that is also disarmed. In this posture we are open, our body is open to bring balance between the two sides of the autonomic nervous system: the sympathetic, fight-or-flight, nervous system on the one hand, and the parasympathetic, love-and-growth nervous system on the other. As balance is established you are in a state of enhanced alertness, so you can notice things; and at the same time you are in a state of relaxation, so you can drop into things, be really present in things. This experience may vary every time, depending on the time of day, or year, and it is different for different people. But in general you have to look for that balance in the posture. It is a posture that makes you feel alive and present, and at the same time disarms you and makes you feel at peace. And so you can establish stability.

In this part of the book we look into how this balance is achieved in more detail, when we talk about tummo, or inner fire practice. There are some studies of inner fire meditators that were done at Harvard, in Herb Benson's lab when I was there. The meditators were practicing inner fire meditation. In general they were sitting in a big plexiglass box with breathing tubes, oximeters and other measuring equipment. The study showed that the meditators had a remarkable combination of great amounts of physical relaxation and mental alertness. Their bodies were totally disarmed and relaxed, their muscles were extremely relaxed, their metabolism was decreased by as much as 64 percent. Imagine having that capacity! You slow down your body's energy use by more than a half, which is like

in hibernation. Yet their brains showed very high levels of activity, more activity than that registered when a person is having an orgasm. In this case it was like having multiple orgasms, with firing activity registered at the levels of the gamma, beta, delta ... and that pattern of high activity was coherent throughout their whole cortex. This is an example of how humans have the capacity for going through many different states of consciousness. And posture is part of it. But the most important component is the nervous system. This practice illustrates, I think beautifully, this seemingly paradoxical combination of being physically very relaxed and mentally very alive at the same time. That is what we are looking for. We talked a bit about that already and we'll talk some more.

I am going to talk about inner fire now. We will begin with a review of where we got to in our journey last semester. We talked about how to take the vision and connect it with inspiration. We learned the practice of vase breathing, and we got to practice it a bit towards the end of the term. Vase breathing is one of the basic exercises. Like kundalini yoga, it allows us to trick our nervous system. This is the practice that Tibetan monks do to kindle a euphoric state, an orgasmic state really; but it also bears some resemblance to the dream state, in that it is a highly mentally active state, and highly positive -- a state in which we are feeling some degree of bliss and openness.

As we try to learn the inner fire practice, we need to learn how to hold our breath so that we trigger our "diving reflex." The diving reflex is a basic reflex that was wired into us when we became aquatic mammals. The diving reflex allows us to tap into built-in, prewired altered states of consciousness that prepares us to dive in and stay under water for a relatively long time, like a seal or a whale. And what do you need if you are going to dive into water and stay in for a long period of time? You need your muscles to be fairly relaxed, because you

don't want to waste energy and oxygen flapping around; and you are going to float through water, so you don't need a lot of muscle tone. But you need to protect your heart and your brain. So the blood flows away from the muscles and into the heart and the brain. Endorphins are secreted, in part to protect the heart and the brain from damage. Something similar happens with orgasm, or in deep sleep. If you ever woke up deeply refreshed after some deep sleep, and you felt good and energized, blissfully refreshed and energized, ready to take on the world, it is because you were secreting one of these feel-good chemicals, probably serotonin.

And so we are tapping into the source of those chemicals through the diving reflex. This reflex reaches into our brainstem. And because we as humans can consciously control the basic vital rhythm, our breathing, we can use that capacity to trigger the diving reflex to induce altered states of consciousness, and use them to learn to live from a different platform in our nervous system. That is really what inner fire is all about.

The idea of inner fire is simple: it is a tool for rewiring our nervous system, for setting a different default system. It helps us to switch our default system from a position of mindlessness, distraction, worry and insecurity, to a positive, disarmed, blissfully present and connective state of consciousness. We all have it, it is totally native to us. We all have it, right now. But we are not using it.

There are so many things in our nervous system that we are not using. We are using -- and probably overusing -- the worry and hurt and anger networks; but we are not using so much our more positive networks, for reasons we discussed earlier in the program, like our built-in bias towards negativity. We have this bias towards negativity.

For some good evolutionary reason we feel safer when we are on guard and worried. So it takes a radical step, a radical choice, to disarm. And disarm not only to be reasonably pleasant, like "I'm going to be reasonably pleasant today." But disarm fully, totally, to the max, by being happy, really happy and alive, in this moment: "I am feeling it in my body ... it is like, wow, my body is alive!" Usually we are too cramped down, held back. But we can override that way of being with this practice. And vase breathing is one of the key elements in it. We have talked a bit about how vase breathing can help to stimulate and release the flow of bliss and energy, and that is the flow of oxytocin, or gamma endorphins, or some other endorphins for sure, and probably some serotonin, dopamine, whatever the cocktail is, made of feel-good chemicals. There are some research studies that give us some clues about this process. And we can look at that research, together with the descriptive studies of this meditative tradition. Anyway, the exact mix in the cocktail doesn't really matter that much. The point is that there is this cocktail of positive, disarming, blissful chemistry within us, and we can tap on it, trigger it. With practice we can learn to master the flow. And that is what the tradition tells us about our subtle body, our yogic nervous system, with its central channel, its chakras and drops. We learn how to let the flow of blissful nectar, the flow of that chemistry, that electro-chemical wave of positivity, go through our whole system, flow up and down, and get used to it, not be afraid of it.

With more practice we try to dig deeper and deeper into the core bliss network. This is described as immersing the "subtle" awareness and energy into the "extremely subtle" heart drop. According to the yogic nervous system, the drop, which is in the heart chakra area, is mapped on our brain, somewhere in the midbrain, where the dopamine and endorphins and other yummy chemicals are secreted. That sort of central clearing ground is called the internal rewarding

system. But it doesn't matter how we call it in our brains. What matters is where we feel it in our hearts. We feel it in our heart and we try to bring all the energy and awareness into that drop, which means we try to fully immerse our awareness in this release experience of blissful absorption, in disarming openness, or whatever you want to call it. We try to totally get in that state of mind and become one with it. And so we reach what is called the "mind objective." And what is the mind objective? It is a stage in the "Perfection Stage." Does anyone remember the five stages of the Perfection Stage? They begin with "freedom of body," which is being free of our sense of our body as a threatening thing; "freedom of speech," or letting go of negative memories, worst-case thinking and all the conditioning, the neuro-electric amygdala reactivity habits that support that; and "freedom of mind," which is where the "mind objective" comes in. This is when our mind is free from all experience that is not made of blissful openness and clarity. As you can imagine, at first this happens only very briefly. But, they tell us, with more practice, we are able to enter and maintain that state with a certain level of stability. That is a sign that we have reached the so-called "mind objective."

We experience the "mind objective" by intensifying this experience of euphoric or inspired states. For that we use whatever bliss we feel. It does not have to be a super-bliss experience, just whatever bliss we feel. We say "Yes!" to the bliss and we use it to disarm ourselves. By embracing the bliss I can let go of all my fears, of the voice that says, "If you think you can have a moment of bliss you must be crazy; look out, because someone is going to hurt you!" Now, instead, I trust the bliss and I let go of all the fears, systematically, radically. This is referred to as the purification of the subtle mind. Here we are letting go of the

clinging instincts, self-protective instincts, and ultimately the self-withdrawal, myopic instincts.

There are three layers of instincts from which we build the knots that block our capacity to feel blissful openness. We have to purge them, dissolve them, slowly, as melting butter in a broth, or washing a stain off a cloth. We do it, as Rick Hanson says, with positivity. This is a simple practice. You become more aware of your positive experiences, and your positive potential. You register, and you take in the positive. This doesn't have to be a fancy practice. This is simple, and this is tantric: to totally take in the positive. If we do that, at this level, that is at the highest level that the human mind is capable of, that the human nervous system is capable of, we are reaching for something that happens rarely, or never, in an ordinary person's life. But if we choose to go that way, intently, without dropping MDMA or any other drug to do it more quickly, if we choose to do it organically, to develop our capacity to drop to these deep connective states, we eventually will reach the mind objective. We will not only experience bliss, but we will also know how to use it to disarm our body and mind, and to unlearn all the conditionings and self-protective habits of childhood and evolution. We are establishing blissful openness as our new normal.

Ultimately, we become able to experience what is called the "Clear Light," which is a primal brilliance state, a state of ecstatic brilliance, a state said to be the natural fabric of all consciousness, of all conscious, neural and embodied, intelligence. This clear-light state is also identified with what is called the "clear light of death." Think of people who have near-death experiences. They report that they go "through the lights" and have ecstatic positive experiences. This is not as unusual as you might think. This is something that happens to some

people, it is something natural. We hope to have a kind of ecstatic experience when we die. But let's hope that we have it even before we die. How about that?

People who have ecstatic near-death experiences and come back to their bodies, they reconnect once again to their bodies, and their whole life has changed. They are not afraid of death anymore. They are more tuned to the present, they embrace the moment, they embrace life with all its roughness. We can have that too, we can cultivate those experiences through this kind of practice. We can do it in a simple way, we could try to save the bliss we have, and not fear it, not compartmentalize it or cling to it in any way, but use it in meditation as a yoga to disarm. That is the essence of this practice.

Let me be clearer about the stages. "Freedom of body" is not one of the five stages of the Perfection Stage. It is actually the gateway from the Creation Stage into the Perfection Stage. So the first perfection stage is "freedom of speech," the second is "freedom of mind," which is what we are talking about right now. Then comes "Self-Consecration", or the "Virtual Body," then "Clear Light" or "Illumination," and last is "Integration."

What we are doing here is getting to think differently about our body and mind. We are replacing our normal way of thinking about our body and mind. We normally think of our body as being made of matter; but actually it is made out of a self-image that is a mental construction. That is why the tradition says that when people die they become light. The human body is actually capable of sustaining a whole range of experiences that is way beyond what we normally experience. So, we replace our mind, our normal fear-driven, waking state of mind, with one of bliss-inspired clarity, a mind of perfect clarity and perfect openness, of transparency, translucency, where we don't have to identify with anything, where our mind is a field of total connectivity and openness.



So our perception of our body and mind changes. Our body becomes a virtual body, we are aware now that it is a mental construction, a temporary embodiment of energy and chemistry. It is virtual, not because it is not real but because we are aware that it is not as real as it seems. It is like a reflection on a mirror, of a face on a mirror.

Many of you have asked if this practice is good against chronic pain. There is an element of detachment from the material body in this, but there is also an element of changing the embodiment of pain. Some studies of pain, for example, indicate that a third of the suffering from pain comes from our reaction to pain, not from the pain directly. So if you learn to react differently, you may say you detach from the pain. Also, there is research showing that the actual sensation of pain can be transformed by meditation, the chemistry and the electrical process of pain can be transformed. And that is what we are talking about here. So you can do both. You create a positive state of consciousness that is looking at your body from a more affirmative place, and you are also creating a different kind of chemical environment that is more positive to live in. This pain control is built in; and it is disarming and opening special chemistry. So this is a deeper and more radical tool.

The experience we normally have of our body is of something that is solid and hard. But in reality it is capable of a whole range of experiences. And experiencing the virtual body is like living in the body with the awareness that we are luminous, "made of such stuff that dreams are made of" as Shakespeare said. We are not as solid as we think. We have an intelligence that rides on symbols, and hopefully those symbols are transparent and connected, so that we don't get stuck. And the ultimate symbol, the mother of all symbols is my identity, my self, "I" or whatever we fix our self-habit on, whatever word or concept or image that

tends to stick, as if written in stone. But here the idea is that we could actually take on concepts and self-images that are more self-dissolving and transparent, so we don't get stuck in them. That is what it would be like to have a subtle body: now we are able to not take it so seriously, not to take everything as a matter of survival, and we can then operate from a more flexible, not as solid a platform.

We need openness. We need openness because we need to be able to listen, we need to bring our full awareness into connecting to life being fully creative and free from bias. And we also need forms, to connect and to recognize each other. We connect through forms, through images, through words, and also through physical actions. Buddhists say that we have two bodies, a truth body and a form body. In the Mahayana tradition, the form body is divided in two: the bliss body, which is made of beautiful symbolic mental expressions, and the emanation body. You need these two bodies because in meditation practice you spend time emptying your mind, and when you go back to the world and to your ordinary social existence which is totally cluttered with content, you are going to flip out of your meditative mind and flip into your unenlightened software to process all the clutter. We live in a world that is like a hive, busily buzzing with symbols and sounds, and whatever else. We need to learn how to think and how to be transparent in form, how to work transparently with the symbols that the mind generates naturally and spontaneously. We need to learn how to reengage with form, form as meditative openness, or else the form is never going to be transformed, and we will stay unenlightened. Your nirvana will be when you are on the cushion, but when you come out of your meditative state and your bliss high, you will reengage with samsara, and you will be miserable, and you will react in the same old unenlightened way. That is why in their view you have to do both, you have to transform your form and your mind. You transform your very matter

and your formal sense of self, your narrative, your social life and your community, whatever your culture is made of. And at the same time you are constantly purging yourself, in a bath of transparency and formlessness, getting as translucent and transparent and thin and flexible and creative as possible. Stated simply, what are we doing in the Perfection Stage? We are going to the heart, to the well, to the source of our potential, and that is our primal awareness, our primal brilliance, our capacity for openness, enthusiastic and connective openness. That is the mind objective. When we get there we are at the well. Then the question is, how do we come back from the well, how do we come back to reassemble a way of life that can tap into the source, dive into it and out of it? For that we need a new mind and a new body. And we need to put the mind and the body together in a new way, for a new way of being.

How do we do that? Now we go into the third perfection stage: the "virtual body." This is the stuff of our new dream body, our new transparent way of being, being something, with someone, or in some setting. It is an embodiment of joy, it is a creative way of enjoying connection and expressing freedom, and not just freedom from whatever but freedom to connect. Such is the virtual body. Then we need a mind to take that virtual body. We take the mind and immerse it in, like a jewel in fire. We keep melting it in the clear light, and that dissolves the impurities -- all the taints of stress, and worry, and ego, of separation and alienation, of threat. We do that until they are all gone and we become really pure. Now we can begin to reconnect with what is called the "Clear-Light Mind" with our body, now totally clear. And so we can now dissolve without fear, we can dissolve more deeply into the clear light mind.

Coming out of that clear light mind is the fourth perfection stage. We can now begin to practice re-weaving, re-connecting in a way that is finally working

out all the possible kinks and developing the new way of being, now on a platform of sheer clarity, or transparency, and pure blissful compassionate engagement, of joy in connection, or joy in expression. Those two things are woven together as a new form of life.

I never quite fully understood the end of the movie "2001 Space Odyssey," when the only astronaut left alive goes to Jupiter and beyond, to some place, through a wormhole, to some other universe, and then he is in some rooms, sparkling rooms, and he transforms, he dies and is reborn somehow, he comes all the way back to planet Earth, and this little embryo appears. It's something like that, all a bit strange. It seems to indicate that we need to go to the source to transform, we need to die as the person that we thought we were, the ordinary person that has come out of eons of survival, and a childhood of survival, and we need to be reborn in a new way, like a newborn, with that kind of freshness and glow, that transparency and translucency that newborns have.

The traditional practitioners do the death dissolution practice six times a day. Think about the effect of this: what would it be like if you did the death meditation six times a day, every day, and in your daily life you practiced evolving into a more open, transparent, joyful being? This would be like putting yourself in a sort of evolution accelerator. That is what this is about.

These experiences are not unique to the tantras. You find similar things in various forms of shamanism, in mysticism, in poetry, ... Actually you read and hear about these experiences anywhere: maybe when a woman is giving birth, or when someone has a heroic moment and saves someone, or in a near-death experience. You go there in these extreme moments because those states of mind are the very fabric of our being.

What is particularly radical about tantra is its systematic, scientific method of taking all of these gems, all of these beads of pure joy and clear awareness, and stringing them into a way of life, instead of just letting them come and go, willy-nilly, and never really come back to them again, which is what happens when we believe that life is about suffering, about survival, about accumulation or attachment, whatever. Tantra is a technology that allows us to evolve very quickly, both as individuals and as a species. We can use our amazing mind to simulate the experiences of death, transformation, orgasm, re-resurrection, and as we simulate and recreate those experiences in our meditation practice, we become rather cosmic creatures.

The tantras are for people in a rush, and for transgressive people. The essence is "I want to reach enlightenment quickly quickly, not in three incalculable eons. And my motivation is compassion, because I can't bear the tragic waste of life, as people are spending their precious human lives worrying, freaking out, hating." If you can't bear that, this is the best response. The technology that wants to control people from the outside doesn't touch much of anything. What really touches people is what we touch on the inside. This inner technology is designed to do just that. And how does this work, how do we make it real?

We have talked a bit about Kalachakra. Part of the essence of the Kalachakra practice is to understand the relativity of time, and to understand that we have already reached Nirvana, in that we can be in Nirvana, we all have the potential. We have the potential to calm and tame our minds, and to become extraordinary people. Just look at some of the people on this planet, extraordinary people like His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And he is not the only one. There may be thousands of people, ordinary people, who are really extraordinary, like him. I recently saw this wonderful documentary, "Waiting for SugarMan." It is about a male singer

from Detroit, who was not known in the US but, in the strangest twist of fate, he became very popular in South Africa, more popular than the Beatles, according to some. So he's famous in one country on the planet, and he's completely unknown in the rest of the planet. He is still living in Detroit, working in construction. Anyway, the thing is that there are a lot of remarkable people in this world, on this planet. How did they become that way? Not by accident. They went through certain experiences, they were touched by some people, they learned about a few things, perhaps they got some education or training ... It's the law of cause-and-effect. So, what if we made that set of causes that brings out the best in us our default system, and our education and training system, and we start now, practicing with each other?

The other way in which this tradition is so radical, so different from others, is its notion of emptiness and interconnectedness. Full interconnectedness totally demolishes the sense of there being anything that stands alone; this is valid for everything, for the whole or its parts, for an institution or an individual. We can take this interconnectivity and use it as raw material. The catalyst is our own inner transformation. In our inner environment we transform our nervous system, we find a better way to get through the day, to connect and live through the 24/7 lifestyle, to know whether we want to answer that email, or how we want to answer that email, or whether we want to get off email entirely, whatever it is that we want to do.

Everybody is freaked out and burnt out from too much of this 24/7 lifestyle, always on. We need to find alternatives. And this technology, this ancient technology, which is totally low-tech, is one very good alternative. Like the internet, you use your imagination. You learn by using your imagination, coming to class, listening to Gelek Rinpoche, and so on. The idea is that transformation

happens as a grassroots movement, one person and one community at a time, one counter-culture community at a time, changing the way we feel, changing the way we connect, changing the frequency, the buzz or the resonance, a ripple effect. Like i-phones, or smart phones, that started gradually and now they are all over, everyone has one. It happens because it brings a better way. The same was true for zero, the numeral: a grammarian in India invented it. And now we can't live without it, we use zeros for everything. This is the nature of the human intelligence: one of us comes up with a good idea and we are smart enough so that eventually everybody gets it. Here, the good idea is that we don't need to do so much, we just need to get a better way to be us, each of us, as individuals, we can have a happier way to be, we can connect in a happy way. We connect that way, one individual at a time, and one community at a time, and that sends out ripple effects, it resonates, and it accelerates the chain reaction, the transformation. And it's happening -- it's got to happen.

## Chapter Nine: Virtual and Actual Seals: Turning Sexual Chemistry in Pure Passion

As usual, we begin with a review of where we are. We're on a journey together. Some of you may be new to this journey and some have been on it all along. The Tibetan philosophical take is that whatever appears here is meant to be here, everything is interconnected and everything is as it should be. This is a very positive take on life, a very positive vision. It's like looking back at life after having tasted its blissful, inherently satisfying and meaningful nature. But for most of us, it's a stretch to think of life in that way. And so we need to work our way up to it. I think it's a good exercise for any of us to get over our funk and our gloom-and-doom view, to see that we really are kind of looking at the dark side, the down side, more than the up side of things.

It's like Rick Hanson says, our brains are like velcro for suffering, and for those kinds of things, those negative experiences. Trying to see where the happiness lies, what it feels like or looks like, is not so easy. I think we can all use this type of exercise. It's like standing on your head, it's good for you, right? It gets the blood flowing. This is like standing on your emotional head, and looking at life flowing, from the standpoint of happiness, radical happiness, true and authentic, real happiness, as Sharon Salzberg would say.

So, let us review where we are, to the extent that we can. I want to wind our way to the subject of the day, which is transforming sexual energy and use it on the path to enlightenment. This is a charged topic. In California it would be perfectly normal, and the purpose of the workshop would be Tantric sex. That's not the purpose here. Today I'll try to explain to you the real purpose of this esoteric work with sexual energy, which, in a way, is completely the opposite of ordinary, normal sex. Here it's about integrating our own sexual energy to be a whole being, to be complete. It's like the notion of union of the male and female



parts of us embracing, and finding a wholeness. Who is familiar with that? I see heads shaking, all right! So, I'll talk a little bit about that.

Last chapter we talked about integration. If we want to integrate, if we're going for more integration in our lives, we need to see that, as the living creatures that we are, we're made of conflicting energies. We have these two instincts, love and death, which are in conflict. In Freud's view, the tension between those two instincts could never be resolved. That was the basis for claiming that civilization would always be kind of a misery show, like average torture. In that view we would always be discontent. This was inevitable, we were not made to be civilized.

Now, of course, we know that Freud was wrong. While we can always be miserable, misery is only one option; but it isn't a necessity. It turned out that Carl Jung was right, that he had a leg to stand on when he said that energy can actually be transformed. We are now understanding the power of neuroplasticity and the power of positive affect, and our natural capacity to transform negativity into positivity. That's kind of what sublimation means. Jung used this term, he took it from the ancient alchemists. Like a good Swiss doctor, Jung was well versed in Latin and Greek. So he could read the primary sources. But the rest of us are not so lucky. And even if you can read Latin and Greek, these are very esoteric sources, it is hard to make much sense of them. I discovered Jung when I was a teenager. I would sneak into my father's library on Saturday, when he was out at the hospital, and I picked books off the shelves. And so I ran into Jung, and instantly became a convert. One of the things about Jung that fascinated me was his optimism, his sense of meaning and purpose. Another was the way in which he tried to bridge Western science and the ancient spiritual traditions which were little known in his time. It was not public knowledge if anybody in our culture reached that far, or got there. And the reality is that there were people who got

there. What to me was really interesting was that throughout history, no matter how primitive a society was, there were people who felt the need for some sort of transformative experience and tried to make a science of it. That's what alchemy is about, in a way.

Jung, of course, was interested in Tibetan culture. He even wrote an introduction to the translation of the Book of the Dead. Jung talked about individuation and integration. His idea of integration was, on a psychic level, about integrating the masculine and feminine, or about self and other. On an energy level, integration was about balancing aggression (or life-protective energy) with generosity and love (life-preserving energy). Freud thought these two energies could never be fully reconciled. But Jung felt that they could be, that we could sublimate the negative energies into positive ones. Maybe we have here a physicist or a chemist who knows what sublimation literally means. Isn't that when a solid is converted to gas without going through the intermediate, liquid state? There is some technical definition, but I'm not sure how relevant it is for us. In any case, the main point is that sublimation is a material transformation from one state into another. Jung's view was that we could transform the ordinary energy in our nervous system. At that time scientists studying the squid's nervous system had already discovered that axons use electricity; Freud was involved in that early work. The idea that we could transform that kind of energy from negative to positive is the essence of sublimation here. And we can learn how. It was with this idea of sublimation that Jung built a bridge from modern psychoanalysis and modern neuroscience (at that time in its primitive state) to the ancient traditions.

I was young and into Jung, into his ideas and interest in Eastern traditions. And so I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven when I walked into Bob Thurman's first religion class at Amherst, and he started talking about Tibetan Buddhism. I

thought to myself, "Oh, here we are, Small world!" The wonderful thing about this tradition, unlike our own esoteric traditions, is that this is very much a living, vibrant tradition. Even though Tibet is an endangered culture, it's a culture that's totally committed to integrating these arts, this kind of practices, with science. In India, at Nalanda university, there was a culture that made a science out of understanding these teachings. Teachers were teaching them, and reproducing them, expanding their reach, not keeping them for a lucky few. In Nalanda everyone could learn about them. That is also the vision of the Tantra. So we can all learn how to transform our inner awareness and energies -- the raw material, the fabric of our mind-body processes -- into an elixir of bliss and altruistic helpfulness. And that would be a good thing, something we can all use, and not just as individuals, but as a group too.

We have briefly talked about the five stages of the Perfection Stage; and we talked about the distinction between Creation and Perfection stages -- that is, when you're transforming the way your symbolic mind processes information, as opposed to the way your non-symbolic or intuitive, affective heart processes information. As we move into the Perfection Stage, the first thing we need to do is go into the crucible, the source, in the same sense alchemists used to talk about going to the source, and learn how to tap on it. The first part of the process is learning how to find, within our mind-body processes, the source, the potential for bliss and positivity that's in there, just sitting in there, under knotted-up afflictions and walled off by our defenses, by our reactive habits, our fears and hurts and resentments -- by all of our confusions. You are not going to feel blissful if you're living in the dread of the next thing that's going to happen, or feeling like "nobody loves me." It's very hard to get there. We need to find that essence,

learn how to take it in, channel it and turn it into a new way of being. That is the essence of the Perfection Stage.

The Perfection Stage is divided into two journeys. First is the journey out, to the most primal essence of your awareness and energy; this is like going to the center of the earth, or to the center of the universe. Then is the journey back in, to Earth, so to speak. I like to compare this to the journey in the movie "2001 Space Odyssey." First there is the journey out, far out, as David Bowman, who is the only astronaut in the crew that makes it alive, travels to Jupiter and beyond; he learns something out there, and then he comes back to Earth. An odyssey always has two parts: first we go to the "other" and we become transformed by it; and then we come back and re-engage. In this case we engage what was the ordinary self, and, to use Jung's language, we develop an "integrated" self, a higher self. This is when we sort of lose our self in some kind of dissolution, or transformation -- or a crisis, or a quasi-psychosis -- and we use this technology. We don't have to go crazy. We get more creative, we learn how to integrate new knowledge, and then come back and re-engage as a new person.

Now we will talk about what Tsong Khapa called the the "nine mergers and three seals." This will put us in the right direction for where we are going. Tsong Khapa was a Tibetan sage who lived in the fifteenth century and made Buddhist teachings much more accessible. He explained how to reach the so-called "mind objective" -- I like to call it "freedom of mind" -- that we talked about last week. You reach the mind objective when you tap into the essence of the bliss potential within you, that is the potential for disarming, for bliss, for openness within you. This happens in the third of five stages of the Perfection Stage. Here ordinary meditation is not enough. We need to combine the inner experience of meditation with some outer, psycho-physiological support. We need to do

something, we need a catalyst to make this transformation, this transition, possible. We need what Tsong Khapa called the "four keys."

Before getting into the four keys you need to be clear about a few things. You need your meditation skills, and you need inner fire, and you need diamond recitation. We talked about generating inner fire last term. We also talked a bit about diamond recitation, and sublimation. In sublimation you convert something into something else. And to transform anything you need a source of heat, of energy. And so, for our inner transformation we develop inner heat. We develop a flow of energy, which is really a chemical rush, using vase breathing. Remember vase breathing, from last year? We use vase breathing with meditation. And that triggers the "diving reflex." The diving reflex triggers a chemical transformation and a shift in our brain's chemistry. That's part of what we're using here, in this meditation practice.

At this stage we learn a different style of breath awareness. We go back to basic mindfulness, that is basic breath awareness, and we learn the "vajra recitation," or diamond recitation. With that we are now aware of the three stages of our breathing -- the in-breath, the pause, and the out-breath -- as the sounds that our breath makes as it comes in and out of our body. These sounds are like the sounds of the Buddhas: the OM of the body Buddha, the AH of the speech Buddha, and the HUM of the mind Buddha.

The details are not important. What is important here is the diamond recitation, which is a subtler, deeper practice of breath awareness. The way this works is, first we use vase breathing and inner fire to get into a blissful state; and then we go deeper into that blissful state using this deeper breath awareness.

There's science behind this, based on the smart vagus, my best friend. Why do I say that? The smart vagus is the section of the vagal nerve that allows us

to consciously control our breath. And why is that so important? Because by consciously controlling our breath we can actually tap into one of the lower parts of the brain stem, in the reticular formation in the very low part of the brain stem, where these nerves come out, and they can help transform what's going on higher up in the brainstem, where awareness comes from. Awareness comes from what's called the "reticular activating system" which regulates awake and wake-sleep transitions. It sits right on top of the reticular formation. So, essentially, what we're doing is using this breath exercise to go in deeper to rewire our ability to control the activation of our awareness at the fundamental level. This is not just esoteric religious gobbledygook. This is something real, something that has to do with our bodies and our minds.

So, we've got those two techniques, breath awareness and vase breathing. According to Tsong Khapa, these are necessary, but not enough in and of themselves, to give us access to the so-called "heart drop," the pure drop, the core essence. We also need, he says, a full immersion and absorption into our bliss network. And what do we need for that, what do we do next? Here Tsong Khapa introduces the "nine mergers" and the "three seals." That is all the equipment that we use to support our meditation process. In short, we are now using inner tools like breath awareness and vase breathing, combined with methodologies to produce psycho-physiological altered states. Another example of such a tool is hypnosis.

I want to explain what a merger is, to give you a bit of a taste of the whole Perfection Stage. Do you remember the three conversions in the Creation Stage? We talked about the Creation Stage when we went over the reconstruction of our narrative. The three conversions are death, transition (or development), and rebirth. First comes a death-like dissolution; then a resurrection-like re-emergence,

or an afterlife-life re-emergence; and then, finally, there's the re-embodiment of awareness, which is like a new birth, a rebirth.

So those are the three stages, or the three conversions. First, we convert death into the "Truth Body." We take death as a path to developing the "Truth Body" – the body that is a realization and a form of awareness grounded in reality, in the way things really are. This is the ultimate reality. It is pure mind, or whatever way you want to think of it. And to be there we have to let go, of everything.

Then, as we begin to emerge, as we start to come out of it, something starts to percolate. We try to use that percolation for transformation, for not going back to being the same old Joe. We don't want to be reborn as our ordinary selves, because we're not so happy as our ordinary selves. There's nothing wrong with being our ordinary selves, other than, gee, wouldn't it be nice to be happier, or more effective, or more whatever ...? So now we go for the second conversion: we try to convert the emergence from death to life into what's called the "Bliss Body," or the "Beatific Body," the "Beauty Body." You can take your pick. You take beauty if you are inclined to the aesthetic side of things; you take bliss if you like bliss better. And that's called turning development, or the Bardo, the transition from death to rebirth, into a path to the Bliss Body. Now we're going to learn to let go of the ordinary as the truth of our lives, we are going to liberate ourselves from that limited life and we will actualize a better self. That's what the death conversion is. Letting go is the door to liberation. So don't fear it anymore. Go for it!

Now, in the first conversion, there is a vague, kind of weird transition, where I'm feeling dream-like; and coming out of the dissolution to taking form again becomes a form of creative play. That is the form of our Bliss Body: we are now in

the creative -- and joyful -- process of re-sculpting our nervous system and our own self into a happier, healthier, more effective life form.

The third conversion is from the Bliss Body to the Emanation Body. Now I'm back in a form, I appear as a person once again, I have a full body, hands and all that. But now I imagine this life as something that was thrust upon me when I was born. My body becomes like the raw material of life, and I can use that material to embody and manifest truth and bliss. That's really the essence of the Truth Body: it is a communication device, or a benefit device, a device with a technology for helping. "Who can I help with this?" is the idea.

So those are the three conversions that make up the Creation Stage. The Creation Stage is fundamentally about taking on the life that is thrust upon us. If anybody here knows about the Existentialist movement, you may remember the idea of "being thrown" into existence. And, actually, the word "thrown-ness" was used, adopted from Heidegger. The Buddhists use the same word when they describe how we feel when we helplessly, powerlessly find ourselves being born as a human being coming out of a womb -- or in a womb if we remember what that was like -- and getting stuck with parents and a family and body and stuff like that, they call all that "being thrown" into that world. It is a particular kind of karma that throws us into that world. But now we're talking about getting off that train, that freight train of compulsive existence, of survival, a life of survival throwing me forward. You get off the train and suddenly there's a joy, it's all a matter of love and awareness. It feels like "I've arrived. Finally. I'm not struggling to get anywhere, I'm not struggling for survival, I have survived already! What's more, I'm creative." That's what we're trying to do, to change our ordinary embattled, stress-driven traumatized sense of self into a heroic sense of self, one that feels like "Hey, I really made it! I'm really OK! I'm ready for anything."



Maybe some of us get a glimpse of that now and then. And most of us don't live there. So, in the Creation Stage, we build a flight simulator, which is designed to teach us how to live there. We're going to practice again and again, like Bill Murray in the movie "Ground Hog Day." And in that way we start to get acculturated, we start to get used to it.

In the Perfection Stage, the three conversions become the nine mergers, which are really three sets of three mergers each. The mergers do the same thing, only they're not just converting our experience, they're not just reframing or revising, as in the Creation Stage. The mergers go deeper. Now each conversion is merged with a certain state of consciousness, an altered state of consciousness, which is a profound physiological state of consciousness.

The first set of mergers is the waking??death?? state mergers. Here you get a freebee, because, in a way, we've already practiced these mergers in the Creation Stage. When I feel that I'm sort of in a state of dissolution and de-differentiation -- or oneness, or deep peace, or whatever you want to call it -- that's merging the dissolution in the waking state with the Truth Body. So, I'm having an experience of dissolution and I'm trying to use it as a path to merging with peace and confidence. That's the Truth Body.

The second set of mergers is the in-between stage, or transition stage, mergers. Once I've had a dissolution experience, my mind is going to reboot. I start to take that altered state as a basis which I can then merge with my intention, my goal of developing a Bliss Body.

And then finally, I come back to the waking state. But I'm different now, I have been transformed by these experiences. Now I'm merging the ordinary waking state – or the life-like transition, back to life -- with an Emanation Body.

This may sound very complicated, but it's not, not really. In a way it's like learning how to ride a bicycle. So, think about it, about our minds and bodies, and how we live in the waking state. We just live up here, in the head. And then we go to sleep, and we have dreams. Maybe we remember them, and maybe we don't. And we dismiss them, we kind of feel, "Oh, I went to sleep and I lost consciousness, I lost time, it was all downtime." But the reality is that as far as our mind and body are concerned, as far as our brain is concerned, the waking state is just a small part of who we are. It is like the tip of an iceberg, there is so much more underneath ... That's why Freud is interesting, that's why psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are interesting. Because there's so much going on under, deeper. If we want to be more whole, more integrated, if we want to know more about who we are and what our reality is, we have to learn how to recover the stuff that's deep down. Freud compared this development to the building of the dams in the Netherlands, where they had to push out the water, get it out of the way and claim the earth under it. In a similar way, as we try to push out the confusion, we have to connect with it first, get it out of the way and connect with the deeper levels of our life. Those levels may be kind of confusing, and anxiety-provoking. And as we go through them, they feel like they melt, we experience a sense of dissolution, or maybe loss, or a sense of transition, even the unreality of having a form, and of having an identity in the first place.

We want to cultivate these stages in meditation practice, all of them, to get used to a wider range of experience. Like an artist, a painter goes for the full color palette to master it -- how do I use black? How do I use green? What

happens when I use this color with that color? -- we want to know how to use all the layers of our mind-body process to create our new person, a new personality, a Buddha personality. And for that we need the full palette. We are trying to weave all parts of our self, all of them, our altered states with their transitions, the in-between states and the other stuff that we normally just write off. And we learn how to make it all part of a new me, as we build a new me, one that's a bigger, more inclusive, more complete and grounded.

So that's the freebee, the first of five stages in the Perfection Stage, which is like the Creation Stage. All this will become clearer as we move along.

The mergers, in a way, are the same thing as the conversions in the Creation Stage. Let me explain. During our meditation practice we go through cycles of dissolution and re-emergence. As we re-emerge, as we integrate our new sense of self, the process is called a "conversion" when it's still at the theoretical level, it is still only a mental construction; and it becomes a "merger" when it starts to be a kind of chemical reality, and we start to get used to it, and we integrate a sense of dissolution. That is the Truth Body.

So that is using our waking state and meditative experience as the platform for transformation. We can also use our sleep cycle. Normally, when we go to sleep there's a kind of separation from our ordinary self. We are going through a transition to a less formed sense of self. And anything could happen to us in that process. We could have a nightmare, we could even die. So there's a risk involved. And actually, some people get afraid when they go to sleep, because they fear they're going to die. Anyhow, we go into a real deep sleep state, which is content-less, and we use it as a path to merging the deep sleep state with the Truth Body. And so we are using deep sleep as a platform, a naturally occurring

platform, to merge our awareness with the Truth Body, or to immerse our awareness in the Truth Body. The language is a little difficult to translate here ...

Next, when we come out of the deep sleep state, and we have a dream, we take that dream and use it to practice "lucid dreaming." We learn to become aware in our dreams, and we try to guide them. And so, in my dream, instead of Joe running from here to there -- trying to be where it's at, where the action is -- as I become lucid while in the dream state I quickly turn into my future Buddha, I imagine myself as Joe Buddha. And, instead of mindlessly running around, doing this or that, or anything unpleasant, I am working together with others and making the world a better place. That's merging the dream state with the Bliss Body, or Beatific Body.

Then, when I wake up, I merge the waking state with the Emanation Body. I return to my body but I don't see it as my old body, here I am, Joe, again. Now I'm actually a Buddha. Somehow some time ago I was sure that I was ordinary Joe; maybe I was brainwashed ... But now I've got this body, this precious body that people think is Joe's body, but it's actually my Buddha body, and I can use it to practice benefiting the world around me, like a real Buddha ... That's merging the waking state with the Emanation Body. So, that's the second set of mergers.

Are you following so far? Yo'll get the hang of it. As you go over these practices, you'll see the pattern. It's all fairly transparent. Lucid dreaming is an advanced practice. And it sounds a bit weird. There have been some experiments hooking up yogis who are lucid dreamers to an EEG machine. The results show that their brains work differently from those of a normal sleeping person. They show the delta wave pattern that's associated with normal deep sleep, and also a gamma wave pattern that's associated with waking consciousness -- at the same

time. This does not occur naturally. So, it seems that these yogis are really doing it, they are actually merging those two states of consciousness.

Anyway, at this stage Tsong Khapa says, sorry guys, that's still not deep enough, we need to go deeper. To get to the bottom of things, all the way to the source -- the fountain of youth, or life, or bliss, or whatever you want to call it -- we need one of two states of consciousness: death or sex. Those are the only two that go deep enough into our nervous system. And so the reason for the death mergers. I'm not sure you'll want to use them, but they're a good thing to know about. You can reframe death: instead of an end to something, or a bad trip, you can use the death process as a means to become a Buddha, as a means to become enlightened.

How do we do that, in our practice? As Gelek Rimpoche likes to say, you substitute your ordinary death with the Truth Body. Then everything that comes afterwards is transformed. The afterlife -- what would normally be going to Heaven, or being in the Bardo, or whatever happens in your cosmology -- becomes a path to having a Bliss Body. Instead of wandering from realm to realm looking for something, you practice emanating enlightenment in a subtle aesthetic form. Then being reborn becomes a voluntary reincarnation. You merge that with being an Emanation Body. That's what happened to the Buddha. He was up in Heaven, in the Tushita Heaven, in the form of the Bodhisattva Shratakeito, a kind of Vedic paradigm of the Seeker. He was looking down at the planet Earth and said, "Everybody down there is really miserable. What can I do?" So he decided to voluntarily be reborn, reborn on the barely tolerable Earth: "I'm going to become a Buddha and help everybody figure all this out." So he died and he took a transition form body, the Bliss Body form of a white elephant. And that white elephant entered his mother's womb ... Here you have one version

of the Immaculate Conception five centuries before the New Testament with Mary and Jesus. Anyway, he is reborn as Shakymuni, has a good life, becomes enlightened when he's 35, and so that's that.

If you want to become enlightened in this lifetime you need to learn how to transform sexual energy. That's where we come to what I call the fourth set of mergers, which is not traditional. Normally, we talk about the two seals, the two sexual seals. And then there is a third seal, the Great Seal, or Mahamudra, which is just kind of cosmic.

The first seal is you get yourself a virtual partner. You actually imagine yourself in embrace with a virtual partner; you get a handle of your sexual energy, and you use sexual fantasy. But not in any kind of normal, ordinary way. This is an art, a skill. You learn to use that energy with the enlightened vision and embodiment that we have been practicing here all along. And you imagine your virtual partner as Mrs. Buddha or Mr. Buddha. You imagine that partner as a life partner, you imagine feeling the bliss and love and warmth and closeness of that relationship, you are feeling it in your mind. Of course, you want to actually feel it in your body too, but that's a whole other thing, and that's up to the vividness of your imagination. So, that's the practice with a virtual partner.

Then, in the second seal there's the actual partner, a partner who is another human being. This is the reason for all this hype about Tantric sex, because one of the ways that you can do this is to get a real-life partner. Now, in reality, it's not Tantric sex if you don't know the Tantric part. If you don't know all of this inner technology, and if you don't use the sexual interaction with another human being to disarm your nervous system and tap into your bliss and transform yourself, then you're not really doing tantric sex. You're just having ordinary sex. You might as well read the Kama Sutra for that. And that is very different. This is about taking

the experience of sexual union from allowing yourself to being run by evolution to using that energy on the path to enlightenment. This is not easy. Evolution has wired us to desire sexual closeness and release. And as long as that's what drives us, we're just doing evolution's work, we're reproducing. And that's not what this is about. This is not about having babies. It's about stopping the cycle of mindless repetition and reproduction. It's about turning what would normally be an act of compulsion into a fully integrated art of self-transformation, giving birth to a new you.

So, that's a general description. We'll get into a little more detail about how that would actually work later. The third seal is the Mahamudra, which literally means the Great Seal, which is what this term is about. The Great Seal is actually the play of your illusory body -- that is your virtual body, or incarnated dream-like Buddha Body, or Bliss Body. This is about your ability to embody perfect, complete joy and bliss, together with the emptiness of all things in the universe, which is the clear light. And you can learn how to play with the universe and be one with it in that way, joyfully. You can learn to see and use all experiences as a partner. And then you find in all your experiences a way to be, to feel that you're communing with the universe, as a partner.

For some reason this makes me think of the time I brought Serkong Rinpoche to my mother's. I've told this story before. We needed a place to stay overnight, and it was the fourth of July. Out comes my mother, to greet this Tibetan lama, and his assistants, all in their Tibetan robes. My mother had never met a Tibetan lama; and Rinpoche had never met my mother. The special moment in this story is that when he encountered her, he had tears in his eyes. He was experiencing a blissful reunion with a long lost relative, or something like that. He had just landed in America and he was not thinking, "Oh here I am in America.

Are these people going to like me? What are they going to do to me? Are they going to feed me well?" Instead, he was experiencing joy in connection with this stranger. And it is that joy that made me think of that. Imagine if we could have that kind of joy regardless, no matter what, even if somebody is miserable to us and screams at us. Sometimes you feel joy even if your child is screaming at you. One of our cats has taken to pooping where she's not supposed to poop. But we still love her, she's still cute, when she comes to you she's still blissful. So, go figure, right? Life is full of paradox. And we can engage anything in the world with either fear and denial, or with blissful openness and awareness. To engage with blissful openness and awareness we have to learn how to make that our new default, with a new art for a new way of being. That's what the Great Seal is all about. That's kind of what we are going to be talking about during this term and in our retreat. So we don't need to get into more detail now. That would be getting ahead of ourselves.

So let us take a step back. I mentioned earlier the conversion of sexual energy. How does that work? So, if you do this, think of it as another set of three mergers, a set of three orgasmic mergers, the sexual experience mergers, following the pattern of death, transition and rebirth. So orgasm becomes a path toward experiencing the Truth Body. The French call orgasm the "little death." And that is because you experience a loss of sense of self. You can really go over and beyond your ordinary sense of self, and get a sense of disarmed joy and openness. This is something that we don't normally experience but is very much a part of us. It's what makes the world go around. And we can all feel that. In short, if you're consciously taking sexual experience as a path to developing a new grounding in openness, or letting go, or transparency, or selflessness, or love,



then that would be making the normal, ordinary orgasmic experience a path to the Truth Body -- or merging it with the Truth Body.

Then you reemerge, you start to have an experience of a body with another person who's different from you, and so on and so forth. You can take that as a path to embodying bliss, to being a truly happy being, connected with another truly happy being, a bubble of life, as if life could be truly happy just knowing itself and connecting with its missing half; or whatever way you want to call it.

And then comes the afterglow. Freud believed that marriage was based on the afterglow of sexual experience. He was a very pragmatic character. The important point here is the sense of closeness that comes out of sharing that kind of experience with another person, and that is temporarily disarming. It feels like I'm safe to disarm with this other person. And it allows me to feel more connected to this person, open to share the bliss of life with another human being. Then, in the afterglow, I get a sense of "Gee, being in a body isn't so bad. Being alive isn't so bad." And that is a path to the Emanation Body.

While traditionally it was said that the visualized partner wasn't enough, in the Gelugpa tradition, Tsong Khapa's tradition, which is inspired by the Kalachakra Tantra, the practice is a little more technical. In this case you can actually have the same effect with just a virtual partner, you can make an intense sexual simulation, or simulated union, just with your own perfect male half, or female half, or whatever gender you are, to actually have enough of an orgasmic experience by using all of this inner technology. How does that work?

Tsong Khapa talks about the four keys, two inner keys and two outer keys. These are the keys we need to unlock the "heart drop," the extremely subtle drop at the heart. And that's the way to unlock the bliss network and experience the freedom of mind. That is called the "mind objective." And we need also two

inner tools: vase breathing, or inner fire, and diamond recitation. We have talked about these two tools before.

The two inner keys are techniques which are sort of simulated in our inner experience. One is the "kiss connection." To do that we breathe in, we take in energy from above (as we inhale) and energy from below (by holding up our pelvic floor), and we bring these energies together, strongly, to experience something like a kiss, only internally. And the other is "compression." After the kiss connection you try to take all your energy and you just "oomph" it, you bring it up a few notches, by sort of compressing it into your heart center. After that compression, you practice expansion, you come out and let go. And then you repeat, you go back in again, out again, in again. And you practice in this way.

Later on we'll talk about the neuroscience of this, which has something to do with the effort required to get conscious control over what I would call the mid-brain, which is the top of the brain stem.

In the ordinary sexual experience the energy flows from the brain to the sexual organs; when practicing sublimation with it, we bring the energy up again, from the sexual organs to the brain, back and forth, mastering in this way any sense of attachment, and experiencing the bliss that is really in us. In this more advanced practice, what we're trying to do is get into the heart drop, not just experience bliss and learn to play with it. We need to bring the energy from above and from below together at the heart, and then we need to compress those together, and then kind of immerse our awareness, our energy, deeper, into the heart center, whatever that means.

It is hard to describe these experiences exactly, you have to sort of feel your way through. But it's not the point here, I'm not suggesting that you go home and do this. I'm just trying to explain what the pieces of this practice are.

The different pieces are different skills, skills that can be mastered, and that if you wanted to, you could put the pieces together and actually get the result that you are practicing for. This is good to know, that with this we can learn a special set of skills. And they are not so complicated. They're like yoga for the mind, for stimulating certain neural feedbacks, or facilitating certain kinds of neural feedbacks. What they are doing basically is building our capacity to regulate and rewire our nervous system.

So, Tsong Khapa says, the two internal keys are the kiss connection and compression; and the two outer keys are the two sexual practices, with a virtual partner and with an actual partner. And he says that you don't really need all the keys. You need only the first three. Highly sensitive and receptive people can do this, in the privacy of their own mind. We kind of know this. Anyone who's had a sexual dream, for example, knows we can have an orgasmic experience without another person. And it is not masturbation, but a mentally driven blissful experience. The mind has this capacity. And we can tap into it with the right set of techniques and procedures, with the practices we are talking about here.

One question is, do you release into orgasm or are you getting to the point of orgasm and controlling it, holding back? As I have said, this practice is not sex, because the purpose is not the release. The purpose is to get to that place where bliss is happening, and then pull back. And with practice you master the ability to go back and forth. You do that so you're not compulsively "thrown" into the next thing, so that you are not driven by attachment.

What you are actually learning is how to keep the bliss internally, and use it well. In the Buddhist view having an orgasm, a normal orgasm, is a tremendous waste. It dissipates your energy all over the place; you notice this when you have an orgasm, and afterwards you are exhausted and you feel kind of "blah..." The

experience of orgasm hooks some people. But it's sort of like exercising a lot. The point here is we want to keep the energy, we don't want the dissipation. We want to have access to that kind of energy, all the time. We are using this practice to trick our nervous system into thinking it's having sex so that it produces that high, bliss-generating energy; but it's not having sex. We do this because we want that bliss. And we want to use that bliss not just to have a relationship or to produce an offspring, or something like that; we want it to totally transform the way we live in our body, so that life becomes bliss-based and love-based, instead of fear-based and shame-based. So, that's the transformation that we're learning to master.

And so one of the Tantric rules, one of the fundamental commitments -- and also one of the Tantric downfalls -- is no release. Of course, that gets complicated if you have an actual partner. In this case, the partner has to be a practitioner also. It can't be just any other person. It has to be somebody who is on this path, with you, if you're in a relationship where your partner has a similar aspiration and is capable of a similar psychic internal transformational yoga. Otherwise, don't bother. Do it by yourself because it can't work with just another person. This is not about having better sex, or whatever. It's not an ordinary experience. At the start it is limited, temporary. And in time, with practice, you can get into a flow, a flow of bliss.

One of the unique characteristics of the Kalachakra is the idea of changeless great bliss. This happens when we embody our full potential. Then we are in the bliss flow, we experience our every moment of consciousness and every level of consciousness as an unwavering flow of great bliss. As Hamlet says in his monologue "To be or not to be," consummation devoutly to be wished." This is within our reach, if we get into this training and we master it. Then it becomes

natural. Then it can become a completely different way of being. Whether we believe that or not, or we want to aspire to that, if we put in our practice the work that's necessary we'll get there. The point with this type of practice is that as much an effort we put into it, that's as far as we go along the path, we get that far. Even just being able to very briefly, now and then, tap into that positive energy -- our love energy, compassion energy, sexual energy -- and harness it to produce an internal release state of great openness, that's a blessing. And then you use that great bliss and openness to disarm your ordinary self. That's very important. Otherwise, Tsong Khapa says, you will waste that bliss. Unless you use that bliss to get over the gloom-and-doom, traumatic nightmare, evolutionary hangover, and lighten up, re-teach your nervous system, then you're wasting this energy, the positive effect will be short-lived, you'll miss the opportunity.

As Rick Hanson taught us when he was here, to promote positivity we have to make the best out of our positive experiences, we can stretch out their effect. We are wasting them unless we really pay attention to them, we focus on them and we register them in, bring them deep into our nervous system. I can let my nervous system learn that life is good, that I'm OK, that there's beauty and love and good things in every moment in life in the world.

I want to read to you a quote from Tsong Khapa, from my book *Sustainable Happiness*, where he describes the practice of the death dissolutions:

"Here you are developing the four voids of extremely great impact according to the death process, and so it is an emergent order coming from the process of compressing the wind energies into the heart center and a reverse order coming from a process of expanding back out from the heart center. Thus, by the inner condition of the method of meditating life

energy [breath] control however you do it, and by the outer condition of relying on union with a consort, the wind energies and enlightenment spirits are both compressed into the heart center from both the top and bottom of the body."

Remember that the dissolution process has eight steps; we went over them in the opening meditation. The body dissolves in four stages, from solids to liquids to fire to breath energy; then the mind dissolves in four stages, from luminescence to radiance and so on. And if we use the four mental dissolutions to let go of negative habits -- desire patterns, aggressive or defensive habit patterns, isolated habit patterns, and then finally all habit patterns -- then we experience the four 4 bliss voids. And so he described how it has to happen.

Later on Tsong Khapa says, basically, that this practice is a waste of time if you develop the bliss states but you don't use them to disarm your mind. For example, some people brag about how great they are at restraining orgasm and maintaining all these bliss states. According to Tsong Khapa that's not the point. You are wasting the bliss unless you're using it to disarm. Why? Because then it's just another pleasant state, it's like a vacation, wonderful and lovely. But then you go back and you're the same person, because you haven't re-educated your nervous system. So, as you can see, this is a very profound practice, right?

About the dissolution states, the eight-dissolutions practice, I want to mention that this is not just a perceptual dissolution of the ordinary self, it's a dissolution of an ordinary self-state or ordinary self-sense. And, again, that's just another way of saying that we're trying to dismantle that neurotic, on-the-defensive person that we've become, as we take the raw materials of our mind

and body and put them back together again, but in a happier, more blissful way, a more effective way.

So, how do we use the bliss that we have generated through these practices to disarm? That is the practice of Mahamudra, the "Great Seal," the art of using bliss to dismantle our ordinary perception of separateness and alienation from the world around us. That's the essence of this meditation.

There are different ways of interpreting that. One is when we use it as a way of realizing what's called emptiness, what I like to call openness and Tsong Khapa calls the bliss-voids. Ideally the bliss is experienced, and that's the "method.". But, in this practice, to reach liberation method has to be conjoined with wisdom, the wisdom for using that very positive experience in our nervous system to know that we're OK, to feel that we can let go; and also the wisdom to see that we're not we thought. This is now obvious, because if you dissolved yourself, and you're spread out like space, and you're pure light, clearly you're not what you thought you were. The wisdom part is to really understand that all our instinctive habits that tells us, "I'm a hungry, frightened animal wandering alone in the jungle," or "I am a frightened child on the verge of rejection" is actually just a bad dream, a hangover, an evolutionary hangover.

There are two ways to use this to harness the bliss states that are being generated. One is to unlearn or de-condition, to disarm the instinctive reactions, these compulsive instincts that are always swirling around in our mind saying "do this, eat that, love this, hate that." Our minds are full of these kinds of thoughts, they are constantly generating them. And because we're living up in the head, at the top of the iceberg, we have no influence on what the central processing unit is doing. The CPU is just pushing us around. As Freud said, the ego is not a master in its own house. The master is the id, the animal in us, it's just pure drive, made

of all these evolutionary instincts that are programmed into us, tangled up with memories, confusion and distortions from early childhood. That's what's driving us.

In a way, this kind of practice makes psychoanalysis sort of unnecessary, or maybe it completes it. Instead of just talking about our unconscious, this is about taking a journey into our unconsciousness. And instead of just knowing what's wrong with us and why we're neurotic -- because mommy said that, or my friends said this -- this is disarming the confusion, unlearning the Pavlovian reflex, that every time somebody looks at me funny I feel just like my inner child when my mother scolded me. We can disarm that. Some kind of healing happens with the practice. We can disarm even the fundamental instinct that is at the heart of our animal survival instincts, the one that says, "when you feel vulnerable, be on guard." We can unlearn all of that, that's what Buddhist practitioners say.

So that's one method for harnessing this bliss to disarm, as a therapeutic medicine. It's the ultimate medicine.

There are two elements in this learning process. One is the uniting quality of these states of mind. The mind has many layers, from very coarse to very subtle. Up on top, the higher awareness is very good at differentiating things. But sometimes it's so good at differentiating things, that we get caught up in those differentiations, and we lose the unity of it all. Lama Yeshe called this the "garbage dualistic mind," that is when everything just seems so different, and we feel so alienated. But when you go into the dream state, or the deep sleep state, or the orgasmic state, you're in a different layer of your nervous system, one that is more united. Because the central processing unit of those deeper states of consciousness is like a one-bit processing unit, it's much simpler, much more



undifferentiated. It feels like "here I am, floating around, I don't know where I end and you start ..."

The advantage of the deeper layers of consciousness is that it's easier to feel the connectedness of all things, because they're non-conceptual, and they're not as caught up in all the distinctions that our higher awareness makes. It's like when you wake up from a very deep sleep, or a deep nap after jet lag; it's a bit disorienting. You don't know where you are, who you are, or even what it is to be alive. You feel like, "What is this?" Somehow everything is much lighter, more communal, it's almost like you've dissolved in everything else. That's because those subtle states of consciousness have a uniting quality.

If you're trying to break down your artificial sense of separateness, which is part of what traps us in our isolated cell, these states of consciousness are very useful. While in the modern world, in the Cartesian world, or in any warring tradition, these states of consciousness are not wanted, because they want us to feel threatened and small and alienated, so we can go out and fight, we can conquer the universe, we can hurt people without feeling it. But for a healing, therapeutic, more matriarchal approach to life, you want these deep states that are more unified. These states allow us to understand things in a more realistic way, and even read our babies mind, understand their wishes.

So, that's one element to this teaching, that these states of mind are better at helping us connect, because of their very chemistry. The other element is that because they're blissful, they have a natural disarming function which is similar to what hypno-therapists call an "affect bridge." If you want to take on trauma, you better be taking it on from a place that's strong in positive affect. You need to feel confident, or loved, or inspired, or something positive like that. Otherwise the trauma is going to re-traumatize you. But if you generate bliss, that bliss

automatically helps you disarm and get the upper hand over all these fears – it helps you turn the velcro into warm and fuzzy little cotton candy filaments, or something like that. It just smoothes everything out. "What do I have to fear? I'm feeling no pain. I'm blissful. I'm not afraid." Those feelings are present when endorphins are secreted. The role of endorphins is actually to inoculate us against pain and make us fearless. It's part of their biological function. And we're using them to get a little more courage and become a little more heroic, and not be so afraid all the time.

As I said, some parts of this type of practice are somewhat controversial, because it mixes spirituality and sexuality. For most people that just doesn't mix. Even in the Indian traditions, in which many people are totally into this kind of stuff, most people really think that this kind of Tantric practice is "left-handed;" and what that means is that it's dirty, because they use the left hand to wipe themselves. Sex is dirty and you shouldn't really use that as a path. We Christians have the same thing, of course. In our fundamentalist tradition sex is sinful, shameful, and acceptable only for procreation.

Tantra says exactly the opposite. It's not about procreation, we don't need more people. We need more happiness. How can we use our nature to feel more happiness, to feel more love and care for all the life here, including our own?

So, this art is very controversial, using sex and death like that. Even within the Buddhist tradition it has been controversial. At a certain point in history, sometime between the third and eighth centuries, nobody really knows for sure, this stuff was integrated into the curriculum, based on establishing a clear set of boundaries and guidelines about how it was to be taught and how teachers were to be taught to teach it, so that it wouldn't be confusing, and it wouldn't create unnecessary intrigue or controversy, or provocation.

You can imagine, of course, how this could be confusing. In one part of the monastery monks are learning to live a celibate life and let go of passion. And in another part the monks are going for a blissed-out experience imagining being in sexual union with a partner. The fear is that a person on a healthy spiritual path, which begins with dispassion and calming down, will be thrown into confusion, confusing the spiritual path with some sort of hedonistic activity. And that's not so hard to see. These tools are powerful and one should be really mature before engaging. It's the same in other types of mysticism, like Kabbalah, and Christian mysticism. These are very provocative things. For Kabbalah it used to be that to go into that practice you have to be at least 40 years old, because 40 is considered a mature age, after you have a measure of stability and a good understanding of the basic teachings. As I like to say, if you want to play with fire first you have to know how to put it out. That's the first rule. If you don't know how to put it out you can get burnt, you can get in trouble. That's why these techniques are traditionally shrouded in some degree of secrecy and require maturity.

The essence of the Kalachakra tradition, which came along relatively late, probably sometime between the eighth and eleventh centuries, was to say, "we don't need that secrecy anymore, because now we can use science instead, we can scientifically explain how these elements are actually part of our natural make-up, and how this energy connects us all, and together we can become a positive thing, a positive force." The Kalachakra tradition is the tradition which we at Nalanda institute follow, how we take this practice.

Within the Tibetan tradition the same dialogue is going on. Some people are very protective of these teachings; others are very open and hand them out to everyone. The guidelines say that they should be taught with care; and if they're going to be taught more openly, the teaching should be based on science. And it should be clear that it is about learning the way your mind and body really work so that you use them for a more positive way of living. You should not be vulnerable to misunderstanding the teaching, and then misuse it.

You can read about the science behind this kind of practice in Stephen Porges' book, *The Polyvagal Theory*. He's like "Mr. Vagal Nerve Research." His book was published in Dan Siegel's *Interpersonal Neurobiology* series. In his research Porges pulls together a lot of elements that are in the Tantras, even though he didn't know anything about them. He points out that, in our biological evolution, when we went from fish to mammals, and our breathing adapted to a new environment, the nerves that fed our brachial arches reorganized. A number of them became dedicated to new purposes, and with new abilities to fulfill them. One of them was conscious breathing. Another was control of our facial expressions. This is very important. The facial nerve is right next to the new smart vagus, and also to the auditory nerve controlling hearing and the pharyngeal nerve controlling speech. We can think about it in this way: when we went from fish to mammals, social interaction became our new water: instead of swimming in the ocean, we began to swim in social relations; and instead of breathing air filtered through the water, we had to filter through social relations for finding loving interconnections with other human beings. We developed chemicals like vasopressin and oxytocin in that same context, to help us modulate the old sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems for mammalian life. Porges called these nervous systems the "social engagement system." And you can see

the social connection. You can see how, if you're meditating on Buddhas with beautiful smiling faces, that that would calm your nervous system. So, when you see a beautiful face, or a smiling face, the vagal nerve is more active. When you hear a tone of voice that's sweet and kind, that stimulates the vagal nerve. When you speak in a gentle way, it stimulates the vagal nerve. The same happens when you breathe slowly. All of these things are actually reaching deep into our brain stem, and the Tantric tradition brings them all together: body language, facial expression, mantra, breathing. It's really teaching us to get control of our brain stem using these complicated feedbacks that are built into our mammalian nervous system. So it's very far out! But you don't need to know all that in order to practice this. If you already know enough to understand how cool this is, then you can just practice it because it's cool, because you want what it teaches, what it offers. I think that as Westerners it helps us to have a better understanding, including scientific understanding. And that's all very consistent with the spirit of the Kalachakra tradition: The more we understand it, the better our practice.

Chapter 10:Realizing Freedom of Mind: The Ultimate Metaphoric Clear Light

Let's begin with a question about practice: When we're imagining being these archetypal beings made of light which we don't feel we are, in fact we're quite convinced we're not like that, what are we imagining, really? Is it just some sort of empty fantasy, some wishful thinking we're dreaming up? how should we relate to it?

We have been talking about tantra, the esoteric practice for transforming ourselves. Part of what makes tantra different is that it's an accelerated learning system for quick results. For one thing, it's a fast track system, a multilayered -- or multitasking -- instructive meditation system for developing wisdom and compassion both at the same time. In tantra you practice wisdom and compassion in the same meditation. In the normal Buddhist meditation practice, on the other hand, you practice them separately and then bring them together in yourself, in a better kind of person or way of being.

Also, in tantra we alternate between formless meditation and formal meditation. The formless meditation is more familiar to us. We have practiced it often, in our introductory meditations. We melt everything, we become pure energy and space-light, we float around, out there. And isn't that nice? It is nice. We need that. We need space and light to clear our minds, to clear them out really well, and then we need to start over again in order to change, really change to become more of our ideal self. And for that we need to be free, in this way, free to move on.

From the Buddhist point of view, what we're doing by clearing our minds and learning to tap into the present moment to be free -- free from fear, free from

concern, free from attachment -- is we're realizing our personal self-interest. There's nothing better than that. It's sort of the complete opposite of modern civilization. I think it's Pascal, the French Philosopher, who said that all human evil can be traced to the difficulty that people have to just sit still with themselves. We can't sit with ourselves because we're wild, we're not at peace, we're tortured. Freud said that we're afflicted by what he called "reminiscences," the traumatic memories we cannot recall, fears and so on which could be traced not just to childhood, but to evolution. It was evolution that made us fearful, and so we're always on guard. That is why Rick Hanson says that our brains are like Velcro for suffering. We're always leaning towards the suffering side of life instead of the happy side.

The formless meditation practice can free us from that negative bias, so we start with it. And after that we get into the dying process -- more exactly, our whacky, neurotic dysfunctional way of being is dying, we don't need it anymore, and we're taking the risk of opening up and seeing what can come. We need to plant the seeds for a new way of being. This is essential if we follow the Mahayana way. We're not trying to escape. We understand that there's no escape, there's no place to go, no place "there" as opposed to "here." The only way we're going to have a happier life is if we start to find a new way to relate to it, relate to life in a way that's effective, that's wise, that's based on a kind of compassionate befriending of it. That's our compassion practice.

Next, in the formal meditation practice we are working to reboot as the Buddha on the sun disc, or the exclamation point inside our center, we're evolving again, out of the void, we're evolving in life as being, we're creating a new life, we're like God in the beginning, God at the beginning of the Bible. The Bible says that in the beginning there was nothing; the world was without form, and void.

Then God said, "Let there be light!" or something like that. And he said so with the confidence to do it. And so he did it. Then God got busy and worked hard to create the universe ... And now here we are, we're working hard also, we're trying to recreate our world. We're trying to recreate the world out of simple, pure experiences, out of a sense of luminosity, out of a sense of hope and affirmative intention, and purpose. And on that we build a whole new sense of what it is to be a person -- or, in the language of cognitive therapy, a new person schema, or self schema.

Of course, this new person built out of positive intention is not going to resonate with our old, suffering, nervous system. This is going to feel weird. It may not even resonate with our best moments, or with the most positive experiences in our lives. So for now you can do this very simple experiment: imagine yourself as pure sunlight, or as a luminous syllable of affirmative sound, whatever is bubbling up from inside; or imagine yourself as something like a heroic Father Time, the force of progress, moving through light, through bodies. Or imagine yourself as Mother Earth, which produces a sort of grounding and connectedness in things. I bet that would resonate more with the best moments you've had in your life. You've felt some of that, right? You wouldn't be here if you had not had some sort of transcendent experience, maybe some short glimpses that made you feel that " ... well, maybe it's not all bad, and maybe the way to make it better isn't to go make a million bucks or to be famous or whatever, maybe there's another way to make it all better ..." The problem is that we don't trust those experiences. But if we did, and if we were to make a person out of them, if we were to base our person on those positive experiences, that would be one way to think about how to resonate with these idealized images. These images are designed to call up



some fundamental states of well-being, of possibility and purity that we normally don't connect with because we're very busy living in survival mode.

A more official answer, a more psychologically valid answer to the question of how these images work is that, if it is hard for us to identify with the genius within, with the potential within, then we start by getting a sense of grounding and possibility in relating to others who we see with that genius within, we can see the potential within them. There are people like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or teachers we may have had a great weekend experience with, like Gelek Rinpoche, who are quite special, who have come from something else. You can see that special quality more objectively in others because it's not you. But you can put your ideals in them, you can hitch your wagon of ideals to their horse, or train, or star ... whatever expression you want to use. It's through the role modeling process that we really get the content, that's how this practice works, we borrow somebody else's realization. We may not know at this point what it feels like to be truly happy, or well, or effective. But we may be able to have a few glimpses when we are around people who know those feelings, who are cool and don't get uptight, who are more hopeful, or a little kinder, or a little more patient -- whatever it is that we want to be.

Clearly, this type of visualization practice doesn't feel as familiar, it is hard for us to relate to it easily. So think of it as a way for building your compassion. Surely it does not feel like you -- it's actually translucent, not solid. It becomes hard to relate to it if you take your normal sense of ego or self-reification and transplant it onto this translucency, or onto a mentor, like Chandrakirti, or Father Time, or Mother Earth, which will feel even weirder.

That's not what we're being asked to do here. We're being asked to envision our self in what I call our self-dissolving prosthetic self, we're being asked to envision our self in a whole new way, which is self-less, which is transparent, translucent, like a dream, a dream self. And the only reason why we're giving way to it is because it might help us connect with another person. It might help us reach out to them and give them a feeling, as artists do through their works. Our medium is the raw material of our mind, and we're trying to communicate, to say "hey, it's okay in here, it's pretty cool in here, come on in." You can do this by showing a little friendliness, you can use a little energy for that. You can manifest that by moving in a certain way or speaking in a certain way, morphing instead of assuming that your body and mind are already set and cannot change, and using them as raw material, like clay, and re-morphing them slowly, re-working them using that quality of our mind, neuroplasticity. We work on our transformation one day at a time, dying and being reborn, time and again. And so we're slowly shaping the kind of persona that we would like to have in this world, that we would like to be around. And we can do that, we can take this life and we can make it more like what we want it to be -- not everything of course, like I can't become six feet tall suddenly, and I'm not sure I'd like to be six feet tall, but that's another issue.

There is a question about the neuroscience side of things here: our brain has the tendency to see things as more solid than they really are, more separate than they really are; where might that tendency be located? is there a particular part of our brain that does this? The way I would put that issue will be familiar for those of you who were in my neuroscience talk for the students in Nalanda's certificate program. Rick Hanson talked about this also. He talked about the balance of the autonomic nervous system and the parts of that system that set the

tone. He talked about the parasympathetic system, which is like "the green zone" and the sympathetic system is like "the red zone." And he made the point that the green and the red zones are operative through all the layers of the brain.

We can think of the human brain as three-fold, what is referred to as our triune brain. Dan Siegel also uses this triune model. At the top and front of the brain is the neocortex, which in evolutionary terms is the newest part of our brain. And it is more analytical, more into waking information processing. Then there is the limbic system, which started to develop with the mammals; this earlier, older part is where our emotional brain lives. The limbic system is more active in our dreams and emotional processing. And third is the primal brain, the reptilian brain. Rick says -- and I very much believe that he's right -- that throughout all the different layers of the brain there are states in which the brain is functioning as a self-protective organ, in an evolutionary conservative way -- which is to say a psychologically defensive way. And so it tends to see itself, us and the world as separate, separate and solid. Separateness and solidity are part of the process of reification. On the other hand, there are times when the brain is chilled out and operating in a very green-light kind of way -- when everything seems totally interconnected, we lose our boundaries and everything flows into everything else.

So, in response to the question of where in the brain is our tendency for reification, I would say that, rather than thinking of it as located in one layer of the brain, the perception of our separateness and solidity operates at all the different layers of the brain. It's a state, a self-state, a self-protective state, where our default perception of the world tends to be "I'm very separate ..." because most of the time we're too scared, too scared for our own good and for the situation at hand.

At the same time, we want the world to be a safer place. And that relates very much to this notion of the yogic nervous system. Maybe you remember the images, the map with the chakras along the central channel in the middle that goes through our core being to our pelvic area, the two side channels that start at the nostrils and wind down to our pelvic area, the third eye and the crown chakra and so on. There is a very simplified version in my book on page 424.

In my model of the nervous system, I see these two systems, from East and West, together, with the two side channels representing the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system in a general way. There's some reason, I believe, to support that. It is this system that puts us in the "red zone" or "green zone." And the chakras stand for different layers of our brain. We focus mostly on three, but we could easily split the brain functions into 5 or 7 layers. I'll talk a little bit more about that today. I want to try to go a little deeper with the Tibetan Buddhist esoteric side and try to connect it more to neuroscience and psychotherapy, to get our bearings from a Western point of view. So, should we go on?

Let us now talk about the clear-light mind, or the freedom of mind, the third of five substages in the Perfection Stage. We get there after we dismantle our normal sense of disconnection from our primal state, action or consciousness, and we connect to what is referred to as the primordial Buddha inside of us: We go home, to the source of awareness, the most primal, luminous and clear formless awareness deep within us. Then we are free in our minds, we're able to travel through the whole terrain of our being, we're not stuck up there in the head, in the symbolic complexities of our waking consciousness. We're not stuck in an emotional narrative, like in psychotherapy, or in our dream brain, worrying or thinking or wishing that something would happen with others, which is what the

emotional brain does, in some way. And we're not stuck in the reptilian mode of the brain either, wanting something all the time and never being content with what we get. If we could free our minds from all of those taints, from all of the different forms of suffering, and just get to the primal awareness of "I'm here," where the natural power of our mind is unobstructed. That would be a major step toward enlightenment.

The way we're trained to think as moderns, the Cartesian way, the way I was trained to think in medical school, is that our human consciousness really is only what's up here at the top of our bodies, in our heads -- not in my beret but at the highest level of consciousness, a level that maybe only primates -- and maybe only humans among primates -- have reached, the level that operates in a very symbolic way. Descartes said "I think therefore I am." And the corollary, or the antithesis of that is "My emotional mind and my visceral embodied awareness are not human intelligence, they may be more like animals, they may not even be consciousness." For Descartes these other aspects of our human existence were in fact considered as body, as mechanical as a machine.

So, from Descartes we got a mechanistic view of the body and a disembodied view of the mind. From that time, physicians are trained to look at the human body, not as the temple where a person resides, where a spirit resides, or even as a living thing inhabited as consciousness; physicians are trained to think of the human body as a machine, totally impersonal, and even, in a way, lifeless. Otherwise how are you going to be able to cut into it, or give it all sorts of poisonous medicine? My teachers at medical school used to tell us, "You'll burn out if you care about your patients, if you relate to your patients as people; you'll get empathy burnout." But now we know that actually the opposite is true: the burnout comes from no longer connecting with people, for treating people as

mechanical bodies. That does not mean that doctors and their teachers are mean people or anything like that; they're just subscribing to the latest view of what a human being is. So when you go into a coma or something like that, a state where your higher cortex isn't operating, they take you to a hospital and they put an EEG on you, and if they don't get any standard signs, like gamma waves or theta waves or something that shows that complicated activity is going on in your brain, they consider you brain-dead. Yet there might still be some activity coming from the brainstem. This happens all the time with people who fall into a coma: they go into vegetative states, they have a near-death experience, and then they get resuscitated; or they have a stroke, or having locked-in man or locked-in woman syndrome, they look brain-dead while they're still conscious. Spooky thought, right? When people come out of a coma, some of them say things like "Oh yes, I saw everything that was going on in the room, I heard you telling that dirty joke ..." Seriously, these things have happened, they've been reported. I've heard people telling their relatives that they knew they were there and they knew what they were saying.

According to many cultures including Buddhism, the mind isn't up in the head, but in the heart. In terms of our western brain model, that means that our primary awareness is actually where the heart centers are in our brain -- and that is in the brainstem. And right next to the heart center is the cardiorespiratory oscillator and all the things that regulate our breath; and the nuclei that form the reticular activating system with its reticular formation, the regulators of our fundamental awareness, they're also there. They are all in the brainstem, sitting there, next to each other. So awareness seems to be just as primal a life process for us human beings as breathing or having a pulse is for animals. It's a primal thing, not so complicated.

The view in these Eastern traditions is that our real consciousness, our primal consciousness doesn't separate us from the other living beings, but actually we share it with all living beings, they all have it, in some form or another. We need to learn how to integrate that part of our consciousness. We can do it through different types of journeys -- for example meditative journeys, or using sleep or death or even sexuality as a process -- through these altered states that normally occur; and we can learn to merge our higher awareness, or to immerse our higher awareness into deeper and deeper layers of our nervous system and bring conscious integration.

I have talked to you about a model for the integration of the brain. There is a very lovely study, from the 1980s, that compared the brain activity in musicians and non-musicians. And it showed a significant difference between musicians' brains and normal non-musician brains when listening to music. In non-musicians, only the right brain lights up. It's as if non-musicians kind of shut down the left brain, which is the verbal brain, and they just listen to and appreciate the sounds and the rhythms. It's as if we become simpler mammals again, like when my cat is feeling pleasure and starts purring. On the other hand, when musicians listen to music the two sides of their brain light up -- the music module in the right and the syntax module in the left brain. The syntax module gives us speech and analytic power to parse things up into pieces. So apparently some linkage develops, two systems that were not naturally connected, two modules that were not networked, are now so. This can happen because of the brain's quality of neuroplasticity. For the musician, the constant practice of thinking about the sounds -- how the sounds are produced, how they combine with each other, what effect they're having on me and why, and so on -- promotes the development of this connection, this networking between the verbal mind and the musical mind. And

that's a model, a very simple, lovely, elegant model of self-regulation for neural integration. Different, separate parts have now come together.

Our normal brains have gone through evolution, and now we find ourselves in his world, it's like we're thrown in here, out of the womb and into this life, with all this equipment. Some of it dates back to our reptilian days, some of it comes from our mammalian days, some of it comes from our primate days, and some of it is strictly from human days. And these parts are not wired together -- I mean, they are wired together potentially, but they're not all working together, they work separately, in what some people call a "heterarchy," which means when one part is running the show the others are in the back seat. Heterarchy explains why, when we have stress, our higher reasoning capacity and our communication capacity are in the back seat. We can't reason or communicate clearly anymore. The same thing happens when you have an argument with your spouse or a friend: you can't think clearly, you act like an idiot, and you say stupid things, hurtful things that later you wish you could take back. This happens when we're frightened and we're thinking like a frightened animal. We need to bring awareness to all levels so that we can integrate them. So we work to bring awareness to these actions of ours coming from the layer in charge, and gradually connect it with the deeper layers of our mind. But how do we do that internally?

To answer that I'll go back to the traditional practice. We are in the Perfection Stage, about mid-way point in the Perfection Stage, the stage of intuitive realization. Now we're not just imagining that we're more effective beings, but we're actually re-wiring our mind and nervous systems so that we are more effective. We are not in a flight simulator any longer, we're learning how to actually fly differently. And the midway point is the third stage, "Freedom of Mind." Here we have reached the objective clear light, we have the realization,



we're finally able to let go of all the clinging to the fragmented consciousness and reactive patterns of "me" versus "other" or "us" versus "them" so that we can actually dive in and immerse ourselves completely in a consciousness mode that is more united and integrated. In the tradition's view that is the fundamental nature of our consciousness: united, integrated. Being separated in thought or feeling, thinking like a separate being or feeling like a separate being, that's what they call "veils," or layers. And that's represented in the map of the nervous system. The central channel is where bliss and openness live. That's the core essence of our nervous system, that is blissful openness. But the on/off switch is now in the off position, because the side channels are caught in a reactive bouncing back and forth between stress and fatigue. This gets us in a segmented, or fragmented mode, which constricts our ability to go deeper, and so to connect on a deeper level.

In the medical Buddhist tradition chakras are not seen as the beautiful lotuses where the bees are humming and nectar is flowing out that we hear about in some yoga traditions. They're seen as knots, knots created by an ordinary mind, a mind that is normally frightened, alienated and neurotic. The knots are made by the side channels winding around the central channel, essentially creating knots. The most complex knot is the one at the heart. We all feel that. Bob Thurman likes to say that it's like being born with a clamp left inside. You can feel that tension when you start to feel stressed; you know you feel bad. And when we meditate or relax, or we encounter someone who loves us or something we like, then we feel good -- we get a feeling of release and warmth, and melting inside. But then we go back to the knots, quickly, we get tied up in knots again when things get stressful again. How would it be if we totally could unknot all that twisting of the

side channels? That's the proposition of this "Freedom of Mind" stage: unraveling of the heart knot.

Buddhists say that in the journey you weave for yourself you enable yourself to thread your awareness away from its normal weave, the fabric of differences at the surface -- like the symbols or concepts of "me" or "you," "here" or "there", "good" or "bad" -- and you thread deeper. You tap into the central channel, and then you go into a kind of uniting experience -- and you may have a blissful experience. We all have these peak experiences where we feel blissful, whole. Then, during the rest of the journey the task is to gradually open up the central channel. You do that as you bring at the same time the energy from above and below into the heart, and then you try to untie the heart knot. And that's how we get access to the deeper layers, and to what they call "the indestructible drop," which is just a way of gaining access to the central processing unit, so to speak, or the source, the well of blissful-openness experience.

If you think about it in terms of our western map of the brain, this kind of experience probably has to do with integrating the brainstem areas of activation and reward, the internal reward system, which is where our bliss comes from. It starts in the brainstem, in the ventral tegmental area, which is in the middle of our brain. Interestingly enough, consciousness starts there too. So the source of consciousness is in the same place as the internal reward system. And sitting right on top of it is the hypothalamus, with all the appetites. And right around the hypothalamus is the amygdala, which is the alarm bell that is ready to warn "danger! danger! danger!" and get freaked out. If you look at the brain in this way, with the core brain as the heart center rather than as a brain part, you can see how the rest of the brain, including the limbic system and even the cortex, wraps around it like a knot. If we're all tied up in traumatic memories stored in these

brain areas we can't relax enough to dive deeper, we can't immerse ourselves more deeply into the core capacity we have to experience just pure awareness and pure bliss, and pure spontaneity and openness. So how do we get to that?

We can do that, they tell us, by generating dis-illusion states, states that take us from complexity to simplicity, from the more complex to simpler states of being. We need states that take us from differentiating between "I'm over here and you're over there" and wake us up to the deeper states, dreamlike states where there's no "you" and "me" and there's no "it" and there's no "I."

It's like this experience I've had several times in my life, of waking up not knowing where I am. That experience comes right out of the deep sleep state, where you have a formless consciousness. We don't know who we are or what we are, we don't know that we are, we're just an awareness, we're just noticing. And we can get into that state. But first we need to dissolve.

In the guided meditation at the beginning of our session today I had everybody dissolve, and then we dissolved the universe into us. The eight stages of death that we went through map the process of dis-illusion of experience that is described for people going through the death process. And we actually go through that same sequence of dissolutions -- or whatever sequence of deconstruction of our differentiated consciousness -- not just in the death process, but also in deep sleep and sexual orgasm. These are all very primal states, they've been around since the beginning of evolution. And that's exactly where we're trying to go: back to our creation, to the source of consciousness. That will not only free us from feeling alienated, from living in a fragmented memory of fear and trauma; it will also allow us to recreate ourselves with a higher awareness. Like the musician who can work with music creatively, we can work with our nervous system creatively to weave together a new song of life, one that's not a frightened

shriek of a cornered animal or a traumatized child, but a triumphant song of an aware being that knows that "okay! finally I've made it, now I'm human, now I'm living in New York City, now I'm studying how to be enlightened ..." What could be better than that?

Remember the eight dissolutions? We went through them, the first four are coarse, and the last four are subtle, manifesting as four lights: the moonlight space, the twilight space, the midnight space and the clear light space. Those are the four last layers of the dis-illusion process, the process of dis-illusion of the mind. And all disillusions are normally accompanied by an experience of bliss. They signal the melting down of the ordinary survival modes of the mind. And what happens if you melt away them all away -- the desire-seeking survival mode, the defensive fear-based survival mode, and even the alienated myopic isolation-based survival mode that "it's me against the universe" -- you have these experiences of the so-called "luminous intuitions."

We don't normally think of death as a blissful experience. We don't normally think of going to sleep as blissful unless we're really tired and we think "oh sleep" and wake up feeling rejuvenated, feeling just like "wow, sleep is wonderful isn't it?" And we may think of sexuality as a blissful experience. In all these states the biochemistry is basically the same. The wheels of the dis-illusion process are greased by some internal reward process, like the secretion of endorphins, oxytocin and other kinds of chemicals, and by certain experiences of dissolving and unity -- and that's how we get the experience of dissolving in bliss.

So, if we actually could pay attention to the four subtle dissolutions one after the other, without fear or alienation, we would be experiencing the four blisses: bliss first, then sublime bliss, then supreme bliss and finally orgasmic or complete bliss. I usually think of them as bliss, more bliss, great bliss, innate bliss;

those are the ones I remember. But I use the more scholarly, precise translations of the terms in my book.

According to the tradition, when you experience bliss you're basically tapping into the internal reward system, you're experiencing your nervous system in its natural, innate capacity to reward you for being alive. That's all, really. So be alive! It's good for you. And remember, your aim here is not just to experience bliss states but to use them to learn and to grow. This is a working vacation, I like to say. You're having a bliss experience and you're also doing some work: you're dismantling your fears and overcoming your traumas -- and that's what creates the luminous intuitions.

In technical terms, if you have the four blisses and if you can join them with the four voids you will have bliss-void experiences. Void here does not refer to some metaphysical thing. The first void is the lack of clinging feelings. We work on letting go of clinging, and we use the first type of bliss; that will be a bliss-void experience. When we do that we experience one of the four luminous intuitions, what I like to call lucid intuition, or luminance intuition. Luminance is often compared to a moonlit sky. But it doesn't really look like a moonlit sky. That's just a symbol, it's just part of a map, a mental signpost to help you recognize what you're looking for. But, as you know, the map is not the territory, like the George Washington bridge does not look like a sign that says "George Washington Bridge." The same is true for our mind. And so the lucid, or luminous intuition doesn't actually look like the moonlit sky. It 's like a cool, clear awareness of life, an awareness of life cooled, no tension or noise. Think of the moon, how beautiful it is and how relaxing it is just to look at it with awareness, it's calming like some kind of beautiful tea.

The second void is the lack of aversions. We work on letting go of self-protective, traumatic patterns with the second kind of bliss, and we get the second bliss-void experience, described as a twilit sky. Aversion is like a grip that we feel in our heart, we feel it gripping us. It is actually a hand from the past, it's like a nightmare, reaching out from the grave, grabbing us, and saying "Look out! something bad is about to happen ..." 'And we have to un-grab. Actually it's all our own mind, it's one part of our mind grabbing another part of our mind. The part that just wants to be happy is getting grabbed by the part that's always looking out for danger, like a sentinel. We have to tell it to calm down, we have to make it clear that "No, I don't need you, I don't need such a sentinel anymore, why don't you re-tool, go back to school and learn to do something more useful, and more positive, so you can get a job doing what you really want to do ..."

The third void is the lack of separation, segmentation. We work on that with the bliss that lets go of the sense of isolation and separateness, like when we feel cut off from everything and everyone else, we don't belong, our survival is threatened. We need to understand that "that fear that is gripping me is produced by another part of my mind, it's my mind that's doing it, it's my mind that is producing this fear of alienation, whatever ..." We're making the world appear scary, to prepare us to fight or fly. We are the ones producing it. And now we can undo it. That's the beautiful optimism of this teaching.

And how do we undo that? The experience is described as a midnight sky, it's the midnight intuition, the immanence intuition. The way to undo it is to find the intuition that knows that I don't need to feel separate, I'm really not separate. Without all these people and all these other things around me I wouldn't be here -- I wouldn't be me. This body wouldn't have ever gotten here. And it certainly

wouldn't stay around. So that's the luminous or lucid intuition of immanence.

Tsong Khapa describes it as the dark night of the soul.

This sequence of intuitions can happen through any dissolution experience. If you're really paying attention it's said that you will notice these transitions from coarser and more differentiated awareness to subtler undifferentiated awareness. Now, don't take this too literally. Just remember that the register of all of this is always going down, down, we're just going from a normal waking state to a light relaxation state, which is like a light sleep state because we can't relax very well. So what's needed then is to go to what Tsong Khapa calls the "deathlike dissolution of extremely great impact." That's the translation. It is a state of consciousness unlike any kind of normal swoon or sleep or anything that you might dream of. This is a state that you could only experience if you were really at death's door. Or if you have this really truly orgasmic connection with life, you really love another human being or something like that. And your nervous system was just dissolved, or dismantled, whatever.

There are certain levels or depths we need to reach before we get to these states. We need to unravel the heart knot to get access to the clear light, we need to get completely absorbed in the extremely subtle drop, of bliss and openness, with our mind, with our energy totally absorbed in bliss and openness, in a flow where there is nothing that's not bliss and openness -- and that's what freedom of mind is.

So, experiencing "Freedom of mind" literally means that your mind is free of anything that's not bliss and openness. To get to that level of immersion and absorption we need some physiological support. And so last week we talked about sexuality. Because in the tradition's view it's either sex or death that can take you there. If you don't want to wait until you're dead, then you need to use

your sexual energy. It doesn't have to be physical sex with another human being. But you need to use your sexual energy. You need to use your natural capacity to feel love, to feel arousal. You need to use that part of your nervous system. And you can do it with your imagination; you know that it's only mental but it doesn't matter, it still works.

The point is that when we get to that experience, we're having an orgasmic release within our meditation, or we're going through this dissolution, letting go of not only our core ordinary sense of our body as being this machine, mechanical Joe, this puppet thing that's going around doing these things, we're also into our mind and suddenly our mind is in this expansive space, and then we're letting go of clinging, we're letting go of fear-based self-gripping self-protectiveness, we're even letting go of our sense of isolation. And so we have these bliss-void experiences of extremely great impact.

If we can recruit the physiological support we need, this biological support that we have internally, we can unstick our mind from the fragments of fear, trauma, and stress. Externally, or somatically, our body is in a deep altered state that supports disarming and dis-illusion. If we have that kind of experience we can finally get to the extremely subtle mind in the subtle drop and become fully absorbed in it. Then we experience what's called the "ultimate metaphoric clear light."

There are many kinds of "clear light." Before I define for you what the "ultimate metaphoric clear light" is as opposed to any other clear light, I want to read to you what Tsong Khapa says about the disillusion process that leads to that clear light. I'm reading from page 487:



"In general, in the first three voids by just the proportion of how great is the momentum of termination of wind energies, just so dense and long are the clarity and non-conceptuality of the clear light."

"Wind energy" is Tsong Khapa's way of calling neural energy, the subtle energy in our nervous system, the energy that shows up on an EEG. That energy acts like a wind, pushing our mind around. But, apparently, when we get to the state of extremely deep absorption the wind quiets down, and all becomes more still, focused. And, in fact, if you look at the EEG of meditators in these altered states, it shows a special coherence. Meditators can activate these subtle neural states, for example the delta waves, which are low-frequency waves associated with deep sleep-- but the meditators remain alert.

Reading on:

"Especially in the occasion of immanence unconsciousness, by just how great the proportion is the momentum of the loss of consciousness, just so much is the elimination of the mind's ability to distract itself to other objects and the development of immersion into clear light itself."

This means that how still our mind gets determines how intense and long are the clarity and non-conceptuality of the clear light we experience. In other words, the calmer our nervous system, the more physically disarmed and still, the more profound the clarity and non-conceptuality, the non-fabricated nature, authentic, raw experience of the nature of the clear light. At the point of most stillness of mind, most clarity and non-conceptuality is the last luminous intuition.

Tsong Khapa says that especially in the case of immanence, when we're in the midnight state and unconsciousness sets in, the momentum of the loss of consciousness determines the level of the mind immersion into the clear light self. Essentially what he's saying is that the darker the night, the clearer the dawn, which means that the more we can lose our attachment to our ordinary self without reservation, without hesitation, and fearlessly melt into that loss of the familiar sense of vigilance, monitoring or differentiation, the more fully we can melt into that space, the clearer the clear light and the clarity that will come on the other side of it. We feel we're going to be annihilated, but we're not. We're just going through a transition, and, like going through a tunnel, on the other side is this special light, this luminous, amazing clear light.

Now, if you think that that's cool, just listen to this, this is amazing. At the time that the clear light arises, except for remembering the view of emptiness and focusing one-pointedly on the nature of reality, you must concentrate consciousness fully, completely, unmoved by wind energies, without any thinking about other objects.

The exception here is what I find the most fascinating. We tend to think of these meditations, these deep states of formlessness and non-conceptuality as freedom, almost like a total escape, like the isolation tanks of the 1960s and 1970s, or in outer space or something, where you're just floating off. But here this is not the case at all. Tsong Khapa is saying that when we get there it's still work to do, it's still a workspace!...

So you are in this clear light but you're not enlightened yet, not fully enlightened. You just have gotten to some place that is really beneficial for working. What you have to do there is remember to examine the mind in that extremely dissolved state. Notice what that is like -- and remember also, without

attachment. Do not attach to any sense that your mind might offer, for example, that the mind is separate from something else, or that there's something to fear or something to hold onto in there. You have to keep a view of openness, of voidness, to make sure that when you get to the clear light, you're dissolving even the very subtlest attachment, and the tiniest sense of separateness, or fear, or isolation -- and that's when you get to the Freedom of Mind.

There are many levels of clear light. In a general sense, "clear light" is this natural thing that is within us all. There is a mother clear light, which is a natural thing that we all experience because it's what we're made of, what our consciousness is made of. Then there's the child clear light, which is the clear light that we experience because we try to get back to the mother, to reunite with the mother.

So we're trying to have this meditative experience, and we want to experience what's it like to be pure awareness, clear, unfettered, free ... And it's not so easy to get there. They say that the best way for the mind to get there is to use metaphor: you make a mental image, a map, or a sign of what you think it might look like, and take it with you. Then when you get there and have this immersive experience, check your map and see if you seem to be in the mirror of the map, if you seem to be in the right place. And if you seem to be in the right space, that's great. You can correct the map too. You can correct it as you go -- "No, it wasn't like that here but there, actually it was like this here ... This is clearly where I was trying to get to but it's not like that, it's like this ..."

So, using your conceptual mind, you're checking how free and clear you're actually getting, until, eventually, you don't need the map anymore. You can let it go and you can immerse yourself completely, because you know you're in the

right place. Like using a ladder, when you get to the place you can throw the ladder out, because you're there, you've arrived.

What is an "ultimate metaphoric clear light?" To begin with, a "metaphoric clear light" that is not "ultimate" would be supposing only some of your mind was absorbed in the extremely subtle bliss chemistry. Even if you had this dis-illusion and you saw an image that corresponded to your own image of clear light, it's not ultimate because only part of your mind was absorbed; and it's going to be deeper if you absorb all your energy and mind into that chemistry. The deeper you go, the more you absorb your mind and energy into the experience, the more fully absorbed you become in the experience, the closer you get to the "ultimate metaphoric clear light." When your mind is totally absorbed in the experience you're as close as you can get with a symbol -- that's what ultimate metaphoric clear light means.

So now you are as close as you can get using a symbol. To go beyond that you have to learn how to get rid of the symbol, which actually doesn't happen right away, but only happens slowly. Isn't this fascinating? That's a very interesting map of what happens.

Tsong Khapa talks about how important it is to have these non-conceptual states. These lucid intuitions are important because of their non-conceptuality and non-elaboration, no fabrications, no artificial structures, no mental garbage -- what Lama Yeshe calls "dualistic garbage." You're going to have to think when you get there. He doesn't mean it's non-conceptual in the sense that there's no conceptual activity, and he doesn't mean it's not elaborated in the sense that there's no logical sequence of assessment: Am I here ... Is this it ... Am I right ... Is it wrong? What he means is that the thinking, the conceptual activity is not coming from any reactivity, because you're free from reactive conceptuality that is based on non-

bliss, or fear, shame, trauma, hurt, anger and so on, that is any memory of the world that distorts the world by being reactive or stressed out. It's free of all that. As I said before, "Freedom of Mind" is a freedom of any mind, any thought that is not blissful and not open. And in that blissful open mind apparently we can think. It's not open because it's not afraid, it's not ashamed.

One question is, is "openness" another way of saying freedom of content, rather than an absence, or a kind of negative content? There's a subtle distinction going back to the philosophy of emptiness. It can be empty of many things. However, it's not empty in the sense that most of us humans think of empty -- as nothing. When we say something's empty we think "oh well, there's nothing there, so what?" That's because we're not interested in space. But if instead of emptiness you say openness, as I like to, that's a different take.

We could try to refine that, and it's important to try to understand these things because to have an accurate map you have to have a very precise way of using your verbal signs, or your painting skills. Your words can paint these signs; and if your words are not clear, the signs won't be. That's why the tradition says that it's best if you have a clear conceptual understanding before you go into the practice. If you don't understand what emptiness is, what freedom of mind is, you're going to get lost. You will likely have a really wonderful experience, and you're going to think. "Now I'm enlightened!" And then you're going to come back and be, well, ... not so enlightened. If you really want to be enlightened you have to actually know which of the many kinds of pseudo-enlightenments, or ersatz enlightenment states, enlightenment look-alike states you should not buy into, and wait for the real thing.

Of course, there's still content. It's just not in the forms that we normally see. The forms that we normally see, the forms that normally govern our generation of content are the forms of stress and fear and survival. That's the reactive or afflictive mind, to put it in Buddhist terms. The afflictive mind is the mind that's living in confusion and poisoned by stress emotions. When we think that way, with negative anticipation -- what those in the Recovery Movement call "that stinkin' thinkin'" - we're confusing ourselves, we're stuck in that confusion. "Freedom of Mind" is free from that. That mind is much better able to think many things, and in a way it can be the ultimate liberation of creativity, the ultimate liberation of intellectual prowess and triumph. That's what Yamantaka represents. That's the teaching that we just had over the weekend with Gelek Rimpopche. Yamantaka represents the ultimate liberation of the intellect, getting over the ego in the self-protective sense. This experience very far out.

We could talk about all kinds of other things about the Tibetan tradition, but I want to talk now about western psychology. I find it very interesting how these old things from Buddhism and other Eastern traditions overlap with modern Western psychology. And I looked for, I struggled to find connections between some of my favorite psychological thinkers and Eastern traditions. I wanted to find something that might resonate with all this exotic thinking, because I like it to make it less exotic, more accessible. The way it's described by them sounds extremely exotic, too exotic, too far out, it makes us feel like who is ever going to realize that? Well, we are acquiring many tools to do just that.

If you remember last week I told you about the keys to unlocking the freedom of mind, two internal keys and two external keys. So are adding these to our toolset of meditative skills. So far our meditation toolset includes visualization; the inner fire breathing; right learning; how to breathe in a disarming and inspiring

way, like kundalini energy; diamond recitation, which is learning how to honor and observe the sounds of our breath as the primal voice of enlightenment within our own minds, a sort of primal meditation on breath. At this point it may sound really weird, too fancy, too complicated a meditation system to find breath awareness. But it is really not so complicated. And it is fascinating.

Going back to our toolbox. We have these more unique and distinctive yoga practices, the four keys, two inner and two outer keys. The inner keys are the "kiss connection" or learning how to bring together the higher and lower energies and integrate them, at the heart, typically in this tradition; and the "compression" or learning how to compress inside. This is a kind of weird organic thing, I don't know what this means, I think it has something to do with the diving reflex. Anyway, learning how to willfully constrict the heart and breathing in a way to kind of still it, it's probably consciously exercising what some people call the heart rate. This has to do with vagal tone. Remember, we have a natural capacity to play dead, and that capacity is in our vagal nervous system. That is the capacity that allows us to swoon or faint.

Actually, one way that I like to think of the first of the three luminous intuitions, the one about desires, letting go of them is learning to integrate the energy of the smart vagal nerve in the parasympathetic system, which feeds the social attachment energy. The idea is to calm it down, relax and let go, calm it down and out of clinging mode.

Then, the second luminous intuition is about learning to integrate the sympathetic nervous system with awareness that will bring calm our aversions. Third, the immanence intuition I think has to do with the old vagal nervous system, the play-dead nervous system, what Stephen Porges calls the "fearless

immobilization state" of our nervous system. It's finding how you can be still, how you bring yourself to stillness. As T. S. Elliot said it,

"I said to my soul be still and let the dark come upon you.  
Which will be the darkness of God."

That's what you're doing in the compression practice, you're telling your soul to be still, you're saying, "dear heart be still, dear heart be calm."

These two inner practices combine with the two outer practices of visualization. Here you are either visualizing a loving embrace with a partner, or you are actually with a partner you are close to physically that you can share this development process with and use that love energy.

I think about Kohut and Lacan as the inner guys, the western equivalent to the inner keys. Kohut talks about narcissism. He thinks narcissism has gotten a bad reputation, he thinks narcissism is not all bad. It's okay to love yourself as long as that self-love doesn't cut you off from other people, and instead it embraces others, all others equally. In his view, self-love and love of another are naturally related, they are the same energy. He says if your narcissism is handled well by your parents it turns into what he calls "cosmic narcissism," which means deeply connected, by love -- and it turns into a healthy ability to love.

So, in his view, if you love a number of people, if your love has gone from just being attached to your parents, your partner, your children, and your grandchildren to the whole community, the whole planet of people, you develop this love for all living beings as yourself, that's part of natural evolution for Kohut, that's his cosmic narcissism. I like that. And I think that it relates to what Buddhism calls the "self of selflessness." The truth of the freedom of mind, or the mind



objective, is that you have the basis to have a self of selflessness, to have a mind, a mind you can think with, you can experience, you can create, you can express, you can enjoy, but you're not separated from anybody else -- a mind that's like an ecstatic mind.

Another way to think about this is in terms of Jacques Lacan's notion that the mind has different layers. He takes Freud's ego, superego, and id, and he turns them into the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. For Lacan our unconsciousness is created by our reification of language. This is a very Buddhist idea. In fact, in Buddhism there is a tripartite system that's very resonant with this. Nagarjuna says it in his tantric teachings. Reality has three different layers: "constructed reality," which we can't see in relationships between things because we're perceiving them in the form of symbols that make them seem more different than they really are; "relative reality" where we start to see the causal interconnections of the way things actually work together; and "perfect reality" when you immerse yourself in relative reality and you become totally free from symbols and concepts. Then you see reality as it really is -- perfect.

The reason why I mention that is because Nagarjuna makes the connection between these three different levels of existence and the three luminous intuitions. The symbolic mind is like the constructed mind, with a constructed reality, and it is correlated with the luminous intuition, the intuition that's desire-oriented, attachment-oriented -- you want something from somebody. The relative reality is correlated with the radiance intuition, which is aggression-oriented, aversion oriented. And perfect reality, correlated with the intuition of immanence, in which we're sort of moving through and away from our isolation or our sense of separateness.

I know it's not that relevant here, I'm just trying to give you a feeling for the fact that we have western maps, these modern western maps of the mind, they have some sense of the depth of what's going on under the surface. And there are ways in which they may resonate with some of these insights.

And I'll just touch on two other Western psychologists with connections to Eastern traditions, I mentioned Jung last week. And I'll read some Jung this time, he's lots of fun. So, let's talk now about the two outer keys, and in particular one of them, where you're using your imagination to envision yourself as your own self with a partner, joining masculine and feminine in this way. Jung very much believed in the power of imagery. He believed in archetypal imagery, and he believed in the importance of recreating ourselves, in joining the masculine-feminine parts of ourselves into a higher integrated soul, or ego -- or psyche, I guess he would call it. Jung also was very interested in alchemy, the western esoteric practice that historically is probably related in many ways to the Indian esoteric practices of which Buddhism is an example of.

When I was a boy I used to run to my father's library while he was at the hospital. My father was a shrink. And I would pilfer books that were interesting. Jung was a favorite, especially one of his books on psychotherapy, "The Psychology of Transference," which is actually a compilation of essays. It's a wonderful book, I highly recommend it. In it there is a very interesting, fascinating study of an alchemy text from fifteenth century England called the "Rosarium Philosophorum" which means the "Rosary of Philosophers." It's really far out. It revolves around an imagery of deep transformation through the sexual union of opposites. It describes the soul going through seven stages: naked truth, immersion, conjunction, death, ascent, purification and return. Jung says -- and I read from page 492 of my book:

"Our pictures of the conjunction (sexual union) are to be understood in this sense: union on the biological level is a symbol of the union of opposites at its highest. This proves that the union of opposites in ... alchemy is just as real as coitus in the common acceptance of the word, so that the work becomes an analogy of the natural (sublimation) process by means of which instinctive energy is transformed, at least in part, into symbolical activity. The creation of such analogies frees instinct and the biological sphere as a whole from the pressure of unconscious contents."

And, after laying out the model of the mind as a mercurial fountain, with three pipes as symbols of how the sublimation of desire dissolves and unifies opposites -- male and female, right and left, sun and moon -- he introduces the king and queen linked in desire, leading Jung to comment:

"Meditation and speculation about the mystery of the conjunctio were inevitable, and this would certainly not leave the erotic fantasy untouched, if only because the pictures spring from the corresponding unconscious contents -- half spiritual, half sexual -- and are also intended to remind us of the twilight zone, for only from undistinguishable night can the light be born."

Anyway, the reason why I find this *Rosarium Philosophorum* so interesting is because it describes the soul's journey -- from death it gradually is conjoined with its partner, and as it gets conjoined with its partner it dissolves, it dies and it is reborn, reborn in an androgynous form. The descriptions are beautiful. And in my

view if you take the first three of the seven stages of the soul -- naked truth, immersion and conjunction -- you could describe them as the three luminances of the dissolution meditation. Death is the fourth, which is parallel to the clear light of death. And the last three are in the reverse direction: ascent, purification and return. Jung is clearly talking about this journey into the depths of the mind, a journey of dissolution and re-creation, and about how it relates to the transformation of sexual energy, the purification of sexual energy. And he even has a map, of what's called the "mercurial fountain" which has three pipes, which are like the three channels in the Eastern map. He describes how water flowing from the mercurial fountain melts the soul, and a dove descends upon it with some kind of blessing, of grace, something like that.

For me it's very interesting to find so much resonance between these very esoteric Eastern practices and western thinking about journeying into altered states of consciousness. Jung did some very interesting work on this. He tried to use these technologies in his work with people in psychotherapy and healing.

We're almost out of time. The fourth and last western name I want to bring up is Reich, Wilhelm Reich. He's like the father of sexual therapy. He talked about sexual energy as orgone. He was a little wacky, but he said many interesting things. For example, when we run on fear and stress reactivity, the body gets "armored." And "body armor" is character armor. This is now coming to fruit, in terms of our current understanding of embodied cognition and how trauma gets stored in physical postures, producing a sense of un-safety in your body. This might be the western version of the East's knotting of the channels, and what Reich calls "character armor" that forms in the body.

Chapter Eleven:Body, Speech, Mind, & Reality: The Odyssey of the Great Perfection

We're making headway. We're past a threshold now and we're finally ready to talk about The Great Seal. We have the foundation, or the perch, as it were, to move on to that. How are we using the word "seal" in this class? We're following the tradition, and one way to put it in context is to say that there are the three types of seals. There's the virtual seal, which is a fantasy, like when we use a virtual partner as our soulmate. We've talked about this already, as one of the two external keys. Then there's the actual seal, like for example a real person, a real soulmate, a person who evolves with you. And that's the second external key. Here "seal" means the coming together, of the male and female energies, or of the subject and object. In the iconography of the tantras it's the subjective awareness and the bliss energy. Remember the bliss energy? Remember we went through a lot of trouble of diving into our nervous system to find bliss energy? And we found it. So now, what are we going to do with it? That's our subjectivity, that's the place to sit on, our ideal base when we are ready to realize the nature of reality. And the nature of reality is emptiness, or openness. So we open to the total interconnection, the interconnection of all things, because all things exist through interconnection. Iconographically that's usually described, identified, as the union of subject and object.

The vajra itself is also a representation of union, the union of wisdom and method. The method is the subject, the male energy of blissful enthusiasm; and the wisdom is the object, the female energy, the feminine perspective, which is clarity, openness and translucency, transparency. When they come together in our mind, we are on the quickest track to be freed from our delusions. And so that

seal, the male and female, in the Tantra, is the union archetype, the meeting of anima and animus. The male and female come together, symbolizing the sexual energy, the energy of connection of life, the energy that life uses to connect and increase itself. That energy is being used, sublimated, directed toward the liberation of the subject, a liberation from living on the defensive. This union of male and female energies is a union with love, a love that is the strongest power for us to grow and evolve as living beings in a healthy way, as social animals, as cultural animals. In that sense love is sacred. It brings out the positive power in us. It's a seal and it opens us to reality, so we can get outside of ourselves.

The third seal is the one we're embarking on now-- and that is the Great Seal, Mahamudra. Mudra refers to a hand gesture, and to body language, in a sense. And it's a body permeated by mind, sealed with mind. Reading the body is important because it helps you understand the mind. And Mahamudra, the Great Mudra, or the Great Seal, is the communion with all life. It's beyond anything we normally think of as union, beyond anything that can be explained. For a better translation I like Kohut's notion of "cosmic narcissism." You might think of it also as cosmic love. Or if you want to be Christian you might say Agape, divine love. Or, as Dante says at the end of his Divine Comedy, it's "the love that moves the sun and the other stars." Cosmic narcissism is this cosmic force that holds us all together. And Mahamudra teaches us to use this little body and this little mind of ours as a way to our full connectedness, our universal connectedness, to experience all -- all other living beings, all nature, all the universe, the cosmos -- as our partner, our soulmate. There is union, union in the emptiness of all things. With Mahamudra practice we understand how everything is the same in that it's empty, empty of any intrinsic existence, empty of anything that is not connected to something else. And by cultivating a blissful relationship with the emptiness of

all things we can unite with all in a positive way, we can have that ecstatic communion with everything.

This is just one way of talking about this way of being, the mystic way of being. It's the same in other cultures -- like Saint Teresa of Avila or St. John in Christianity, and others in the Indian and Sufi traditions -- they all seem to have their own handful of people, wild and wooly, or not wild but refined, writers of beautiful stuff, like Rumi, the Sufi mystic and poet.

I'd like to open our talk about Mahamudra with Tsong Khapa, who is always so far out. Tsong Khapa is very technical, and so he defines Mahamudra in a very technical, precise way. And so in the Tantras, you spend a lot of time going through all these different stages, and then you get up to the Perfection Stage and you go. You go first to the three purification stages, freedom of body, speech and mind. Once you go through that gateway you have access to the innate bliss -- and that's the best engine to get out of your self in a good way. The rest of the Perfection Stage, the two stages for the two realities, is designed to very specifically harness that bliss and use it for union, for an integration of two parts, of body and mind, or of two opposites. What are these two parts?

One is experienced when we come out of that bliss, and we have the most genuine experience of what's called the "Virtual Body." The Virtual Body gives a sense that "I don't really need a body, but I seem to be embodied..." The Virtual Body gives a sense that "My real body is not the physical body that I thought it was, but rather it is the experience of the unbounded joy or bliss of this moment, or this life, of what's in my mind." Tapping into the unbounded joy and then taking that as a body, that's the Virtual Body. Anyway, that's the technical side; we'll come back to this so that it becomes a little more obvious, and familiar.

If the Virtual Body is our body, what's our mind? The mind in this case is the "Clear Light," or "the extremely subtle mind of clear light" or "the clear light of death" or "the clear light of bliss" -- as some people have called it. This "Clear Light" is the natural translucency of a mind that is free from any disruption or limitation; it's the natural brilliance of our mind. We'll also talk more about this later.

If you remember, when we talked about the mind training practice, in the second year of this program, we talked about the enlightened altruist who has a new body and a new mind. In the sutra way, the new body/mind grows out of our ordinary enlightened self-interest in being a kinder and more positive person. Eventually, if we keep practicing that and we identify with the results of our practice, we become a bodhisattva, a different kind of being, one that's fundamentally altruistic, fundamentally aware of how important our connections to all life are. The two elements that make a Bodhisattva are the Truth Body, which is the embodiment of the realization that radical openness is the best part, the most useful, the most essential part of my mind; and the Form Body, which is the embodiment of the realization that compassion is the most useful part of my emotional and physical responses. Then, as you continue your practice, and you refine those two bodies, and you integrate them, that's what makes a Buddha.

In the Tantras the terminology is a bit different than in the sutras. The "Form Body," the form in which compassion manifests itself, in this Tantric context is called "the Virtual Body." It's essentially the same idea, except that the biochemical experience is different. This Virtual Body is made of primordial compassion, a primordial energy which is more primitive, more passionate, more like passionate love, the love loaded with impulse -- not compassion like the mother caring for a child, or when the lover totally and selflessly reveres and



embraces the wellbeing of another. It's about giving yourself totally to another. That passionate love energy is the "Virtual Body". That becomes, for example, the Form Body of the Tantric Buddha Vajradhara, the Primordial Buddha. And that's what I translate as the Master Altruist or Heroic Altruist.

The "Truth Body" corresponds to "Clear Light" in Tantra, where it refers to a specific understanding of the different layers of consciousness, the way they're embedded in the nervous system, and how they can produce different altered states phenomena. This is about using the whole range of capacities of your nervous system and going for the most open experience of the most primary layer of your nervous system, maybe at the most open that a human mind and body can possibly be. That kind of openness, as we have seen before, can be experienced during very primal states, like orgasm, or near-death, or deep sleep. When Tsong Khapa talks about the communion in the practice of the Great Seal, he talks about bringing together the Truth Body and the Clear Light, and then sealing them together. And that is the fifth Perfection Stage.

That's my short preamble into Tsong Khapa. It may not be necessary but I hope it's helpful. It's from his Brilliant Illumination of the Lamp of the Five Stages (the five substages of the Perfection Stage), which Bob Thurman recently translated. Bob worked on it for about 30 years. And the Dalai Lama kept on saying to him, "Not yet, don't publish it yet, it's too secret, it's too powerful." Finally he published it last year. It came out right before my book -- fortunately for me, because then I could use some of his material and quote it.

I'll read to you this beautiful passage from Tsong Khapa's Brilliant Illumination of the Lamp of the Five Stages; then we will take it from there. I'm reading from page 504 of "Sustainable Happiness."

"Art" is the magic (virtual) body which is the purity of the superficial reality, and "wisdom" is stated to be the ultimate reality, it being the clear light intuition that is of one taste with that (reality).

So here Tsong Khapa connects the mind and body to the ordinary Buddhist Mahayana teaching of the two realities. The mind is always equated to ultimate reality; and the body is always equated with relative reality -- what many call "conventional reality." And the union of wisdom and art is one of the definitions of vajra. A vajra represents an indivisibility of something. In this context it is often translated as "diamond" because it's something that is as hard as a diamond, it's very hard to split. When wisdom and method are hard to split apart, it becomes a Tantric, or Vajra, method. So, Tsong Khapa is saying that the art is the Virtual Body, and the wisdom is the Clear Light. That's how the two go together.

Reading on from page 504:

"Uniting together" is uniting (them) indivisibly in actuality....Having made them one in the form of the great seal deity body, in the center of that vessel and essence you should meditate the form of the communion master altruist.

Uniting is communing, or sealing, becoming one, or however you want to call this permanent union. This is a very interesting instruction. It tells you something about the way in which this elaborate imagery practice is used as a crucible in which to do the practice. And that's actually very common. We talked about this in the context of breath meditation. And the meditation on emptiness is very

common to the Mahayana. In fact it's the essence of the Mahayana tradition. And it's the essence of the Zen tradition.

What Tsong Khapa is saying is that the Virtual Body and the Clear Light together, in the form of the great seal deity body, is a blissful mental image of yourself as the ideal -- Kalachakra or Vishvamata, for example -- in a palace, with a partner, ready to transform the world. You get this kind of insane altruistic futuristic vision of yourself, "I can do it .... I'm doing it ... we're doing it ... we're done, we finished it! The world is finished now, it's perfect. We've reached utopia." Imagine yourself at that moment ... that's the vision, and that's the practice.

And then, at the heart of the body, the physical form of having that visionary experience is sealed with the radical openness that doesn't identify with anything, any of it. There are no more hang-ups of any sort, static or solid -- now there's just riding, like a wave, letting go and enjoying the vision.

In a way, you can think of it as the Buddhist Nirvana. If you look at Buddhism from the standpoint of the truth of suffering, which is at the very start of Buddhism, the first Noble Truth, you have what most people think of as Buddhism. But if you take Buddhism from the standpoint of its goal, Nirvana, the third Noble Truth -- which is what Tantra does -- life is groovy and we should all be blissed out and enjoying ourselves in that groovy bliss, and suffering is not an illusion but it's like an illusion. So, what happened to distance, the distance from the start to the goal?

Let's take an ordinary experience. My sister calls me on the i-phone, on facetime --and there she is! We can see each other, we can talk to each other. So, what is the distance between us now? Is distance real? Does she really live somewhere else if all I have to do is push a button and she's right there? Do you see what I'm saying? So, if suffering were like distance, in that sense, with that

quality, it means that with the right technology it could be gone, most of it anyway, we could make it disappear, just like that. Then it wouldn't be such a big deal. You might suffer a bit. Like, it might be that I want to hug my sister, so I might actually have to get in a car and drive to where she lives. Or I could give her a virtual hug, on facetime, or skype. Anyway, you get my message, right? Things are just not what they seem at first. And we don't really need the vision. We don't need to have a futuristic vision or goal or concept or image of Nirvana. We're actually already in Nirvana, so we just need to stop the nonsense and be in it.

So that's the great seal deity body. At the same time we have this beautiful vision together with radical transcendent openness which lets go of it all and sees through it all. It's all very light and transparent and translucent. And that is the vessel and the essence in which you should meditate. You should meditate on the form of that communion, which is the Master Altruist. In other words, we should meditate that we're divine beings, in this beautiful mandala palace, and so on. But the actual communion Master Altruist, the actual deity or being is the realization, the mind that in the moment is realizing this blissful illumination and at the same time it is enjoying its embodiment. It's physical, but not in any specific form.

So, for Tsong Khapa meditating on emptiness with bliss is the essence of this practice. And to do that we set up this very complex vision, in a way, to put ourselves in the right mode. It's like bringing the mandala with us, bringing the monastery with us. It's like a portable monastery. We bring the vision into our mind, and with the right map and context we practice. And we're in the right place, we're already seated in the right place in the right way and it all lines up,

just have the realization. But what we're actually doing is meditating, meditating on emptiness. That's really what we're doing.

OK. So, I'll read Tsong Khapa's explanation once more, to see how you hear it this time.

"Art" is the magic (virtual) body which is the purity of the superficial reality,...

The superficial reality is pure, it doesn't have stuff in it, it doesn't have afflictions.

... and "wisdom" is stated to be the ultimate reality, it being the clear light intuition that is of one taste with that (reality).

There is this part of our mind that really sees how totally interconnected and awesome we are, and we give ourselves to that.

"Uniting together" is uniting (them) indivisibly in actuality.

Having made them one in the form of the great seal deity body, in the center of that vessel and essence you should meditate the form of the communion master altruist.

That's the practice of the Great Seal. And so he has set up the sequencing of the Great Perfection Stage after we get to the "Freedom of Mind." Once we go through that gateway, where we've tapped into our bliss in an unlimited way, we

can start to use it, to harness it to remold, to "rewire our nervous system for happiness" as Rick Hanson would say.

And so we have moved from the Ordinary Perfection Stage to the Great Perfection Stage. That is further out than any of us have ever dreamed of going, right? But there it is. We were first in the ordinary and now we're doing the extraordinary, we have entered into the extraordinary Perfection Stage, the Great Perfection Stage of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra, the culmination of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra meditation. And that is also called the Mahamudra, the Great Seal.

So, as we saw earlier, there are five stages in the perfection stage. Mahamudra is kind of shorthand for the whole path, the gradual path of realizing wisdom. But that is not the precise technical meaning. You're not really practicing the Mahamudra, you're only practicing a relative, a conventional level of Mahamudra until you've gotten to this point. I think that since we're trying to understand the staging system and the way in which our minds and bodies progress through the different stages according to this tradition, best is to not be fuzzy but to be very precise. And that's Tsong Khapa's essence. His method is analysis, one step at a time, each one leading to the next one. In that sense Mahamudra is the last of the five stages of the Perfection Stage. But, in a way you could say that all five stages of the perfection stage is Mahamudra, as that refers to the goal, and in tantra you're starting at the goal. But technically that is not Mahamudra.

So, this Nalanda program has a four-year curriculum. The first year is the Theravada practice -- mindfulness, Noble Truths, calming. The second year is Mahayana, wisdom and compassion practice, the Sutric Nagarjuna. The third year is the Creation Stage. And the fourth year is essentially the Perfection Stage. Theoretically we covered the ordinary Perfection Stage last semester. And now

we're covering it in more detail. I teach Mahamudra as the last topic in the teaching of the gradual path, which is the usual way of the Gelugpa tradition. The last topic I want to touch on is, how do you meditate on emptiness in the context of the Perfection Stage of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra? That is, how do you meditate on emptiness at the most advanced level, the level of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra Perfection Stage?

There's a Sutric Nagarjuna and a Tantric Nagarjuna. *The Lamp of the Five Stages*, the book I mentioned earlier on the Perfection Stage that Bob Thurman translated, is attributed to Nagarjuna, the same name that we find first in the Mahayana. So he was around for 500 years -- more than Yoda!... whatever that means. Anyway, according to the texts, the ordinary Nagarjuna made a statement about how the Buddha taught different teachings, tuning in to his audience. It goes something like this:

So Buddha taught his disciples  
 The doctrines they could forbear.  
 To some he taught doctrines  
 To turn away from sin.  
 To some, doctrines to acquire virtue.  
 To others, doctrines based on non-duality  
 (that is the duality of Samsara and Nirvana).  
 To some he taught what is profound and frightening to the fearful --  
 Having an essence of emptiness and compassion --  
 The means of achieving unsurpassed enlightenment.

So, as Buddha says, you should strive not just to eliminate vice, or just accomplish virtue, you should achieve Nirvana. And then, to some he taught to reach Nirvana here and develop compassion.

That's the Mahayana, which he described as the profound awe-inspiring practice of enlightenment, whose essence, or nature, is emptiness, the emptiness that is the womb of compassion. You can see how there are good reasons why many people think that from the beginning the ordinary Mahayana included tantric teachings, implicitly, in there. And there are reasons why the two Nagarjunas are woven together. Whether there was one or there were two Nagarjunas hardly matters, especially since they're both selfless.

I am going to try to talk more specifically about the relation between the Mahayana system and the Vajrayana system, the Unexcelled Yoga Tantra system. But first I want to lay out the stages, the five substages in the Perfection Stage. First we go through the "Freedom of the Body." At that point we become free of our ordinary body image. We can envision ourselves as having a mental body, a much better body. We've made a better body for ourselves. Then, coming out of that we get "Freedom of Speech," where we free ourselves from neurotic negative thinking and energy. Then we get "Freedom of Mind," we free ourselves from non-blissful moods and mind states. And then, coming out of the Freedom of Mind we realize the "Metaphoric Clear Light." We still only have a mental conception of emptiness, but the mental conception is accurate enough and it has experienced bliss, enough bliss to get us free from negativity. We're convinced now, we actually believe that the nature of life is not suffering. The nature of life really is Nirvana.

Out of that we develop the next stage. Then, the moment you come out of the "Ultimate Metaphoric Clear Light," the moment you come out of the last



experience of Clear Light, the last fetter on your heart, the last limit to bliss is melted away, and you arise, you come out of it, you reboot, in the form of the impure Virtual Body. At that point you actually start to work, to have what's called a Virtual Body.

What is a Virtual Body? Tsong Khapa says that at that point your Virtual Body looks like your old meditative deity body, but it doesn't feel that way. It feels totally different because now it's inspired by genuine orgasmic bliss energy. And that orgasmic bliss energy is connected to the mental image. When the mental image returns, my new self-image returns: "Now I'm actually really happy about it, I'm actually a new person who's really happy..." It feels like a boundless experience of joy and chemical inspiration. But it's still impure. There are some obstructions left, some dirt and grime and dust that have to be polished away, some affliction that has to be purged. There's still a little bit of confusion.

What follows is that, over time, we take that impure Virtual Body and we immerse it, we dissolve it, we die again, and again ... And when we die, we have a clearer Clear Light because when we enter the Clear Light in a deity body, and we're not afraid. When we enter death in a deity body that is a body of joy, it's great! It's the little death, *la petite morte*. It's an orgasmic experience. We're coming home. Now we can see the Clear Light more clearly, because our bodies are less resistant to letting go and more open to experiencing oneness with bliss -- or Nirvana, or whatever you want to call it. Eventually, by immersing ourselves time and again and often enough in it, we experience what's called the actual Clear Light, and we reach what's called the "Clear Light Stage," sometimes called the Manifest Enlightenment Stage or the Illumination Stage. The stage in which we emerge is the last stage, where we emerge from the Ultimate Metaphoric Clear Light in the Virtual Body that has actual bliss motivating you. It's riding

actual bliss, it's made of actual bliss. It's sometimes called the Virtual Body Stage, or the Self-Consecration Stage. At that point we take the mind of realizing emptiness, this mind of Clear Light, and we put it together with an embodiment of joy, the joy of the release from our tensions and our stresses and our entrapments in Samsara -- and it is that embodiment of pure joy that now we call "me": "This is me, I am this pure blissful being of joy and clarity. It's me!" That's the "self-consecration". That's when we really seal our new identity: We've become the heroic being.

Then we melt that down by immersing in the Clear Light that we actually experience, the actual Clear Light that is without a concept, totally, intuitively, directly. We just experience it, without any mental map or anything -- that's when we have reached the Pure Enlightenment Stage.

And then we have the two elements. When we come out of that particular Clear Light experience we arise in the form of a pure Virtual Body. There are very few constraints left, there's very little taste of stress, energy, mood and chemistry left. So it's pure. We are at the last stage of the work, what's called the "learner's integration" or the "learner's communion." That is where we're learning how to put mind and body together in this new reality, where we're really made of pure joy and our minds are total clarity, totally transparent. That's very, totally far out...

Each of these levels of practice require that we get permission to do it. We go through certain initiations that give us a little hint of what it's like, a little preview of coming attractions if you will. This is no experience anyone could possibly describe to you. All that can be said is that when your mind becomes clear light and your body becomes pure joy, and you put them together, that's your master altruist. That will be the form in which you achieve Buddhahood, perfect integration, great communion with all life.

Now I'm going to try to take a step back and look at this in more impressionistic terms, more narrative terms. Think about the Odyssey. Gelek Rimpoche used the word "odyssey" to describe the gradual path that we've been on for the past 3+ years together, I think influenced by Alan Ginsberg and other poets. Gelek Rimpoche called the gradual path an odyssey to freedom. "Odyssey" is a very good word to describe the journey of the Perfection Stage because the essence of the Perfection Stage is that you're going outside the familiar; you're leaving home and you're going as far away, as far as consciousness could possibly go. That's why I like the movie "2001 Space Odyssey" as a metaphor for our journey, because we're really going far, far away from our normal experience of being embodied and struggling, like Hamlet says, " ... crawling around between Earth and Heaven." That's the normal tolerable experience of life that we have when we're all bound up in stress and trauma, just trying to survive. But in this practice we go away from that, as far away as possible. And we experience this amazing journey, like Ulysses' journey, going all the way to North Africa and so on, and then finally coming back home, to Ithaca, transformed.

So here's our journey: we go as far from ordinary experience as we can to have this extraordinary experience of bliss and openness and freedom. Then we have to come back because this isn't just about escape. It's about finding a better way to connect, about finding an ultimate solution for everyone in life, for all beings on this planet. So there's that way back, you come back a heroic being. If you remember, when Ulysses came back to Ithaca, he was a very different person. In fact he was disguised, no one recognized him. And he had the power at that point, the power and the confidence to totally transform all of the worldly struggles and afflictions of life. And he reunited with his beloved. Sounds like a good story, right? That's the idea.

The traditional way of thinking about this is, you have the setup of the ordinary Perfection Stage where you have the three freedoms, right? We're gradually purging our mind stream of conditioned perceptions -- perceptions based on feeling alienated and fearful, full of conditioned concepts and conditioned moods, conditioned by negativity, fearing the worst and thinking the worst. And that's the love of compulsive life, right? So, we're freed of that love, it has just melted away. Out of that we have a near-death experience, or whatever transforming experience, and we return to life totally changed. And out of that we gradually ripen into a Master Altruist.

What we're going for is a deconstruction of our ordinary self, and after that a reconstruction of a new self, a new way of being. The way this is traditionally done is, we have four things: We have body, speech, mind, and realization of reality. We free our body, we free our speech, we free our mind, and then we can connect with reality. Now we're ready to really see reality, and how amazing reality really is. When we're connecting with relative reality we're the Virtual Body.

Then we're connecting with ultimate reality, we're Clear Light. Now we've purged our body and mind down to the pure essence of our nature, the natural brilliance, the natural Nirvana that's in us. Then we can actually see what reality is and live in it directly.

So, that's a beautiful way to go for freedom from compulsive life. That is the first part of the odyssey. Then comes the realization of a healing mastery of reality, a form of reality that overcomes all fear and embodies all joy and all the clarity and wisdom and compassion of the Master Altruist.

So, we talked about the relationship between the "Virtual Body" and "Clear Light," which are the Tantric terms; and between the "Form Body" and the "Truth Body," which are the Sutric terms. I said that both of these forms of

embodiment are related to the two-reality theory. And the two-reality theory itself is related to the psychological understanding of the subject and the object. The relative reality is how we come to understand reality; it's the subjective frame of mind that takes us to the realization of the liberating truth of emptiness, or openness. Getting outside of ourselves allows us to climb outside of our own minds. And that's how the relative and the ultimate realities are connected.

Hopefully we have dug deep enough into this material to give you a taste of one of the obsessions of the Tantrikas, the Tibetans, and that is to show how all the different forms of Buddhist practice can be woven together, and in a very elegant way. In my book I include a detailed version of this interweaving of three paths -- the 10 stages in the Bodhisattva path, the path of the Enlightened Altruist in the Mahayana tradition, the five stages of the Arhat in the Theravada, and in the Tantric system the Creation Stage and five substages of the Perfection Stage. Tsong Khapa weaves all these together in a very masterful way, showing that they actually line up together, they are just different languages for the same path, each with different ways of approaching the common path.

The way I like to think about this is, when you think about reality, and you think about enlightenment from very far away, it looks to you to be one way. But when you get closer, say when you're half way there, it looks different. And when you're actually very close it looks another way entirely. But it's all really one journey.

Are there any questions about the three freedoms and the one reality -- or the two realities, depending on how you slice it? I can hear from you that this process of death, and death of the self practice, remains a mystery. Four years of this program isn't enough to fully understand. I've been with this for almost 40 years, so I can empathize. It does take time, even just to get the map and the

stages straight. But how about just getting a bit of the gist, a taste? Do you get the flavor? It's that bit of flavor we get that keeps us going. I hope this program has given you that bit, and that I have helped demystify at least some of the mysteries for you. Knowledge of those things and stages comes in handy, and they will come up.

When you take this practice and compare it to a near-death experience, that is a way to make it more accessible, because we know some people who have gone through that experience and it's also something we know could easily happen to us. But what's interesting is that if you think about it from a Tantric point of view, instead of a mystery, a near-death experience or a conversion experience is all reality looked at from a different mindset. If you look at reality within one state of consciousness, it looks like this; and if you look at reality while you're dreaming, it looks like that. If you look at it while you're awake, it looks different. The same happens if you look at it as you're dying. It just looks differently, based on what part of your system, of which layer of your mind and brain is having the experience ...yes?

I think most of us here probably have had some little taste of this kind of experience, we feel that there's some relief, some sense of clarity, or hope, or peace or whatever, that shows you, as the Dalai Lama likes to say, that it's possible, that the source is in there somewhere, in our minds, in our bodies.

All of these stages are really empty anyway. They're just words. The words are there only to orient our minds, so that our minds feel they have something to hold on to. But the reality is that we have this little experience, this little epiphany where we feel life could be totally different... And then I think, what if I felt like this after I had a terrible day, what if I could feel bliss and clarity instead of stress and frustration? If I'm feeling like bliss and clarity now, and when I practice, why

couldn't I feel like this then? In a way, the whole path to enlightenment is about feeling like that all the time, full of bliss and clarity, clear and joyful. And what would that take? What would I have to do in order to feel all the time like Yvonne here told us she feels when she comes out of her meditation, calm and inspired, regardless of whatever is happening externally?

This tradition is saying is that there is a system of training our minds for building on positive experiences, and for gradual growing in a certain direction. Part of the reason for so many details about the direction is to help us stay on course, leading to very far-out mystical states. Sometimes we're in spaces where we go "aaaaaahhhh..." with pleasure. This might feel great but, from their point of view, if it's not on the map, we're even less likely to get there. Even though it's just a mental map we have to follow it. And that map may be complicated. But remember, the map is not the territory, and the territory may be quite simplifying. As Nagarjuna said, "Peace eradicates perplexity." It totally dissolves it. When we get to that place where peace is, it's not complicated. It's very simple. However, if we don't know that we can get there, then we might not even try.

We might think, "this perplexity that I live in all the time and the armored way my body feels it and responds to it all is just the way I have to feel. It's just life, it's just the way it is, it's what it is to have a human mind, it's what it is to have a human body." Part of the purpose of the Lam Rim is to encourage us and challenge us at the same time to say "No, that's not it, I have this seed, this potential inside of me, for this radically different way of being..."

I don't think that the main reason for laying out the stages of the path in an almost obsessively detailed way is so that people can follow them most accurately. When you do this kind of practice it can get very messy anyway. You know that you're moving along, and you go here and you do a little bit of this or that ...

"Maybe I'm over here, maybe I'm over there ..." I think the real purpose is to challenge our minds, to challenge the preconception in our minds that "I couldn't possibly get there, not me." But then if you lay it out, you lay it all out following Tsong Khapa's method, which is to lay it out in clear analytic terms, starting the Lam Rim at complete enlightenment, complete Mahamudra, at the effect, then you can make it happen. I think that's the real wisdom in Tsong Khapa's method: We start by laying out the effect we want, and we ask, what's the proximate cause of that? And then what's the proximate cause of that? And the cause of that? And that? Like reverse engineering, that's the way he does it. You understand that if you want to get there, there is a sequence of causes and effects that connects you from where you are to where you want to be. That's the great purpose of this Lam Rim tradition: to challenge us, so that with the right practice or methodology we become capable of a lot more than we could imagine.

The main purpose of practices like this is to help us get off our behinds, particularly those among us who have been studying this for many years and have listened to many teachers and many theories about what spiritual development is, or what enlightenment is, or whatever, and who've had amazing experiences and think, "Oh, now I'm enlightened."

It's fairly easy to have an amazing experience of enlightenment. There are a lot of amazing experiences out there to have. But, you see, a map like this one really defines the path to enlightenment. And so you practice: "OK, I'm having this kind of amazing experience, is it what they're describing? ..." Was it like that? Did it do this for you? Did it feel like that?... It challenges you to go beyond your ordinary self and realize, "Oh, beyond my little enlightenment, my very fledgling level of enlightenment, there are all these other levels I could be experiencing..." If we don't have the wider vision we tend to get complacent, our perspective



closes and becomes kind of myopic. And we think, "Well, that's it. So I had my enlightenment and that's it."

I think that, especially now, in a world where there's spiritual materialism, with more people becoming interested in all these more mental and spiritual practices, and lots of different kinds of teachers teaching a lot of different things out there, it is really helpful to have this map, which is a very exact, rigorous and relatively demystifying map. Spelled out on a piece of paper even a child could understand it. But it still requires years of study. We have not had enough time to study in this program to get a full understanding of it at this point. But if we did, or when we do, the mystery will have disappeared. The elements, the stages, the progression, all these together form a line of causes leading to the next thing, and to the next thing, and so on. If you have that and you apply it to all these realizations that we hear about, then you will be in a position to say, "Wow! Yeah. OK, maybe that's where this person is, pretty far out. But maybe there's still something further ..."

And, to be honest with you, even in the case people we think of as highly evolved – like the Dalai Lama, or one of my favorite teachers, Serkong Rinpoche, who I brought to my mother's house on one 4<sup>th</sup> of July, or people like Tsong Khapa -- there is a debate about whether they actually went all the way. Tsong Khapa maintained his monastic vows. He was interested in purifying the tradition because it had become decadent. So he did things like he threw out people who used to put alcohol into the inner offering – they would take little sips of alcohol and that was their enlightenment! "No, that's not appropriate for a monk," he said. He also threw out the notion of going back and forth between being a monk and practicing celibacy, and a civilian having a physical romantic partner. And so, according to his system, he did not really achieve enlightenment until he died.

There are some people who disagree with this interpretation and believe he might have achieved enlightenment but he was just pretending that he had not. Then, people like Serkong Rinpoche or His Holiness the Dalai Lama very frankly say, "No, I actually haven't gone all the way there, I may be over here, just this far, on this stage on the map ..." And that's the beauty and benefit of having a system that's so rigorous and so clear, yet among the top practitioners there is a sense of humility and a sense of communal work and achievement. The attitude is more like "This is the map; that is the territory; this is where a person can go; this is how far I think I might have gone and that's what lies ahead..." So it's not so subjective. I think being so exact is actually a great service.

The idea of transformation through this kind of practice is simply that of a chain reaction of individual internal transformations pursued with a conscious activism of reaching out to others and helping others, right? It's not pursued with the attitude of "Oh, I'm separate from you, what I do is my private business, what you do is your private business." This is pursued with an understanding that we're all interdependent, that I won't have a fully happy life until you have a happy life and everybody else has a happy life. And so, when I reach out to my happiness, when I pursue my happiness, I'm pursuing it while building the skills to encourage you, inspire you, challenge you to pursue yours. That's what we're doing on the Bodhisattva path: We're building our own Nirvana. And for that we're building the body, the emotional skills, the communicative or constructive skills, the teamwork skills, the creative skills to actually transform our communication, our culture, and our environment. We're building all of them at the same time.

When I was starting out nobody knew who the Dalai Lama was. A few people went to India, got to know him and he became kind of a celebrity for rich people and some hippies who dropped out and stumbled into Dharamsala. But

now he's one of the most famous and most respected people on this planet. How did that happen? It's not because of a public relations campaign or an amazing marketing machine at the disposal of the Tibetan government in exile. It's because of the quality of that one human being. The Dalai Lama has such special quality that whoever is around him feels something unusual, exceptional.

And what if we had a school where we cultivated that quality of being? In Buddhism there is the assumption that we're all equally capable of developing it. Maybe the Dalai Lama started at three, and we start at 30. But, nonetheless, if we got half or a tenth or whatever amount as far as he did, that might be a good thing. That's the understanding. You have people who are out of the box – not only is their mind outside of the box, but their nervous system is out of the box, their chemicals are out of the box, their hormones are out of the box -- people who are coming at life from a totally different way. They get thrown into the world, like little radical free agents. They're thrown into their corporation, or their discipline, or their family. And then see what happens. In the Buddhist view, because we're so deeply interconnected in this world of quantum energy and living systems, if one person changes, other people must change also. It's all cause-and-effect. We affect everybody around us with the way we are, the way we relate to them. And you never know how far your actions can get.

So don't just run off to Dharamsala. Do this practice rigorously. Become an exceptional person and then go. And wherever you go you will be a force for change. This is a radical non-violent teaching. It's different from traditional grassroots movements where we're assuming that we're powerless and we have to come together and force some change on people that we're alienated from and who are alienated from us. This is a very different way, perhaps a little more like the way of Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Mandela. You've heard about Mandela,

how he never expressed bitterness. And how important that was for a peaceful transition of power in South Africa, how de Klerk was able to turn power over to Mandela knowing that there wasn't going to be a blood bath, that Mandela, this man, was in charge. And that one person transformed the country. In many ways he was the critical catalyst that allowed the South African society to transform in a non-violent way. And yes, of course, there's still a lot that needs to be transformed. This type of transformation, if it is to last, can only be gradual. There's still a lot of violence, and there's a lot of repressed rage, and inequality, and so on and so forth. On the other hand, it's quite an accomplishment that while pockets of apartheid are still there, it's not the official system any longer, there's more room to maneuver.

Look at us in America. Even though there's gross inequality and there's a class system with social barriers and clubs and glass ceilings and things like that, the reality is that we have a lot more freedom and room to maneuver and have influence. And individuals do have influence. The way to move forward is that we each become engines of change to the extent that that's possible. And that means we can organize counter-cultural communities. That's part of what Nalanda is about. Part of the reason that I founded Nalanda outside of Columbia University or Cornell Medical School or other places that were interested in having us, is because there's no way we could have the space, the freedom to do this kind of thing, and have this kind of conversation -- that's not possible when you are in a highly controlled financial machine like that. But we can have it here! And then, afterwards, after we transform, we go back and we work in those highly controlled financial machines. You see, the essence of the Buddhist approach is that there is no society, just groups of individuals, every individual is a world unto themselves. And, as Nietzsche said, we don't try to change the herd, we try to

change the strays. At the start you work with people who have some receptivity and openness, right? And you work with them to increase their receptivity and openness and to transform. And pretty soon you have a counterculture. Countercultures are powerful things -- and countercultural institutions even more so. There's plenty of room in our society to have institutions that are about change, that are more nimble and directed to some place different.

And how about neuroscience? I can say one radically optimistic thing about neuroscience. I never believed that we would get to this level of clarity about the nervous system in my lifetime. And the discoveries have been lined up with a very positive understanding of human potential and of the right path for humanity. Neuroscience has become a force for change. It used to be known for a bunch of rat catchers staining neurons. It's quite remarkable how it's turned around. On the other hand, I would say that the stuff neuroscience is coming up with has been around forever. And convincing research on the positive effects of meditation has been around since the 1950s and 1960s. We already knew then. And anybody who wanted to know more about it could choose from at least 100 papers that were out already showing that the human mind can control things that no physician or researcher in their right mind thinks that they can control.

Still to this day there are a lot of neuroscientists who don't believe that a human being can train to control their heart rate, or their metabolism, or integrate their bliss system. This is all still very far-out. And I can say from the standpoint of medicine, which is the one tradition, the one institution that I've been most involved with, stuck in, embedded in, whatever, and the one I've struggled the most with, even though we have all this far-out knowledge now, if you look at medical school today, it's pretty much the same as it was in 1929. The basic model of what a human being is, what health is and what illness is hasn't changed.

And who knows what will take for it to change. It's got to change. For one thing, the current model is too expensive. The corporations in our economic system aren't going to stand for higher and higher health costs. Soon we're going to need some form of self-insurance.

At Cornell we're working with companies to bring in systems to teach people how to live healthier lives. The preventive way is cheaper. And it works better. But the system is not there yet. Once someone finds a way to do it, everybody is going to jump on board.

And then the medical system might change. If the pharmaceutical industry and surgical industry and all the others work together with the insurance industry to find a cheaper way to do things in the health sector, then maybe medical education will change. To me it's like a paradox, it's like the best of times and the worst of times: there is a lot of research out there pointing to better and cheaper ways to health, and you'd expect that public health systems would want to use them, and would introduce them, for example, through education, reforming the way doctors are trained. On the other hand, you realize that they've done nothing, really pretty much nothing, in that direction, except for one or two medical schools in the country.

From our own experience we know that change is difficult. And institutional change more so. I know, as a physician, as a therapist, and as a Buddhist practitioner, some of the institutions and cultural establishments in these fields, and I think of them as made of people. I've worked with people over decades; people don't change so easily. I've worked with myself, right? It's not so easy for a person to change. We have these very entrenched self-protective mechanisms. We get entrenched in trauma and negativity – that's part of the reason why this all seems so pie-in-the-sky, because the reality is that we know how hard it is to

change even just a small thing in our system. But I'm also seeing in my practice that if we keep at it, if we keep engaged in an unconditioned, accepting, caring way, if we don't give up on people, then, in a safe environment and with the right balance between challenging and reassuring, and so on, people can undergo remarkable change. I think there's hope, if individuals can change, institutions can change. And I've certainly seen that: I've seen individuals change and I've seen institutions change as well, although maybe on a smaller scale.

When I first came to New York to go to medical school, in the late 1970s or early 1980s, there were no yoga centers like now. And there were no meditation centers. I could not say anything to my colleagues about what I was interested in because I really would have been drummed out of the service. And then I went to Boston. And then I went to California. And I came back, 15 years later. By then there was a yoga center on every corner, and there were a dozen or more vibrant meditation centers. And the public's consciousness was totally into this. Even the people at Columbia, in the Psychiatry Department, came to me and said, "We know what you're doing, why don't you start a center?" Public consciousness is powerful and can drive change. And even the doctors who get trained in the same old idiotic way, I'm sorry to say, are not living in the same society or culture that you and I grew up in -- or at least that my generation grew up in. So there's hope.

I do think that ultimately we each have to run our own experiment. It's up to each one of us to see if the practice makes sense to us, if it fits right. When it comes to experiences like this, of course, it's not so easy to run the experiment. You have to judge for yourself: does it sound coherent? does it sound sensible? does it sound plausible? how does it rate compared with other models, or maps, or methods for happiness, for living?

Ultimately we each have to run our own experiment, by taking some of the elements from the many vast and complicated and profound things that we're studying, and testing them to see if they really work. It's not easy to stick with it just because it's a good idea; you have to have some good experiences with it. I think that experiences tend to just creep up on you. And, ultimately, when you look back and you ask yourself, "Over the years I've been thinking about these things, practicing these things and studying these things ... Am I a better human being for it? What do I have to show for it? Do I feel a little tiny increment of more happiness, or more peace, or more freedom?" That's the experiment.

If the answer to those questions is yes, then we keep going. What's the alternative? You stop going and you go back to the old patterns. You know what I mean? That's life: you either go forward or you go backward. You either get better or you get worse. There's no standing still.

One powerful thing about this tradition is that it offers us a path to becoming happier people. The path is grounded and reliable enough so that each of us can run our own experiment and come out of it with some sense that, "This is sound, basically sound, something here works and makes sense to me." And that's also part of what the overall life-changing commitment is. The more you rely on it, the more you are willing to commit to it, dive into it, believe in it, invest in it, share it, the more it changes you. You stick with it and you go further, because it builds on itself. But you have to trust your own organic inner guru. What's your pace? How far do you feel like going?

After being together on his journey, and reflecting on our four years together doing this study and practice from Nalanda, you could ask, "Well, what's the rationale for covering such a wide sweep?" Many find it mystifying. Why shouldn't we be mystified? There's plenty of mystifying material in this tradition.



How do you put all these things together? There are three different vehicles, three different psychologies, three different meditation systems -- is it three? at least three, or four or maybe five. So, of course we should be mystified by now, right? Wouldn't we all have been better off if we just came on a weekly basis, sat quietly and did some simple breathing meditations, or maybe chanted, and leave it at that?

The rationale from the Tibetan point of view, and from my perspective as a teacher, is that this kind of practice offers an opportunity to get exposure and familiarize our minds with a map, for a spiritual life, a contemplative life, however far we want to go. And that kind of exposure and familiarity builds an awareness that can be a really powerful thing. At the same time, we have to know where we are, and we have to be practical. That's why I say this is like a liberal arts class: you can be aware of what change could bring. I could be a Buddha in just a few years if I did this practice very rigorously and had a grant, like one of those lifetime research grants that Buckminster Fuller had... But I'm not him and I don't have the grant. I'm not meditating morning, noon, and night, and I can't do that. So where am I really, in practical terms? Well, I'm struggling with this emotion, or with this form of suffering, or with that misperception, or something. And, on a practical level, I know that I need this kind of skill.

The thing is, now that you have gone through this survey of the contemplative path and of the many tools to help you move along that path, you're in a position to sort through those tools, try them out and see what works for you. You might remember this program and say, "You know what? Joe said something about this issue I'm going through... something relevant, maybe this is the right tool, the right medicine for this kind of affliction..." Even if you start practicing just one very simple thing, maybe that's your tool, you found a good

tool to start to work with, it works for you. And that's how the rubber meets the road. You can have the awareness in the mind, but where the heart grows is very specifically when it is struggling with very practical problems, like "I get irritated at the limits from my guilt, or the limitations of my partner, or myself, or my children ... how do I work with that?" That's where this survey, this big sweep, becomes very useful. Because there's always a part of some practice, in this survey, which can actually get exactly what we need, what grounds us -- and where the vision is, a vision for so much more.

Chapter Twelve: The Stuff of Dreams: Birthing & Blessing Your Body of Inspiration

We've walked the Hero's Journey in this visionary practice. We've talked about it as a preparation. We are preparing our minds for the journey to become that Hero. And, like pilots practicing in a flight simulator we are using visualization; and bonding with our mentor. The visualization is for orientation: it orients us to follow a live role model, one that we can identify with. As we begin to be able to visualize, we use that vision to transform our sense of self, dissolving our current self as we did in the opening meditation, dissolving our ordinary sense of self into a kind of near-death experience, a psychic death experience, and then we rebirth ourselves in the form of clarity and blissful compassion, and connectedness. And so we take on a whole new form, a new positive vision of ourselves as powerful agents of awareness and positivity, right? That's what Mother Earth/Father Time are about, that's when we've done the virtual reality transformation in the Creation Stage. Now, in the Perfection Stage, we hook up our nervous system to that vision.

As we all know, we can go to sleep and have a dream, and then wake up and still be the same person that went to sleep. We can have a fantasy, a dream of being in Bermuda, but we're not there. And so, if you want to really connect to the vision, if you want to have this beautiful enlightening luminous vision of your potential and tie it into "the grid" as it were, the wetware of your nervous system, you need to engage your nervous system, and specifically the forces that you need to transform.

We have talked about the forces that we need to change in terms of the chakra system, within which is this blissful network of openness, of luminous awareness and blissful positivity. And we saw how we can tap into that bliss using

the inner fire. We practiced a little bit, we did deep breathing exercises. I don't know how that worked for you. It always gets me a little high, I get a little natural high. And the more you do it, the higher you get – that's part of the idea. But you're not just doing it to get high, like kids twirling around to get dizzy. We're doing it to develop a more euphoric and fluid, a more plastic state of mind that can then do the inner work for our transformation. That work is to slowly unravel all the knots from all the negativities, the stress reactivity that's been bouncing back and forth, that's knocked off our access to the bliss that we need. As we sort of undo and melt away those knots, we go deeper and deeper. Recently we've been talking about this inner journey as an odyssey, of going deeper and deeper into the central nervous system, to the very source, the home, the fountain of eternal youth, the fountain of eternal divine nectar, the bliss that's within all of us ... whatever you want to call it.

And so we go down, deeper and deeper, using the practice of the three freedoms, the freedoms of body, speech and mind. First, we free our sense of "my body" from our normal body image and we learn to identify with the Buddha image, an image of our full potential. Then we free our sense of "my speech" by getting rid of all the negative garbage, as Lama Yeshe likes to say, the garbage of dualistic thinking within our minds. And we install new software, we move to a new frequency, we get a new default frequency, or new normal, a language of affirmative messages, like the mantras. Mantras are the divine speech, the healing creative speech within us and within the enlightened beings. Third, we free our mind. At this point in the journey we are immersing all of our energy and all of our awareness within what's called the "extremely subtle drop" at the heart. What that really means is we're having a very deep and profound release. Bob Thurman likes to call it an "orgasmic" release. This is a release of tensions, inhibitions, obstacles,

veils, and immersing ourselves in the natural purity of our mind -- that natural enthusiasm, the exuberance of our energies -- and taking that as a new home base for a new way of life.

We did all of that. What else is there? Is there more? Well, in this tradition there is more. We talked about how much more there is last week. We talked about the practice of the Mahamudra, the Great Mudra. The mudra or "seal" practices are unlike what are called the "merger practices." The merger practices deepen meditation by essentially teaching us how to meditate when we're asleep, or in the death process. The mudra practices encourage us to meditate when we're in our sensual, sexual, arousal mode. We can practice in two ways, the virtual way and the actual way. In the virtual way we use visualization. We use the image of our partner to get us into that warm and romantic love mode, and then use that to melt and dissolve obstructions. In the actual way we do it in a real relationship with someone else who is equally motivated and equally prepared, who is a real soulmate and a real equal. Or, if we want to short-circuit the process, and we want to or need to do it on our own for whatever reason, and we don't want to wait until we die to have this experience -- an experience of the death-like dissolution that's profound enough to totally unravel all of our stress response, to go the full distance to the core essence of our natural bliss experience, what people have when they experience death -- but we want to have it while we're still alive, we need to learn to tap into this blissful energy and take it to what's called the "ultimate clear light experience," which is an ultimate experience of dissolution within our meditation, within a sense of exalted, or enthused, consciousness.

The Great Seal can mean different things to different people, and it's taught in many different ways. But in every case it is about sealing your awareness, and every experience, with the blissful openness that you tap into in this very deep meditative experience of orgasmic release within you. It's a peak experience, like a near-death experience, or maybe like giving birth, or holding your child for the first time, or going to the top of the Empire State Building, whatever it is. So you have a peak experience. And instead of just letting it go off as some kind of "Oh, I had that kind of experience" and return to my defensive, neurotic life of surviving and worrying and gathering and so on, this practice takes that peak experience and seals, or stamps, all of our other experience with the same quality of awareness, an awareness that is like translucent clarity, a radical freedom of mind, a mind free of all preconceptions, even preconceptions about who we are. It's a mind free of any negative or distressing moods, free of all our traumatic childhood experiences, and free of all that burden of evolution that makes us defensive and reactive. Then we get to this pure experience. We want to take that experience and we want to "seal" it, we want to use it as a seal to make every experience count, to make every experience an experience of connection, an experience of sacred communion with all life. And the way to that is specifically defined.

How do we do it, how do we get to that? We get on this journey, this odyssey that takes us to the freedom of mind, to this very pure-like prima materia, this supernova awareness within us, a big bang-like awareness within us, right? And then we come out of it. And we have to create two things. We have to recreate ourselves, being very mindful for using only the pure, positive energies that spring up from within our nervous system. And we harness these energies, we use them to develop a whole new sense of self which is tied into, or fueled by, or

riding that pure energy, riding it the way "a rider rides a horse." That is the traditional metaphor. And that's what the neurobiologist would call "recruiting." When a higher part of your consciousness, or nervous system, takes a more primal part and uses it for a specific purpose, that's "recruiting."

What we're trying to do is, instead of letting our reactive energy come out of our unconscious and shape our sense of self and our relationship with life, and then have as a result an afflicted life, or an afflicted day, now we're being very picky and choosy about the raw material that we're putting in our mind, the raw material that we're using to fuel our new "green" personality, if you will, a personality that is environment-friendly, with all kinds of environments, not only ecological but also social, and so on. We choose only that pure bliss energy, we're choosing that energy to support our visionary sense of self -- and that's our "virtual body."

Now we're going to talk about the virtual body in the context of "Great Seal" practice. Your virtual body is your awareness of what will allow you most easily to commune with everything in a purely positive way. You have to take that virtual body and use it to immerse yourself to commune with all things in the experience of radical openness, what in Buddhist terms is referred to as the "clear light mind," and that is the experience of total clarity and freedom.

The "virtual body" and the "clear light mind" that we have worked on are the two elements of the Great Seal: The subject, the male subjectivity or the subjective awareness of bliss defined as, or turned into, the "virtual body" encountering, immersing itself, purifying itself, bathing itself in the feminine objective that is the "clear light mind," sometimes called the translucent mind, or the ecstatic translucent mind. The union of the "virtual body" and the "clear-light

mind" is the Great Seal, the Great Communion. Bringing those two things together is called the "Learners Communion" or "Learners Integration."

When we learn how to bring these two things -- a body that is a subjective experience of totally pure bliss, pure joy, purely open to others, and a mind that's totally free, clear of any kind of hangup, of any kind of illusionary instinct or traumatic pattern, one that's just the pure, luminous, liberated potential of the mind -- we come together as a new body and mind. And that's our Great Seal, within our own body-mind process.

From our Great Seal we can then have the Great Seal of communion with all life because we have the joy to connect with all living beings with love and care, to wish all living beings happiness and freedom from suffering. And we have the openness to take in their subjective experience without any bias about "what does this mean to me?" or "how is it going to hurt me?" or "what is it going to take from me?" We don't have any of that ego bias anymore. We have now become totally objective observers of reality, a reality in which we see our total interconnection with all reality, and we can celebrate it and enjoy it. That is the Great Seal, as it pertains to this phase of our odyssey.

Now I'll say one more thing – although I know I've said an awful lot already. If you take this as an odyssey, then it's like an odyssey. That means it's a journey far away from our ordinary experience, a journey to a pure, released, transformative consciousness, the blissful energy that's represented as living in the extremely subtle drop in the heart; and then we journey out of that, we come back to life, we don't stay in Heaven, dead as it were, or forever immortalized. We come back to life, this time voluntarily, to make a difference, to tell others about what we've experienced, to use what we've learned and the energy we've



gleaned to make the world a better place. And so there are two parts in the journey, there and back, because we're not doing this just for ourselves.

We're doing it for the world around us. And if we understand the basic philosophy of interdependence, or the basic philosophy of emptiness, the point being that everything is empty of being in any way separate or unrelated – meaning there's nothing off the grid, so to speak, it's all part of one endless network of interconnections -- then when we achieve pure clarity in our own mind, the universe achieves it with us.

This realization of emptiness is not mine alone. I need to learn how to harness it, express it, embody it in my interactions with others. And that's what the Mahamudra is about: to embody this sort of extreme ecstatic experiences in a way of life, instead of just having them float out there as "Oh, I had this ecstatic experience, but then I got back to my suffering, back again..."

I'll stop the review here. We have a fair amount to do, a lot to cover today. But before moving on I want to touch base and hear where you all are, especially since we have some new people. I don't want to totally lose you, confuse you; I've given you a lot to digest already. For those who are new here, you just walked into a very intense mandala of reflection. Hopefully it's clear enough so that you can get the gist of it, liberal-arts style. This is the last semester of the last year of a four-year program; it will start all over again next term. The textbook we're using is Sustainable Happiness. We're also working on smaller versions, not as thick as a brick, like Sustainable Happiness.

One key question is, how can we maintain the peacefulness that we experience on the cushion throughout the rest of the day, from the minute

meditation stops? Many Buddhist practices were made for people who live in monasteries. In a monastery, of course, you can be mindful more easily, and what you're mindful of is actually beautiful and lovely, for the most part. Of course there are crabby monks, there's bad breakfast, you have to take the garbage out, things like that. Nonetheless, generally speaking, you're in a subculture of enlightenment, of peace and love. This kind of practice, on the other hand, was designed for just the kind of world that we live in, a world that is very much driven by poison, by distress emotions and negativity. This practice is designed to help you create a kind of self-contained, no-stress breathing apparatus where you can stay during the day, and keep your mind and your meditative growth insulated from all the slings and arrows, all the triggers. The tradition says this is possible if you practice six times a day.

There are many Buddhist practices where they recommend doing six times a day. Even basic mindfulness, mindfulness of the breath, you're supposed to practice six times daily. Basically, our minds and bodies are like springs that are wound over very tight, over eons of evolution. And, wow, it's so tight in there ... When we get a little moment to unwind, and we unwind the body and mind a little bit, we feel "AAaaaaaaahhhhhh ... I can breathe again." But then we quickly get wound up again! This does not mean that the way you're practicing is wrong, obviously it's working; and you need more of it. Most of us do, we need to work more intensely, we need more powerful tools to live in the twenty-first Century.

We have been talking about some advanced techniques that use imagery and affirmation, and that have a sense of personal relationship with a living mentor who's an inspiration to you. These are like uplinks, power tools that help insulate the mind. And, as I have said before, they allow you to take the

monastery with you, into your everyday life. These are very powerful techniques. For example, if you find yourself in the middle of a stressful situation, instead of reacting to the stress, use visualization, and envision all beings as Buddhas, or something like that. It's a very sophisticated technology. And what makes it different, the essence of it is that instead of going into an ordinary meditative state of wellbeing you go deeper, deeper into your nervous system, deeper into the archeology of your nervous system, and you get a really extraordinary meditative state, which has more power, it has more chemistry, it's more neurologically primal -- all these open you up for a more powerful experience. That's part of the essence of the Tantras, that's what you're going for, that quick access to deeper altered states that give your meditation more power. That's why we use the nervous system in this as well.

I have some wonderful quotes I want to share with you. This section is so beautiful... We're talking now about the "virtual body." Some people call it the "illusion body", some people call it the "magic body." It is a form of the Sambhogakaya, the Bliss Body, or Beatific Body that you may remember from our study of Mahayana Buddhism. It's like a heavenly body. The idea is that once we get to the third perfection stage, which is the freedom of mind -- and the ultimate metaphoric clear light -- it's like melting down in pure gold, sort of within our minds, pure energy, pure fuel.

The essence of the virtual body practice is in the re-emergence, in how we come out of that experience. We've been spending a lot a time on the dissolution process -- how to dissolve more deeply, layer by layer, how to melt through the traumatic patterns and the instinctive patterns that harm us and keep us scattered. We have dissolved now within our minds, in pure gold, pure

positivity, and we have disarmed. Now we go deeper and deeper. The next question is, "How do we come out of that?"

The idea here is that we have this subtle energy that's very clear, not confused. At least for that moment of coming out we have illumination, we are not being driven by stress energy and negativity, but by a kind of euphoric positive blissful experience. And we want to turn that into a new way of being.

Tsong Khapa says that the "virtual body" assumes the basic science of understanding in the Tantric model, of how this extremely subtle model of body-mind, and thus of how our minds, create reality. The idea is that we have this primal chemistry at the very most basic layers of our nervous system. Like Freud said, "The ego is not master in its own house." It is the id that is pushing us around and driving things. Now, imagine that you could go into the id and transform its energy from the source, and then use it. That would be a powerful way to transform your unconscious, that's a powerful and positive energy to illuminate and awaken your unconscious. And the key element of this science is to understand that the basic chemistry of life can express itself in the form of either samsara, of miserable reactivity and traumatic memories and all of that, or nirvana, the liberation from the negative states, of the release and the freedom and the embrace of something more positive. And we can influence that expression.

I'll read to you a few inspiring gems. For example, from Nagarjuna's Five Stages (page 507 in Sustainable Happiness):

All beings are powerless,  
Not born voluntarily,

The cause of that is clear,  
Universal void, transparency.

That is the clear light of death. You know, at the bottom of all our experience, it's just like when we're born out of the womb, we don't have preconceptions. We're joyful beings -- at least when we're fed! ... Anyway, we have this pure potential for bliss and joy, that's why we're all attracted to babies, because they have this, right?

The mind that serves  
To bind children in the life cycle,  
That same mind takes practitioners  
To the bliss lord (and lady) exaltation.

So the same raw material out of which we make samsara, we can also take us to exaltation.

Here there is no birth at all,  
There is no death at all;  
So you should understand the life cycle itself,  
Constituted (only) by instincts of the mind.

So the question is, which of our instincts of the mind, which of our instinctive patterns are running the show? Or, to use Buddhist language, which seeds are you watering? Or like Rick Hanson says, using an analogy from a Cherokee story, "Which wolf do I feed, the wolf of anger or the wolf of love? ... Anyhow, here the sense of wolf speaks to the notion of the wild, primal nature that's inside of all of us, under all those layers of socialization, of repression and neuroses. There's still something wild in all of us. And we fear it. We think "Oh,

that's going to drive me crazy!" But the reality is that we can learn to navigate through it, and we can learn to navigate through all. For some reason the image that pops to mind is from *The Fantastic Voyage*, a science fiction movie from the 1960s, with a brilliant scientist that develops a way to shrink people and things temporarily, and builds a micro-submarine that is injected into a live body and travels through the mind and body. If I was in that submarine no doubt I would navigate right into the mind to get to the hot springs of pure life, and love, and all that goodness. Then we don't have to be afraid anymore, because from there everything that comes out of so much goodness is fine.

Another beautiful metaphor for the virtual body describes its potential for enlightened agency is a "wish-fulfilling jewel ... in the jewel sack of the body." That jewel holds the "five energies" of the mind body, the fundamental energies of the different regions of our nervous system. And it's all about harnessing energies, these five energies. Understanding how to harness those energies allows us to build, to have a subjectivity. And it is a body because it's a subjectivity that can engage like a normal body, it's the place from which we can engage life. And, of course, this virtual body, like in a dream, doesn't have to be a coarse body, a body that looks like Joe. It can look like anything, it can be subtle, it can be a mental thing, but it still feels like a body because it's a subjectivity. And it's virtual, meaning that we understand that it's illusory.

And how is that virtual body built up? What are those five energies? One of you asked if these five energies are like the five skandas, the five aggregates that create the perception of reality. And the answer is that they are often correlated, in the sense that each of the five skandas is located in a particular chakra, usually, and the five energies have a relationship with the five chakras. But it's a different

level of analysis. On this level the energies are related to how the nervous system functions. And when we deal with the five aggregates we are at a coarser level of analysis, the level of the gross functions of our mind-body. In any case, it isn't just a matter of getting into this mind space, it is also harnessing energies. Nagarjuna quotes the Diamond Rosary:

Other than your life-energy vital essence,  
There is nothing in the three realms;  
By the magical wind-energy, the three (life) realms  
Are seen as like dreaming (in) a dream.

Birth, living and dying,  
And abiding in the between existence,  
Whatever (states) the world constructs,  
Are the emanations of the energy of mind.

Now it's the same cyclic thing, but instead of saying these states are emanations of mind, they are emanations of the energy of the mind.

Ordinary construction-instincts...  
Are visualized as the mind of affirmation itself.  
(And so deconstructed through diamond recitation).  
Purifying wind-energy, one becomes taintless,  
And manifests the wisdom superficial virtual (body)...  
The virtual body along with its luminance,  
Arises from the mere wind-energy and mind.

So what is he saying now, about what the virtual body is? We've meditated on this visionary body, what I call a prosthetic self. The self is our strongest habit, the mother of all habits. Of course, in the Buddhist tradition, there is no self, that is to say, no habit should define the self, no habit should define us. We should be bigger than any habit. The self is always something we're stuck on. The idea here is that we take that normal sense of self that we associate with our body image and we replace it with this prosthetic self, this super image, this ideal image, what the psychoanalyst would call an "ego ideal." Ask yourself, "What form would I be living in if I embodied all my values and none of my weaknesses?" That's the ego ideal. It's all my passions and none of my afflictions. And so we've created this prosthetic body which is a way to tapping into our sense of the possibility of our transforming our self into an ideal form. That's what it is. It's an image, a preview of coming attractions. But it's still just a mental thing.

And what happens when you connect that mental body, which is sometimes called a "mantra body," an altered-state experience of positive blissful openness to a luminous awareness?

Nagarjuna says that when the mind comes out of the "clear light" we have a body made of mind. And we join that body, which is our prosthetic body, our archetype body, with a spirit of pure enthusiasm or bliss. When we come out of this experience, we emerge with a kind of non-dual awareness that's like a wisdom energy. We're kind of blowing with the experience we just had, and then we start to assume, we choose to connect that blissful experience which is joy -- clear, luminous and open -- to the mental image that we've been constructing. And suddenly that mental image is no longer just a mental thing, it's now connected to a visceral experience within the body. There's an experience of energy, an



experience of chemistry, an experience of profound altered fundamental consciousness, happening within our body, as real as any other chemistry.

When we connect the mental image that we've been generating through the Creation Stage with these blissful energies and the luminous awareness coming out of these deconstructive releases, we start to have a virtual body. So those two things, the mental ideal image of the body and the luminous awareness come together.

The mind of blissful openness knows its own emptiness. And we harness the blissful openness to let go the mind, to free the mind of trauma and affliction. It's a purifying process riding on the breath. We choose to connect that, we choose to ride on top of that image, the mental chosen image of our body, of our way of being that's our vision of our self, our prosthetic self. But now, in the Perfection Stage, it doesn't feel just mental because it's connected with this very profound visceral altered state of experience.

And then we do one last thing, self consecration. We say, "This is me, I am my divine Buddha self." My mental vision of myself, my potential, connected with this blissful experience is my real virtual body, my real body, the body made of mind, the body I've chosen to make, and not the body that I made through clinging on to whatever self image I got from my mother, or father, or whatever came out of my unconscious and I have been since then thinking that's "me." It's like sometimes we look in the mirror and we ask, "Who is that person?" It's as if we don't recognize our self. Why? Because we're clinging to some mental image of it. It's totally mentally made, but not made consciously. With this practice we are remaking ourselves consciously, choosing only the best experiences, the ideal of our self and our way of being in the world that we can imagine.

That's one of the raw materials. And then there's the purest energy and awareness we could possibly tap into in our nervous system. That's the other raw material. We put those two raw materials together and we call it "me." That's the seed of a new me, of a new person. I have recreated myself. That's why this stage is called "self consecration."

It is very important that we say "This is me." Otherwise we could do this far-out practice and still think "But that's not really me, that's the Buddha" or "That's my teacher, not me, I'm all my afflictions, I'm all my traumas..." Then it wouldn't work, it wouldn't stick, it wouldn't get very far. There are some really lovely passages about this kind of practice. Here's another one, from the Integrated Practices, as translated by Bob Thurman (page 511):

In truth, the mind is just like luminance apart from shape and color,  
its reality like space, hard to touch like ultimate reality.

The so-called "primal mind", the formless mind that we experience in primal states like deep sleep or orgasm or near-death, not the coarse mind that we're more used to and we identify with, is "apart from shape and color," meaning content; the mind is just like light, like space, hard to touch, hard to grasp.

That being granted, the three luminous intuitions come to depend on  
wind-energy...

That is, the three intuitive primal awarenesses are supported by a certain  
kind of neural energy.

...and becoming common become light;

In other words, when we bring the awareness together with the energy, we can purify them both and turn that energy into a genuine luminous, or lucid, intuition.

therefore the wind-energy binds the consciousness. Then the two luminances of wisdom and art, endowed with light rays, come to arise as the illusory deity body endowed with all variety and excellence. What is its mount? It is (subtle wind) energy, which the mind-diamond rides like a horse, traveling wherever it wishes.

I'll read just one last thing from Tsong Khapa; he sums up (page 512):

Likewise, when the necessary preliminaries of freedom of mind, such as diamond recitation and so forth, the inner and outer life-energy control meditations, have been consummated, that very same complete generation of freedom of mind, from the perspective of generating earth dissolving into water and so on as in the process of death, itself separates the two bodies (of coarse and subtle energy), and the self-consecration magic body is achieved from the mere wind-energy-mind of the voids. The self here is the wind-energy-mind that serves as the base of the designation thinking "I." That very thing is created as the master altruist body which is the consecration.

Here Tsong Khapa is talking about how we can trigger this chemical process of dissolving our ordinary-self state and dive into the pure awareness. Then, when

the self emerges, it does so in what he describes as the separation of the coarse and subtle body.

Earlier, when we talked about the freedom of body, the first of five substages in the Perfection Stage, we saw how we normally think, "I am my body." And that's partly why we have a repression barrier that leaves us cold when it comes to these experiences. We feel like we just can't integrate them because they're not "mine." If we have a formless experience in which we don't have a normal body, like a dream body, it doesn't feel like "me." This body that is speaking right now is "me," right? But when we understand, when we do this practice consciously instead of just having an accidental altered state experience, then we're prepared to greet these deeper layers of our potential, of our inner experience, as part of our raw material, part of our legacy, even as a primal part of our legacy. Then we can engage in "separating the coarse and subtle bodies." That means we can come to really own a state of our self as formless, as being luminous as space, infinite, boundless, formless. We can see that as "I" and "me," or "I" and "mine." Tsong Khapa says that it's possible to have an experience on a subtle level which seems completely apart from the normal experience we have on the coarse level of our body when everything appears as very separate, our self feels as very separate, each person is very separate.

One natural question here is, "How could I be me if I took those altered-state experiences seriously, how could I come back to the world and function?" That's a good question, that's what we'd normally think. That's why we have to go through this odyssey. That's why we have to prepare our minds, slowly dis-identifying with our coarse reality and melting it down. This is like preparing for death, it's like an insurance policy. We're separating ourselves from our ordinary

body -- as we must at death -- and we're coming to understand that we're more than that, that we're more than our ordinary body, that there are also other realms of experience. And we are building up a new platform to operate in the world. That's what the virtual body is.

It seems like we're a person. We think that we have to walk around feeling like Joe or Maria, otherwise the world will fall to the ground. It isn't true. Do you think the world would be a worse place if you walked around thinking you were Mrs. Buddha? or Tara? If you can really walk around thinking you're Tara, if in every interaction you can see yourself as Tara and be Tara, would you really have more trouble relating and functioning, or less trouble? The reality is you'd have less trouble. Our ordinary sense of self is not very functional.

That's why we need, as Bob Thurman likes to call it, a space suit. If you're going to go into outer space (or, in this case, inner space), you need a space suit. That's the point of a deity body, that's why we practice meditating on our self as an extraordinary being. And when we dissolve and melt into that being, or that being melts into us, we're not afraid. We don't panic and think, "where's my body?" We don't panic because that being knows that its body is transparent. We don't know that, but our extraordinary alter ego can know that. Our body-mind is a self-dissolving body-mind, like a self-dissolving suture. We want to dissolve our normal sense of self, the self that is supported by reification, and by a primitive self-protective sense that feels like "I've got to hold on to this piece of real estate, this body, something terrible will happen if I ease up my watch, my grip, on it." That's how evolution is operating in us in this moment, right?

The reality is we don't need to hold so hard onto this body, our body. We could walk with more ease, with much more of a sense of flexibility. Actors do it

all the time. We could have much more of a sense of flexibility, but we can't get from here to there in this body. The deity body is the way we get from here to there.

We hear, "trade in your ordinary body, which is filled with fear; and then you can have a deity body, you can be a Buddha." This doesn't sound like a bad trade. I'll take that trade. You may think it's kind of a sneaky trade because the deity body is empty. But the point is that, from the very beginning, you're practicing developing a new sense of self which is transparent. The normal sense of self we feel we developed while we were still very confused and frightened, and we were looking for something to hold on to. Our reifying instincts were very much operating, so we invested the images that came up from within with a sense of solidity and reality. And we can't get that off. So we start from scratch, and we build a new sense of self that's more transparent, we build it to our own specifications. It's like an aesthetic creation, or like a business we build and we know how it works from the inside out. We can really give up our fear about losing our self because we understand that it is empty, right? The self is empty of inherent existence, it is dependent-arising. Once we see that we're more ready to let go of it, and then we'll be free to do all the things that we really want to do. We can do that because we're not afraid anymore that we're going to lose our self, that somehow we'll get annihilated in the process. That's the whole issue, that's what we have to see. It's just as Shakespeare's Prospero said in *The Tempest*, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." But we think we need to be more solid, it scares us that we're so intangible. All we need is a desensitization experience. We need to actually see, to recognize and feel our insubstantiality, and see that it does not destroy us. On the contrary, it frees us.

This recognition actually makes everything lighter and clearer, and it makes us more functional. That's why we have the practice of the Creation Stage, it helps us transform into lighter and clearer beings, and more functional. What we do is practice regularly, for many months, maybe years, we practice going back and forth, riding on this kind of schizophrenic reality, between our ordinary sense of self and the more visionary and extraordinary sense of self. And slowly we start to lean more of our weight onto the extraordinary visionary sense of self, because it works better, it's more fun, more interesting, and it doesn't go through so much suffering. So we lean more and more towards it. And pretty soon we find that we don't need that ordinary self anymore. "I don't need ordinary Joe anymore, you take him." And so we can transform -- and improve -- our ordinary self. With that extraordinary sense of self we are prepared to engage in alchemical, mystical journeys into other states of consciousness. The thought of it does not overwhelm or paralyze or frighten us anymore, because we're now coming at it from a more transparent, self-dissolving and fluid sense of self -- and that's what the virtual body is.

The virtual body is the lightest possible sense of self that still has any semblance of being a self. It's a register; it's a home address. In terms of the identification process, if you really want to know the real "I" that is the deity when we're merging with the ideal image we've chosen, and we're trying to develop our virtual body, our virtual body is not the image of our body as whatever ideal we've chosen, like White Tara for example. That virtual body is actually the blissful openness intuition, the freedom and luminosity that comes into my mind when I'm blissful enough, and I remember to let go of suffering. I can let go of suffering when I remember that my suffering is self-created, and I don't need it -- and then I have a freedom experience which is blissful. That freedom experience is my real

self, the "I." When I imagine that blissful freedom as inhabiting the image of the deity -- White Tara, for example -- I say, "this is my body." But the "I" that has that body is the blissful openness experience. That's the real deity. The body is just like a package, an address. Pretty far out, don't you think?

Part of the purpose of developing this pure sense of self is to stop suffering and experience joy. That's like when you are around the Dalai Lama, and you feel his joy, and you feel joy, and you wonder, "what's he on?" Right? He's happy, joyful and free, he's really happy, joyful and free. And he's not particularly all puffed up with himself, pious or whatever. He's really having a good time. And yet he is the ruler of six million people who are actually not having such an easy time, and he's still joyful. How is he doing it? He's practicing embodying this pure positive energy and awareness, and this pure vision of his potential and the potential of us all. And that allows him to radiate joy. As Tsong Khapa quotes from the Five Stages (page 514, Sustainable Happiness):

Free from existence and nonexistence,  
A well-formed heroic altruist appears,  
As if reflected clearly  
In a flawless mirror.

When you look in a mirror, you see yourself and it looks like you. You take it to be you but it's not you. That's the metaphor here: it looks like you have a body, but you really don't have a body. You're really a mind.

Endowed with all the best forms,  
This body that always fascinates



Should be shown to the good disciple;  
That is called "self-consecration."

Tsong Khapa explains, quoting from the Esoteric Community Process (page 514):

Meditate sheer diamond  
In body, speech, mind scepters,  
Elaborating body, speech and mind  
Become like sheer diamond.  
By lights of blazing scepters,  
To the extent of a hundred leagues,  
You shine, the personification of joy,  
Adorned by every ornament;  
And the gods Brahma and Rudra  
Are never able to behold you.

So, it's like you learn this yoga, you get this yoga down, and you have this inspiration. It's the yoga of inspiration. We all have it in us. But it is buried deep down, under a crust, a pile of stress and fear and negativity and trauma and self-protectiveness, and so very little joy comes out. It's like what happens to the energy of a child when that child grows up and has experiences. You can sort of see the child in there somewhere but it's all heavy now, it feels heavy, because of all the stuff, of all the trauma and stress and suffering piled up on top of it. The process here is about unburdening the fundamental spirit that's still there. Because that inner child, that pure joy is still there. In fact this inner child would be a lot happier, have a lot more fun now if it could use your body and your mind, and you could do all those things it couldn't do. We can do all those things that we couldn't do, but we don't have that fundamental innate joy. So how do we get

to that? How do we shift our sense of identity over to that joy so that we go at life from a really positive place? That's the yoga here. So, what is the practice?

You have to be able to get to the fundamental dissolution of the freedom of mind. We have talked about the inner and outer elements for that. We went through several tools and techniques -- for example the inner fire, the diamond recitation, deep inspiring breathing, breathing blissfully with vase breathing, connecting your breathing with bliss energy and positivity. We also talked about the "inner kiss," learning how to bring intense loving interest and attention, or attentiveness, to what's going on in your body and mind; and then the "compression" for etching the transformation into your nervous system. Those are all inner tools. You may use visualization as an outer tool, for envisioning a partner; you may also have an actual partner.

What do you do after you have those tools, and you have this experience, and you start to come out of it, and you want to practice the virtual body? The first thing you do before you go into meditation mode is you make a resolution: "I'm going into this altered state, I'm going to dissolve my sense of self, I'm going to roll around in the ecstatic space and openness fearlessly, and then, when I come out of it, I want to emerge in the form of my virtual body." That's the first part of the practice: you make a resolution, just as if you were going into lucid dreaming. For lucid dreaming, before you go to sleep at night, you prompt your mind, you say: "When I start having a dream, I want to remember that I'm dreaming and I want to envision myself as my deity. That's the practice of dream yoga. And the practice of virtual body yoga is another version of dream yoga, only it's the virtual body you go into.

The second part of virtual body practice is to check your virtual body. There are 12 similes to do that. Again, notice that this is not some sort of mystical experience where God speaks to you and you just take it on faith. In this case you are going to test the authenticity of the virtual body. There are checks and balances to fulfill. You can call it "science," or whatever. Like an astronaut flying into space and having a checklist to make sure all is on course, in this inner journey there is a checklist to make sure all is in order as well and we're on track. In this case there's a list of 12 similes to check. The list is in my book, on pages 513-514. Here are some of them, to help you recognize your virtual body:

It's like a magical person, an illusory person, like a Mickey Mouse -- as if created by magic, it's a body made of subtle-energy mind;

like the moon's reflection in many bodies of water, so it can have multiple appearances at once, it can appear to many beings or for many purposes;

like a hallucination -- it looks as if it's there but you know it's not real;

like a mirage -- shifting all the time with conditions;

like a dream body, or an echo -- made of neural energy and mind;

like a fairy city, like going to OZ, right? It appears to have a natural and social environment, but it doesn't;

like an illusion refracted on a gem, with multiple images appearing from it;

like a rainbow -- luminous, insubstantial, made of all energies;

like a lightening bolt -- sudden, evanescent;

like a bubble -- insubstantial.

like a mirror image.

Three of these similes are most important. The "mirror image" which is said to relate specifically to the understanding of emptiness that is the Truth Body, or Dharmakaya. You can meditate on the facts, as you're looking at your image on the mirror and you ask yourself, "What if that image over there is not reflecting me, then what am I?" It's a very interesting meditation. You can really go beyond your ordinary sense of identity if you do this kind of practice.

The "rainbow body" is like the Sambhogakaya. The rainbow is about joy and bliss. The rainbow also represents the harnessing of the five primary energies; rainbows in this culture have five colors.

The "virtual body" is like the moon, like the Nirmanakaya, or Emanation Body. Like the moon that can manifest in many bodies of water, it can manifest in many places.

Another wonderful thing about this virtual body practice is, if you're just "Joe" you can only be over here, in one spot; whereas a virtual body can reach out and connect with many minds, like the moon reflecting light on multiple bodies of water.

The Dream Body is also a frequent simile. Anyway, so you check against these similes. The way this actually works is, when you get to the freedom of mind -- the ultimate objective clear light, the ultimate metaphoric clear light -- and you start coming out, as soon as you come out you're on stage, a stage called self consecration, what some people also call the virtual body stage. You take your virtual body, this new translucent self-dissolving body, and you re-immense it back into the dissolution experience of clear light, and you do that continuously, using the six mergers and the three seals. We talked about these different altered states

of consciousness. Whatever experience you have, you use it to purify, because the virtual body that comes right out of the freedom of mind is not a pure virtual body. It's an impure virtual body. It still has some taints of your old identity, because it's actually influenced by the mental image you use to realize emptiness. There are still taints of affliction, and they attach to that old residue of your mental process. You have to purge that too. This process is likened to "purging a jewel in a fire." You're burning the crust off the jewel. And that's the stage of the virtual body. Eventually it becomes pure enough so that when you go in for the last time you have a direct, unmediated experience of clear light. That's when you have the actual objective clear light. It's not metaphorical anymore. You don't need a mental image to check it against anymore. You just get it. This is it.

So now I'm translucent and radically open and so is reality. I'm not different, I'm not 'here' anymore; translucency and radical openness, that's what I really am. That experience brings you to what's called the Clear Light Stage. Some people call it the Manifested Enlightenment, or the Illumination Stage. Now, for the first time, you have a so-called pure virtual body. When you come out of that clear light, your virtual body is relatively free from taints, actually not totally pure, not yet, but pure enough to be called pure.

Now you have the raw material of a new body and you have the raw material of a new mind. You just have to work on bringing the two together, a body and mind that will be ecstatically connected and totally open, totally joyful and devoid of any alienation or defensive sense of self. This is the last stage, it's called the Learner's Integration. You're learning how to integrate the virtual body and the clear light mind. You end up with a particularly extraordinary mind-body experience with all things. At that point we're practicing the Mahamudra. Up to

now we were not practicing Mahamudra, not technically, in terms of the language of the system. From the practice of the Learner's Integration we're learning how to practice Mahamudra. Then, eventually, at the end of that stage we enter the stage of the Master's Integration -- and that's when we become a Master Altruist.

This is so far out! How did these people come up with this? It's so precise. In one sense it seems obvious, right? Doesn't it? I mean, maybe it sounds like "maybe somebody else experienced that, but I'm never going to experience that, I couldn't relate to that..." But on another level it does strike us as kind of obvious. If you think about it, this is about learning to take the best out of your body and the best out of your mind, and put them together in a new way of being. And that is the best version of you. It's really sweet. And it's beautiful, right?

This goal about being the best we can be is not unique to this tradition. What's unique in this case is the way in which everything is clearly spelled out, as a causal, step-by-step process. Tsong Khapa and others in this tradition defy us not to be hopeless or pessimistic. They say to us, "If you get this, then you can do that; and if you get that, then you can do the other thing, ... And here's the map. Just do this and that ..." It's both challenging and empowering, and it all follows the law of cause-and-effect. I'll read you one more passage, from the Concise Five Stages, quoted by Tsong Khapa (pages 516-517):

By the energy of the furor-fire yoga, (inner fire yoga)

The mind objective is great bliss.

Uniting dream and magic as one;

You should merge the three between.

Addictions become the path of wisdoms.

The three between are the transition out of a deep meditation back to life, the transition out of deep sleep into dream, and the transition out of death into the afterlife. They're all the same in this practice: you can treat all of them as raw material for this practice. And with that you can build whatever you want.

The addictions refer to the purification process we talked about last semester, the process of purging the layers of the subtle mind. This tradition, like our modern neuroscience, says that appetites, instincts and traumatic memories live in the subtle subconscious, or sub-cortical, layers of the mind. So, if we understand how to engage those layers, we're in a better position to purge our consciousness of the old imprints and patterns. And so we let our addictions become the path of wisdoms, that's Tsong Khapa's advice.

Knowing to separate instincts from luminance,

The luminance is the mind freed from its self-protective instincts and its traumatic patterns, and it's light.

Then (you) should perform the conducts.

The conducts are the "seal" practices of sublimating the passion.

Abandoning the evolutionary body,

(You) will attain the diamond body (gem-like body).

The concentration of self-consecration

And likewise the state of clear light,

Distinguished as cause and effect,

That is to say, when you have the virtual body, and you purify to a point, to the tipping point when it 's pure enough to immerse it in the bliss, it becomes the cause of the objective clear light. The bliss is the material cause. When I lose this body, when I let go of this virtual body, and I experience my blissful openness and interconnectedness with all things, then I realize clear light. So the virtual body is a cause of the clear light.

Indicate the two realities.

That refers to, first, there is the virtual body, which is the conventional reality because it seems like a person, it seems like something familiar, it's a symbol. And then, the emptiness is the ultimate reality. And, just as Nagarjuna said, we realize the ultimate reality by relying on the conventional. He says this specifically in the Guhyasamaja teaching, but it's as applicable to all these inspiring images. In other words, by relying on this image we can generate the virtual body that is our ideal. And this gets our foot in the door, so-to-speak, because the virtual body is a cause for being able to realize the clear light. Once you've got that, you're on the integration stage, and you're practicing Mahamudra.

By the process of self-consecration,  
The clear light transperence is attained.

In other words, by practicing this virtual body you attain clear light Then, the last thing we have to do is to celebrate the virtual body. We'll close with this:

The aim of beings may sometimes be (realized)  
By the process of self-consecration,  
Which yokes consciousness with (pure) wind-energy  
And releases corresponding (intuitions like) light rays.



Just as from clear stream water  
The fish leap up so swiftly,  
So from the universal void clear light  
The net of magic expresses itself.

The word magic is Bob Thurman's translation, and I think it's an excellent translation. It brings out our fascination with joy, the way we're attracted to joy. And that's why he calls it the "net of magic," or a network of magic. When the Dalai Lama speaks, we listen. Why? He's just one person, one human being. As he says, "I'm just a simple Buddhist monk." Right? So why do we listen to him? Because there's something extraordinary about his state of mind. About the way he says things. Not to mention what he says. He's a net of magic, good magic, that we're drawn into. We're drawn into the truth, we're drawn into joy through the practice of someone who can embody that joy for us, so that we can appreciate it, without fear, without taint, without any covering or veil. Right?

There is a question about what is it that we take, what makes it into the afterlife, after we die. Is it what we have "sealed"? Does this practice teach us about sealing and what is sealed is what we take into the afterlife?

This technology is the source of the whole Tibetan science of death. All of the death and dying literature, of the bardo, like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, is based on this technology. In this there is the understanding that death can be an opportunity: if we don't have the means to access our primal layer of consciousness in our lifetime, then the death process itself will provide access, if we're prepared. If we prepare for death using this practice, it's said that we can substitute death for the Truth Body. We don't really die, we become our Truth Body. We experience our blissful open interconnection with all life. But

reincarnation is not a simple concept. Karma is not a simple concept. You can understand karma when you are very far along toward Enlightenment.

At a very simple level, I think of karma as that energy that remains after the brain appears dead as defined by our own measurements; there's still experience occurring. It is important to think about the quality of that experience and not just "throw ourselves to the wolves" as it were. That energy that remains in such deep levels can express itself, or appear to us as terrifying demons. The essence is, we don't want to be prey to those demons, the demons in our unconscious. We can debate whether there are demons in the world or not, but we know for a fact that there are demons in our unconscious. The Tibetan Book of the Dead teaches us how to prepare our mind to see through all those projections of demons, how not to relate to or identify with them after we die, to identify with the extraordinary positivity that we build through practice when we are alive. If not, when you die you are prone, in the uncertainty of all the transitions from one state of consciousness to another, to be sort of co-opted by your demons. This practice can give us some better angels, more powerful and effective angels to interfere in our death process and keep away the demons.

Now, after that, exactly where does the consciousness go? ... This reminds me, one of the questions the Buddha refused to answer was whether Buddhas exists after death or not. So I'm not going to answer this question. But I think it's important to prepare for sudden experiences, like death. The fact is that when we prepare for that last moment, for the subtle moment of truth, we're also preparing for all the subtle moments of truth that precede that very last moment. How it works exactly, or how it helps when we're dying is not relevant; what matters is

that it is helpful to train our mind and to free our mind, to open our mind on the way.

A question that comes up frequently is about the effort and the commitment that it takes to practice, this have this type of life. How the Dalai Lama can have all of that responsibility and somehow keep steady and radiate joy, constantly, is fascinating. It is one thing for people in monasteries to commit to the practice. But that's different for most of us with very busy lives. Most of us have a tremendous amount of demands on our time; most of us cannot stop six times a day to check into the practice.

You see, there's an escape clause there: do three in the morning and three at night if you're very busy; break things up in pieces you can chew. The Mahayana tradition, the tradition of universal love and compassion that swept across India and Asia from the second century on, is about taking the practice out of the monastery and into the world. And the ultimate Mahayana tools, the power tools of the Mahayana tradition, are these esoteric tools we've been talking about, the Vajra tools. They are designed to work in the world. They are designed for extremely busy people who are living a role in the world. They are such effective mind tools that if you can master them, you really can get leverage. We come to the world with all our stresses, and then the information that we face in the world is overwhelming. It's understandable to feel overwhelmed, in a very real sense, because it is a lot to absorb, it's way more than we feel we can handle. But what we can handle and how much of it actually depends on our subjectivity.

Suppose we upgrade our subjectivity so that we are better prepared to handle the world and all its information, the world in its infinite complexity. That requires some technology, some methods and tools. And that's what this practice is, a kind of training to be able to joyfully have the energy, the presence of mind, the training to not go negative, or not get overwhelmed, but, rather, to engage -- and embrace -- life.

Very busy people do this kind of practice. Of course there are some people, some monks who do it for their whole lives. But a lot of Tibetans in the Dalai Lama's tradition are involved in government, or in management positions, running monasteries, administrative positions, they're all busy people. But they keep these practices. These are the kind of practices that lead us to do more with less.

In a short period of vajra practice one can create more forward momentum than other practices because the techniques are more powerful. Instead of working from the top layers of our mind, trying to influence everything by letting it trickle down, slowly, all the way down to the base, vajra practice is more like a grassroots movement: you go down to the base, all the way down, to the factories, so-to-speak, or the green houses of your mind states, and you change things from that level. That's the value of these techniques, they provide access to, or give leverage over the basic mind-body activation process, or state. The words sometimes are difficult. I'm not sure what the right word is here, but at some point there's a palpable change in that the level of difficulty is really reduced. It's not that it becomes simple, necessarily, but you do get degrees of leverage from having these practices. You learn by practicing, the more you

practice the better you become at it, so it becomes relatively easier, at least at times. It's that kind of learning process.

I think that the challenge is to have a template for practice and keep track of what's really effective for you. You need discipline. After a while, according to all Buddhist teaching traditions, after reaching a certain level of mastery, that level becomes the new normal, and it becomes natural. Then you move along the path from that new normal. And so it continues. I also think that the learning curve is the hardest at the beginning.

If you look at maps of meditative practice, and the kind of mind states that are required to train the mind, in the beginning the control that we use in trying to tame our mind is forced. There is an added degree of oomph, of some force that we need to get the process going -- hopefully it's not a violent force, but a friendly force. And, to use a traditional image, as we accumulate "merit" that's positivity, positive energy, positive chemistry, and we accumulate wisdom that is openness of mind, freedom of mind, then we climb a hill, or a mountain or whatever, and then things get easier as we go, as we move along the path. With practice a new level becomes a new normal, a new natural. That's possible because these qualities that are normal are natural. What's not natural is to stay on them all the time without getting thrown off or dragged into negativity again. That's actually very natural. This is a skill, a learned capacity with quite a bit of back-and-forth movement, until we are able to stay out of the mud and in the groove, the positive, permanently.

Chapter Thirteen:Firing the Jewel: Purging Your Spirit Body in the Crucible of Clear Light

In this chapter, we have the good fortune to be exploring the fourth Perfection Stage, sometimes called the "illumination stage" or "manifested enlightenment stage." It sounds like a good thing to be exploring, right? One question is, if there is a technology for human beings to become liberated and reach enlightenment, are there technologies designed especially for other beings, like gods and demigods, the higher beings? Cosmology is always a lot of fun. I was just talking about cosmology this morning, and how you get different answers using cosmology, because it is a relative thing.

The traditional view according to the *Abhidharma*, which is like scientific psychology, is that beings can have five or six possible incarnations, or possible forms of life, depending on how you count them: hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, titans, and gods. Humans and animals are considered sometimes one and sometimes two different kinds of beings. Of all incarnations, the human incarnation is the best for this kind of way. This is somewhat consistent with the traditional Buddhist view of the Middle Way: it is best to be in the middle -- not blissed out and not too miserable or freaked out. The middle is the point where we have enough distress to want to change, and enough comfort to be able to progress. So it is said that that is where we humans are.

There are a couple of elements in the scientific psychology that we have mentioned in previous classes. First, how literally is this really meant? Or is it just metaphor?

One teaching says it is a kind of psychological typology. It sees these different forms of embodiment as manifestations, or crystallizations, of different kinds of afflictions. And so a being who is driven by anger lives in a hellish way, always fighting; a being who is driven by greed lives like a hungry ghost, always wanting and never being able to feel satisfied. While each human being has his or her own mix of afflictions, desire is the main affliction among humans, it's common to us all. For animals the common affliction is fear; for titans, envy; and for gods it's pride.

Another teaching, which I find more interesting, makes the distinction between two forms of embodied life: one in coarse physical bodies, like humans and animals; and the other in subtle bodies, mental bodies, like a dream body, a mentally created body -- meaning bodies that are made of mind and energy.

The way I interpret this cosmology is that beings that live in the hell and god realms are actually humans like us, or other kinds of animals, who on a subtle level are experiencing the world as Hell or Heaven. In that case, this cosmology is more like sociology writ large, or bio-psychology writ large. As we all can see and experience, there is quite a variety of life, certainly in both animal life and human life. So "gods" are extremely lucky people; and "hell beings" are extremely unlucky people. We know these types of people exist.

We cannot say for sure what the right answer is, if this kind of practice is only for human beings, or for other beings, like gods. I think that this type of practice was designed mainly for humans. Anyhow, whatever the case may be, one of the points I find interesting is that, among human beings, women are better at Tantra practice, because female bodies are better designed for this kind

of practice; and so their progress happens more quickly. So to all the women in the audience, count yourselves as lucky ones.

Another way to think about that question is, what are gods? and do gods practice the tantra? Well, in some states of mind we might be like gods. For example, some people live in exalted, sort of aesthetic or intellectual transports of certain kinds that may feel like being gods. Still, if you look at the essence of it, the best incarnation, the best outcome is to have a human body. Animals are not considered to be fortunate or equal, as they cannot practice the dharma at all. That is this cosmology, that is the way it is.

As I mentioned earlier, we can see the human incarnation as the most useful because it is the middle of the six forms of life. In general, being in the middle is ideal to get the widest perspective. In this kind of practice, we are looking at the ways in which we can be either socially connected or disconnected. For example, people can be socially disconnected, out of touch, because they are too comfortable, maybe part of "the one percent." Or maybe they don't have the mindset. Also, some people are just too overwhelmed to think about others. But this is a Mahayana practice, this is about working together, growing in interconnectedness mode, growing in the awareness that "I've got enough confidence to improve my own state of mind and I am starting to pay more attention to other people's state of mind."

And what do we do about the predicament that we are all in this together? That is another conversation I was having this morning, in the context of global warming, whether there is hope or not. Of course, the New York Times was compelled to publish two articles about the impossibility of hope, maybe because that kind of news is catchy, so for the Times it is a good idea... Anyhow, I was



talking with a woman who works in international development. It is clear that if the wealth in the world goes up that does not translate into everybody having a better life or better access to necessities. But she was talking about climate change in particular, and about how, with global warming, more financial wealth, more material wealth can make all of us worse off, because of the ways we consume and produce things.

In Buddhism, from a Kalachakra point of view, we humans are going to make it, because our survival instinct and intelligence will overcome the madness. One of the things we can all do to contribute is to work in the development of a positive vision. We are all part of the solution, and we are all part of the reason for the lack of it. It's important that we keep trying to have a positive vision about how it could work out, and not just to look at the billions of ways that it may not work out. The Buddha's view is that people have to have a certain level of comfort to develop. That view, that knowledge is rooted in his own experience of rejecting the luxury of his childhood as a prince and going to live as an ascetic, and realizing that asceticism is too much on the other extreme. His mind was better when there was a balance, between comfort and challenge.

There were some monastic traditions in India at that time, like the Jain, that were more hermetically and ascetically motivated. Then came the development of city states and the urban mercantile civilization, when the marketplace began, in India, Greece and China. And what Buddha did with the Buddhist sangha was locate them in the middle, in the suburbs, not in downtown where businesspeople worked, but close enough so that people could go there and hang out. The sanghas were not out in the woods either, where there was no material standard

of living and people lived on nettle soup, like Milarepa. They were not to be ascetic.

And so it is that simple, there is a middle way where we have enough comfort and our basic needs are met, so that we have leisure time for practice. In that sense, the aim of bringing the whole planet to a certain level of abundance is a very important step to connecting everybody, so that we are all aware of each other, which is important, even though it may cause disruption. But that's is not a problem. That's what I was saying to the lady working in international development. The aim of bringing everyone to a certain level of comfort and abundance is important for everyone to be able to develop. Even if it causes disruption.

Disruption is not a problem. The real problem is that some people feel that they need to accumulate infinite amounts of stuff, so much so that it slows the process of enough abundance reaching everyone. It also gets them stuck in hungry ghost mode. But in the long run, from the Buddhist point of view, if you look at the individual trees it may seem we are heading for disaster, but if you look at the full forest it looks like we are not heading for disaster. Health and education standards have been rising in most developing countries, and so has income. And the fact that the standard of living of developing countries is going up, even though there are horrors associated with development there, is a positive sign.

There are more people on the planet that have the material comforts of the wealthy countries, and many more that are working hard to get there. But maybe material comfort is not enough, maybe more material accumulation is not the way to go, given the negative impact it can have on nature. The thing is, some of us take longer to ask those questions; and more of us are driven by a sense of

hunger or competition, more so than connection and collaboration. The Buddhist view is basically that we won't forever waste our time and energy in mere survival mode if it is not necessary. If there is not enough comfort and survival for many of us, at some point we will all start wondering why some of us think we need so much more than we have.

We know that there is enough to go around. And yet many of us are still hungry and think we need more. Eventually we start to ask ourselves, why is this not working? Why is it that I get more, but more is not making me feel happier, it is not delivering more happiness? From the Buddhist point of view this turnaround is not impossible. We humans are remarkable beings. Maybe the fact that the Buddha became enlightened is not so much due to how special he was to begin with, but more a reflection of how amazing our human nature is. We're talking here about a view on life that is 2,500 years old. Now, 2,500 years seem like a long time, especially for some things. But in the history of humanity it 's like an eye blink, and maybe we are waking up now, maybe we are catching up now, maybe it will take another century or maybe it will take 20 years. And hopefully, whatever amount of time it takes, there still will be enough time before we smoke ourselves out of the planet.

The Kalachakra view is that we should be happy that we have at least this much of a shot at making this planet work. And there are many factors to be grateful for, even in the bizarre, globalized, internet digital age we are living. Some of these factors could work on our favor if we think carefully about how to use them. Of course, some politics have to be taken into account. That is appropriate. So let me segue here. In this context it is appropriate to discuss the

outer condition of the world, in order to be connected -- socially, naturally and environmentally connected.

This connection is needed even if we are talking about manifested enlightenment. Some people may think that we should forget about the world outside of us because enlightenment is an internal event. Interestingly, it is not what this tradition says. This mystical tradition is basically Buddhist and basically realistic. However, their view of reality is not ours. Reality in their view is the world as a place where we can all be happy together in community, and at the same time each of us can be happy individually in our nervous systems. In any case, whatever reality is, we are better off if our minds are connected to it. That is the sense of enlightenment. Enlightenment is not going inside to some pure realm that is separate from this reality, where you can spend your days doing things like staring at your navel. What we need to do is to free our mind of obstacles that keep us from perceiving reality exactly as it is. And if you understand that, then you understand that the path to enlightenment is not just an internal process -- it is internal and external, it is individual and social, environmental, microcosmic and macrocosmic.

Tsongkhapa talks about the moment of enlightenment and gives internal and external criteria to check its authenticity. We talked about the virtual body last week. We talked about getting a virtual body that connects our vision of how we could live in the best possible way with our pure passion; and how that passion gives us the energy to actually pursue the vision. So when we do that we have three internal requirements. We talked about them. One is our vision, which is our dream of who we can be, our best mental guess; two, we have the spirit of positivity that is the closest to pure joy that we can connect with; and three, we

have a positive identity, we are identifying with our peak experience, with our subtle intuitive creative sense of what is truly possible for us.

Those three internal factors are necessary to move forward. They are necessary but not sufficient. There are some external factors we need as well. One is we should receive instructions from a mentor, the best qualified mentor, because to really have this experience one needs a hand from the outside. And the dissolution process has to happen at a certain time. Remember the call of the three between: dream state, post-meditation aftermath, and the bardo, or near-death experience, or post-death. These are specifically connected with a time of day and times of the year. In short, this deep internal and subtle process takes place in a social context, in connection with the community, the teaching and the person who guides you and helps you stay on track. And there's the connection also with the natural processes, through time.

The notion of realizing the clear light as manifest enlightenment is the gateway to the fourth perfection stage. If we get a clear enough and pure enough virtual body, if we get our bliss right, we get rid of the garbage, of our tainted identity patterns, and instinctive patterns, at one point we will be transparent enough. We'll talk about the illumination that comes to us then, and we'll see that we are actually part of reality -- we are not self, we are reality, we are a bit of reality. And we can know it. That is "suchness" or "thusness" from the word Tathāgata in Sanskrit. Tatha means thus, or "like that" and gata means to understand, to become, or to go to. Tathāgata is one of the epithets of a buddha; it is one who has become one with reality. You may say, "But how is that possible, you'd have to die to get there ..." Then you are thinking that reality is outside of

us. But what about if we are reality, the reality of everything, all of one fabric, one quantum soup?

Anyway, so we have these internal and external conditions that lead to manifest enlightenment. It is supposed to happen specifically at pre-dawn. Why does it have to happen at pre-dawn? We can talk about why later on. And it has to be taught by the best mentor, the most reliable mentor. We need the mentor because for the transmission of the teaching of the virtual body and the teaching of the clear light we need words. The initiation into these mysteries, or whatever you want to call them, is through hearing the words from our teacher. And then, "Oh it is like that!..." And we get permission to do this, our teacher grants us permission to practice.

That is another reason why cats can't do this kind of practice. They may seem enlightened, but they do not have the subtle analytical capacity to see through the raw material in our fabric and pick the right threads, pick those "golden threads" from which we can make the best self. It is language that allows us humans to do that.

So, with those internal and external conditions we have what it takes for transmuting our compulsions. To experience the "great bliss" that allows us to disarm, or melt, the virtual body has to be pure. That means that we have gone through the three first stages of the perfection stage and we have now the freedoms of body, speech and mind. And so we are relatively purged of our garbage, of the dualistic stuff we identify with. And then comes the very special purification process of increasingly connecting that with the pure, fine experience of the bliss, of blissful openness, of that orgasmic state of release, of let-go,

especially letting go of the defensive patterns, the compulsive traumatic patterns, totally.

There is one more element needed, and that is the conjunction of subject and object, of the practitioner and reality. And internal peace and external peace have to happen. The sealing thing in this case, the seal on the virtual body is the performative statement that "I am \_\_\_\_" and you fill in whatever form you want to achieve enlightenment in -- Buddha, Ms. Buddha, fierce or peaceful, green, yellow, blue, ... whatever form you want to be in to take enlightenment. And so you say, "I am the real Buddha," understanding that the "I" refers to my vision of myself, my dream of potential that widens with joy, with a sense of exuberance and possibility. Self-ascription is what consecrates us in the virtual body stitch. It is the courage to say "This is who I am: I am this clarity, I am this joy, that is who I am." At this stage of the clear light this is a consensual discussion: I say "I think I have experienced the clear light" and my mentor says "yes, you've got it". This consensual pronouncement is part of the checks and balances in this practice. "I have achieved it!" and "yes, you have achieved it."

If you look at any of the forms of Buddhist Tantra, or the Heart Sutra for example, Avalokiteshvara has this conversation with Shariputra and the Buddha is silent until the end, when he says "Excellent, excellent;" "sādhu, sādhu" in Sanskrit. The sense of the validation from the tradition means that we are also jiving, we are dancing together with the tradition, and not only with the cosmos. Connecting with the tradition is connecting with a lineage, a community of human beings who have a certain set of values, of integrity, of standards, of realization. There's this very lovely koan I really like. It's quite famous. The student is speaking to the teacher: "Teacher, I am breaking out." "Break in" says the teacher. There is

the sense that this is not about a person going into themselves, it is about a person getting out of their little bubble and getting into reality. And that reality brings them closer to others, closer to the lineage and the tradition, and in this case closer also to nature. It is said that it happens at the time of the pre-dawn sky, in which there is neither moonlight nor sunlight, and there isn't darkness, there is just a kind of luminosity, of translucency -- that's the closest natural analogy to consciousness, the sky before dawn, which isn't strongly influenced or biased or inclined to any particular kind of light, from the moon or the sun. The pre-dawn sky is a natural metaphor. Now, whether you can reach Buddhahood only before dawn I don't know. But that is what they say. Maybe we can reach enlightenment in the middle of the night? Maybe, I don't know.

Could that also be a reference to the dissolution of the boundaries of the conscious and the unconscious, to the blurry line between them? There is something very interesting about this point. If you look at what the "clear light" state represents, it is not normal waking, it is not a Cartesian state of consciousness. It is something intuitive, it is a subtle intuitive state, a kind of state that, maybe, is shared with our pets.

There is an element in the Buddhist cosmology, one of the things I have been obsessed with, and I think there is some Tibetan scholarship about this, and that is the similarity between the four "immeasurables" and the four "formless absorptions." If you remember, in ordinary Buddhist psychology there are four heavenly states that correspond to the four boundless emotions, also known as the four immeasurables -- love, compassion, joy and equanimity. And the four formless absorptions are infinite space, infinite consciousness, infinite nothingness, and beyond conscious and unconscious.



I talked about the primal awareness as an awareness that does not have much content. If it doesn't have content, then it doesn't have the same quality of form, the binary clarity, the same high resolution, the clear definition of a reified perception, because we are not using symbols and concepts to exaggerate the differences between things, or to enhance the contrasts. On the contrary, we want to tune into the ambiguity -- and the connectedness. In ambiguity there is connection. The ambiguity in a statement like "fish or foul" suggests that fish is like foul, that somewhere there is a connection between the two. It's the same with whether we are male or female, one with or separate from nature, conscious or unconscious. There is something in ambiguity that allows us to experience, or to intuit the subtle connection between things. I think there is something like this going on here, an enlightened being's consciousness isn't like the consciousness of a normal being.

The Dalai Lama sometimes says to his audience, can you imagine being conscious if you were like an ocean, if your mind were like an ocean, can you imagine if you were conscious of everything from the ocean's surface to its floor?... The whole idea is to get us to use one capability that is maybe uniquely human, and that is a kind of radical openness that is not tied to any one platform or fragment. The fact is that our normal brain is constantly generating platforms as we go through every day through states of sleep, dream, awake. And, basically what this is saying is that we are dismantling those platforms and that we have one integrated platform. Dan Siegel has a lot to say about integration; he distinguishes between eight types of integration, and we want to integrate them all, we want to integrate what our nature has fragmented. He uses the term "transpiration" to describe that expansive feeling that integration brings, making life richer. That is part of what we are talking about, to have a quality of

consciousness that can expand, closing the distance between the differentiated analytical part of our minds and the very, very intuitive, kind of murky, or the translucent parts of our minds, those parts that are just formless, or open. I don't want to get too much into this kind of metaphorical excursion, or speculation, but the point is that it helps us to get a qualitative feeling of the reality. This is not just being enlightened in this particular way or awake in that way; that would just be like being awake in a normal way. This involves a very different experience of reality that is much more gestalt, in that it brings in levels of intuitive openness that we normally pack into our unconsciousness because we don't want to know.

From a Buddhist point of view, we all have a natural capacity to intuit that we are connected to all life and are part to everything. But our self-protective mechanisms say "I don't want to be connected to you, or to you, because you are going to hurt me, or take something from me." It's like Dustin Hoffman in the movie "Midnight Cowboy." He is coming down the street and he walks right in front of a moving taxi cab. He slams his fist on the hood of the cab and yells to the driver, "hey, I'm walking here!" That is our self-assertion saying "I am not you! I am me!" or "I am not it" or "I am not that, I am here! I am this! I am me! I am separate!" However, there is a part of the mind that does not feel threatened, that has the intuitions of connection. The thing is that we normally disavow them, store them in our unconscious, these longings for connection. But there is this other way of being, of not being afraid of connections, of recognizing the oneness in connection and openness, which is more accurate, actually, because the truth is that we are more connected than we are disconnected.

At this stage, what is this gateway? What is different about this clear light as opposed to other clear lights? What is different is that, because we have let go of

the taints of self-protectiveness and self-alienation, we can actually dissolve into the interconnected reality, into the radical openness within us; and we can experience that interconnection without a concept. We can experience it directly, we can have a direct mental perception. That would be a direct yogic perception, it would result from our training. We are having a deep intuition and we've done enough checking to know that we can totally trust this intuition. We can actually sit on it, we can embrace it and dive into it.

And so it is that we have for the first time a direct realization of reality, a direct intuitive experience of reality. In that sense we are at the same point of a bodhisattva at the tenth station of enlightenment. We have become bodhisattvas. We've had a direct experience. Our bodies are different. We are no longer alienated, separated beings. We can see that we are not different, we are part of something bigger. We really see what we are. I am not Joe, I am not this body, I am a bit of life, a bit of reality. The experience at this point is intuitive, we have this intuition of "thatness," of the real, precise, ultimate nature of things. We have it because our minds have been so purged and opened up that we don't have any more obstructions, we are not afraid anymore, we are not making distinctions anymore, we get it, we are here, we are becoming "it", we are "it!" As they say in the Upanishadic traditions, "Tat Tvam Asi" in Sanskrit, "You are That" or "That you are." That is a famous pronouncement of the Upanishads.

Then, after we experience that radical openness something special happens. When we emerge out of it, and we reach clear light things don't stop, the cycle of life is still on and we are still part of the cycle of life. Our minds reboot, and we reemerge in the same sequence that we have reemerged in the past, but now the body that comes out of it, this body with a connection to joy

and openness, or whatever, assumes the form of the deity. And now we know we own it, we own it as our joy body, our spirit body, a body that is no longer impure. It is recognized as pure enough to be called pure. It is not 100 percent, it is 99.44 percent pure, enough to be considered pure. This body is also called the "diamond body."

Today we are going to discuss the practice of taking the gem inside and purifying it in fire, using the diamond as the preferred metaphor for this stage. The diamond body is the pure virtual body that we had before. It was pretty good, it was connected to a joyful blissful release, it wasn't just a concept, and we owned it. But now that body is pure, it has been liberated from any disconnection from reality. With that purity the release and intensity of our joyful connection is even greater. And so it is called the diamond body.

The diamond body is the body of the Buddha's own enlightenment, while he was in a concentration called the Vajra Samadhi, the diamond-like concentration. And so we are having a similar kind of experience in our new illusion body, a body that is said to be like a diamond.

Tsongkhapa explains this stage using beautiful imagery. I'll read to you a passage, on page 521 of "Sustainable Happiness":

"Wherefore by this reason, by this stage of clear enlightenment, one truly attains clear light, the taintless nature of one's body, speech, and mind becomes universal voidness -- the reality of transcendent wisdom that purifies the three consciousnesses, and that thought-free and inexpressible condition is the realm of Nirvana, formless, hard to know, delivered from

evolution and birth, extremely clear like the light of the sun, moon, fire and jewels."

It sounds like poetry, doesn't it? So that is the clear light. We recognize that our body, speech and mind are open, not cut off. And we stop holding on to the symbolic constructs, the nightmares and the traumatic fears that we have identified as "me". And out of that comes the new body, the pure illusion body, the pure virtual body. There is a passage that I have read to you once, from Tsongkhapa's "Five Stages" but I want to read it to you again now:

"The aim of beings may sometimes be (realized)  
By the process of self-consecration,  
Which yokes consciousness with (pure) wind energy,  
And releases corresponding (intuitions like) light rays,  
Just as from clear stream water,  
The fish leap up so swiftly,  
So from the universal void clear light  
The net of magic expresses itself."

Has anybody heard about the jewel net of Indra? This net, which is made of jewels, is a beautiful metaphor for the holographic consciousness, for the interconnectedness of all beings. It is particularly important for Buddhism in China. The notion is that the jewel net of Indra is a net of jewels connected in such a way that each jewel reflects all the other jewels. It's a hologram, it is a holographic network that is infinite. That metaphor is brought up here and the idea is that the virtual body is like a jewel, because it has the clarity of knowing its own emptiness. And like an image can sometimes be reflected in a jewel, an image of us, our body image, is reflecting spirit, or joy. That is the virtual body. It

is at that point that we know it is actually a reflection. Now we know we are not this form, we don't have a material body, we are this subtle energy process.

And then these two things resonate with each other: the clarity of the clear light is reflected in the jewel, and the jewel connects us to the clarity of the clear light, like in an intimate relationship. This is a simple natural metaphor of light and gem, and the way they connect, with resonating light and image of the gem. The illusion body is described as a gem that attracts people, that reflects the clear light and likewise its clear light itself is reflected and magnified through the gems, so there's this other beautiful element when the gem connects with other gems.

And so we understand what the diamond body is. The diamond body is not made of diamond. It is made of the bliss chemistry and the bliss energy in the nervous system that opens us up, that makes us transparent and reflective. When we are in a blissful state our minds and bodies are open and reflective. This is why we evolved the forms that we have, forms that have so little armor. We took that huge risk so that we could be connected and open to reality.

Once we get into the bliss part of our network it all opens up, the part of us that can be totally connected, totally transparent and open, comes out. That is what the diamond body does so that we can connect with others. Each nervous system that is in that state becomes part of the hologram of the community of beings who are open, transparent and connective. And then we become like the jewel net of Indra. Each one of us reflects the total interconnectedness of all things within our nervous system. And making that interconnectedness possible is the fact that we are all open, really open to the light. We purge the gunk off our nervous system, and that allows us to reflect the light that shows us, that allows us

to feel that we are one, we are all part of one spacious and luminous stardust, or whatever you want to call it.

The practice at this stage is we take the jewel that we have, the diamond-like, gemlike, pure illusion body, or magic body, the new sense of ourselves as really transparent and really connective, really open, and we keep immersing it in the fire of clear light, dissolving it over and over again into the fire of clear light. Each time it comes out purer and purer. And so the difference between the two bodies becomes less and less, the two bodies become more and more integrated. That is the process by which we are clearing all the cognitive obstructions. We'll come back to this.

Now, for immersing and purifying the magic body we use two methods, or two yogas that are called, using Bob Thurman's translation, "holistic gathering" and "concentric dissolving." These two methods are like a refinement of two methods I described to you earlier, kiss connection and compression. In our meditations I have asked you to do something like this every time. In the "concentric dissolving" we send our awareness out -- light goes out from our heart into the world and then we dissolve the world -- the natural environment, the social environment and so on -- into us, and we own our position as a macrocosm, and our macrocosm is containing the whole universe, we're saying we contain the whole universe in ourselves. In "holistic gathering" we take our mind, our body, our mental investment and mind-energy investment, and we dissolve it, from the crown and the toes and into the heart. We gather the body into the heart and then, ultimately, we kind of immerse that into the clear light. When we are dissolved, down to a drop or a single syllable that is like an exclamation point at the heart, that goes into the clear light, or, metaphorically, "the drop goes into the

sea." And that is the way that you actually train your mind to let go of the sense of difference and distinction. You desensitize yourself to the fear of loss that keeps us from being open. Normally we think if we are totally open something bad is going to happen, so we hold on to our forms, our separateness. But we have to desensitize ourselves. Through training we can dissolve into total openness, and we will not be destroyed. In fact, we will feel relieved and open, and joyfully connected.

In his "Lamp to Illuminate the Five Stages" Tsongkhapa describes some of these practices, often using Nagarjuna as a source. I want to read to you a passage, on page 522:

"The disciple who has gotten the private instruction,  
Then learns the two kinds of yoga:  
The process of holistic holding  
And of serial (concentric) dissolving.  
From the head or the feet,  
Until it reaches the heart center,  
The practitioner should enter the truth limit (the clear light)  
That is called holistic holding (gathering).  
First having made the animate and inanimate  
(Environments) into clear light,  
(The practitioner) should make (her/his own) nature such --  
That is the (serial) dissolving process."

Whether you put one dissolution before the other or the other way around does not matter. The point is that you have the two: the outer dissolution of your sense of the universe as an externality; and the internal dissolution of your sense



of yourself as an entity. Usually the way we practice is the reverse of the way that he describes: we dissolve the external world into ourselves and then ourselves into a drop. That is how we usually do it. And then there is this beautiful, this lovely image, at the bottom of page 522:

"As breath on a mirror  
Completely dissolves,  
So the practitioner should enter the truth limit  
Again and again."

So, the way you do this is, you have your deity body, which is an image, a body image which is charged with joy, with bliss. You begin to melt that body, melt the body image all the way down to a dot. Life breath continues, and then, beautifully, it begins fading, dissolving itself, the way breath evaporates from a mirror, in a natural process. If it doesn't get destroyed, it goes into the atmosphere. That is the idea.

This reminds me of my dear friend Mary Reilly Nichols who loves to say "Love your breath, I do." So feel the love, like you want to hug someone you love. But do we ever hug ourselves? That's what this is like. Feeling the joy of touching within ourselves, touching our nervous system and resonating with the goodness of the luck of just being alive and having a sensitive human body. Then we are ready to take it to a deeper level. Tsongkhapa cites from "The Four Goddess Dialogue:"

"Always abide in the center of the heart  
Endowed with the blaze of great light  
Up to reaching the nine (the ninth dissolution,

the dissolution of the clear light),  
Abiding in the forehead and down to the foot soles,  
Compress all that into a drop,  
Abiding into the center of that hub."

Some of this may sound familiar. One of the methods that Tsongkhapa mentions is called the "Triple Stack." This is like a set of nested Russian dolls. The idea is that your body image, the virtual body, is not two-dimensional but it has depth, with three dimensions, like body, speech and mind: First, your outer body image (let's say you have chosen White Tara) is the "commitment hero" personifying the diamond body; then your inner body at your heart is a "wisdom hero" (say a little Shakyamuni Buddha) that is your wisdom hero personifying wisdom speech, or diamond speech. So Tara is your outer body, Shakyamuni is your diamond speech, also called the wisdom hero. And third, at his heart is the "concentration hero" which is the exclamation point, or the drop, or the stroke in Tibetan writing, which is a line, and that is made of light.

The outer body represents your commitment to become a Buddha; it's your aim, just like Babe Ruth pointing over into the left field and saying "that's where the ball is going to hit." When you say "I am going to become a Buddha!" that is your "commitment body." Maybe you want to become Tara, a buddha in the form of a woman, to bring nurturance and to liberate all sensitive beings from fear. Or you may choose to become Yamantaka, a nine headed bull, with 34 arms and 16 legs; or you may choose to become beautiful Manjushri. Whatever form you choose is your career path, you are going to become that. That is the commitment hero.

Then the inside is the "wisdom hero." What is your sensibility? What is your intuition, the intuitive energy, the motivation that is guiding you? That is the wisdom hero inside. Third is the "concentration hero" that is where your mind is, what is your real understanding of reality. When you are pushed, what is your consciousness connected to? What is it grounded to? That is the core.

So you melt your three bodies, one into the other, like a set of Russian dolls. You melt into the exclamation point, carrying the three bodies, or the three syllables of the diamond recitation representing the three bodies, OM, AH, HUNG. And the three syllables contain the three sounds in one breathing cycle: the sound of the in-breath, the sound of the pause, the sound of the out-breath. And that contains the very rhythm of life and awareness itself.

And so, when you dissolve, you are dissolving your sense of life as a separate entity, you are dissolving the sense of your breath rhythm as a separate thing -- and that is how you purge the gem. When you come out of that, you will be a little clearer.

Let's compare this process to the process that Shakyamuni went through to achieve enlightenment. Shakyamuni went out into the world, into this city. He saw suffering in ordinary living beings and he was horrified. He decided to renounce the luxury and become a hermit. But a hermit's lifestyle was not the way to go. "There is something else I need to understand the rhythm of life, the human condition." All the demons swirling around him could not break his motivation, and his concentration. The notion of the Vajra concentration is that it has the indestructible motivation to ride away the great demons of the afflictive emotions that push us around: the demon of identifying or reifying our mind and body as a separate thing; the demon of the fear of death, the fear of annihilation or loss of

separateness; and the demon of narcissism, an infantile demon, the demon that wants to be the child of mommy's and daddy's universe, the child of God. We have to get over that childish position in order to become enlightened from the grown-up position that says "I am reality, I am my own parent, and I am not the center -- we are all the center, all life is at the center.

Tsongkhapa describes Shakyamuni's enlightenment in a way that is just like the fourth perfection stage. I read on page 525:

"By the diamond-like concentration,  
At the time when gray (predawn) light arises,  
He is adorned in the qualities of the magic body (or diamond body),  
Such as water-moon and hallucination.  
(That is it seems to reflect everywhere  
and it seems translucent, transparent.)  
He conquered all the devils,  
The Shakya savior (the protector Shakyamuni) well attained  
The realistic unexcelled intuition,  
Saving and helping beings  
He taught all things' thatness."

Thatness means the precise nature of all things, radical openness, radical interconnectedness. I think I have said what I need to say. Maybe I said too much. So that's it, the diamond in the rough. It shows you the science part of it. Tsongkhapa brings the Gelugpa tradition, which is true to the beginning of Buddhism, to recognizing Shakyamuni's effort to demystify religion, to demystify religious experience. He believed that anyone could replicate his journey and achieve enlightenment. His feeling was that God was often found lacking for the

job. Everyone needed to become more enlightened, everyone needed to learn the steps by which one can do that.

When Tsongkhapa talks about the steps at this fourth stage he talks about these two things, the clear light mind and the virtual, gemlike, body, and how they become the mind and body of the master altruist. The clear light mind and the virtual body become our new mind and body in the same way that the bodhisattva, the enlightened altruist, assembles the Truth Body and the Form Body, which with compassion become the Truth Body of wisdom and the Form Body of compassion. In this subtle level clarity is wisdom and bliss is compassion. Reading on, from the bottom of page 525 (observations and explanations in parenthesis):

"Therefore, until you have meditated on the direct realization of the import of thatness with the orgasmic great bliss, you will not attain the truth body (of objective clear light) that completely abandons the objective (cognitive) obscurations."

Those obscurations are like veils on the capacity of our consciousness to see reality as it is. There are two kinds of veils: emotions that disturb us, that leave us feeling threatened and cloud our mind; and cognitive obscurations, biases and preconceptions that are all based on self-protectiveness. It's when we can't see how things are because we are too busy being "me."

The fourth and fifth perfection stages can be compared to the bodhisattva's career going through the ten stages building, accumulating and perfecting altruism and compassion. That is how the bodhisattva overcomes all the veils that cloud the mind. In the fourth and fifth stages of the Tantras we do the same type

of work. The big difference is that the bodhisattva stages can take "three incalculable eons," as one generation becomes kinder and gentler than the one before over time. In Tantra all of that is collapsed in two stages, creation and perfection, that can take as little as one year, or a few years -- or a few days or even a few hours. That is how powerful this practice is.

Tsongkhapa says that if you have the great orgasmic bliss, then you have the tool of objectivity that can know clear light directly, that can know the objective nature of reality without a veil of conceptuality or bias. In order to do that you need the virtual body, the virtual body is the gateway for the normal mind to move into reality. I go on at the bottom of page 525:

"Therefore, until you have meditated on the direct realization of the import of thatness with the orgasmic great bliss (in the form of the virtual body) you will not attain the truth body ( of objective clear light) that completely abandons the objective obscurations. And until you have obtained the magic (virtual) body from the mere wind-energy cultivated by the objective clear light, will you not attain the learner's form body..."

This means you must have the raw material to make a truly blissful translucent being in order to realize enlightenment; and that comes from generating the virtual body out of the previous clear light, one is the cause of the other, the virtual body is the cause of the clear light. Reading on:

"... The union of bliss and void and the achievement of the virtual body are the ultimate essence of the unexcelled vehicle and these two are two extraordinary causes of the two bodies (of a master altruist)."

In other words, these two together ripen and become connected as the mind and body of the master altruist in the same way as the wisdom and compassion of the bodhisattva becomes the altruistic being.

This system is so beautiful we can get lost in it. It's like a labyrinth. So it is important to go to the simplicity of what they are saying. And that is that, inside each of us there is a clarity, a transparency and openness, from which we can make the self on. That is our new mind. And within each of us there is this pure joy that is not tainted by self-protectiveness or trauma. This is pure and unadulterated joy, creative joy, of life. And we can create a body out of that. So, we have to put this body and mind together, and own that as our new self. We can generate these experiences in a matter of years or hours with this practice, instead of incalculable eons. We can become fully altruistic beings because we have had the experience of resolving our needs. We don't walk around anymore guarding ourselves or worrying about ourselves, or gathering nuts for the winter.

In my view, even though it seems that in the Four Year Program we cover three different practices, or three different vehicles -- the theravada, mahayana and vajrayana, dedicating one year to each of the first two and two to the third, and breaking out the third in two different levels -- I think that when you actually get to the practice you will see that the roads converge and the three vehicles become one path. That happens when you focus on dissolving your consciousness into pure awareness, and synchronizing your breath rhythms and your inner energies and chemistry. You practice that until you reach a very intense level of concentration or focus, one that allows you to disarm, and take it all in.

You could see that as very similar to the practice of vipassana, in the more advanced stages of deep mindfulness, in mindfulness of mind focused on being

aware of the breath and of the purity of the mind, the natural clarity of the mind. Those of you who know the Tibetan tradition certainly see how it's connected to the Nygma Dzogchen teachings. When they talk about the natural mind they talk about it in very simple terms: a mind that is spacious and clear, and primarily free from constructions. The Mahamudra tradition is similar. The Zen tradition talks about it in terms of Satori. All these traditions talk about the realizing of emptiness, realizing that compassion and emptiness, or connectedness and emptiness, are together, in that when you take off all the trappings and the hard engine of Buddhist practice, and we try to be in our bodies and minds, and in our nervous systems, in a very different way, the difference between the practices when we get to this point starts to dissolve.

I was talking with my friend Tenzin the other day, I was congratulating him for teaching Theravada. As we talked he mentioned several of his Theravada colleagues who are practicing Tibetan dzogchen. Theravada, dzogchen, and so on, it is all Buddhism. So, assuming it is a final common pathway, the central cleaning house, then the difference is in how you get there. And so the essence of the Tantric path is that it can get you there more quickly and more profoundly if we bring our imagination into it and we have a very strong mentoring bond. The crucible of that will change radically our perceptions of who we are and what reality is. We have here an elaborate and sophisticated sense and system of content-full meditations that prepare us, that bring together the highly active symbolic minds that we live in and the experience of formlessness and radical openness. Some people talk about this system providing a kind of bridge, or a boat, to get to that state.



My view as a teacher interested in a variety of methods, I think that this Tantric practice will eventually become more popular in the West, because it is like us, it is very busy. It promises to give us the power to make a difference in the world, in action, in concrete, passionate and embodied action. I think that in a busy world like ours we need a busy meditation. Some people would advise to block the business out to counteract it, like a homeopathic cure. The capacity of having a passionate, dynamic system of practice will suit our newly civilized race. Because we have only had civilization for, what, maximum 1200 years. Remember, when Gandhi was asked, "What do you think of Western civilization?" he answered that "It would be a good idea."

From the perspective of the history of civilizations, some other civilizations, like Egypt, the Middle East, Greece and so on have been around for 5,000 or 6,000 years. In the West we were busy fighting and conquering people until the 8th century, when Charlemagne converted the French to Christianity. From my point of view it's like the Tibetans worrying about the Chinese for their survival. They believe it is their bad karma, because they used to go every 100 years or so and conquer them and threaten to overrun parts of China. We are like that, we are like the wild nomadic peoples in the big picture of civilization. And we are going to want a wild practice that is passionate and intense. It will work better for us. It will be extremely beneficial. But we have to revise the arts of it so that it can conform more to the Western imagination. We have to redo the art and the ritual so that it feels more synergistic with our culture and perspective, at least to some extent. But maybe I am wrong, maybe everybody should be dropping out and going to the Insight Meditation Society in Barre for six-month retreats...

Isn't this world a wonderful world, with so many different avenues to choose? Different roads for different folks? In the practice of the Mahamudra you really see how Tantra is really Buddhism, it's just a different vehicle to get to the same practice. It's the same crucible for the same reaction, only with different chemical ingredients, and a different kind of mindset.

Chapter Fourteen:Marrying Pure Bliss with Perfect Clarity: Becoming a Master Altruist

So, we are set to commune with the universe, our partner. It sounds like a good idea right? Sit, have a sip of tea with the universe. We are now at the fifth and last leg of the perfection stage of Tibetan Buddhist Tantra practice. As I was reviewing this, I was realizing, "oh boy, this is truly subtle, very subtle actually, when you get to this level..." It's not that it has not been said all along, but it gets subtler and subtler... We are now in the fifth stage, which is the stage of the "learner's integration" or the "learner's communion." What is communing, what is being integrated, are this tangled body and mind that we find within ourselves through practice. And, through glimpses of experience, we have identified a couple of things within that we can make into a new body and a new mind. We have identified this kind of clarity that can be a real basis for a mind that is transcendent openness -- some people call it immaculate openness -- or openness that is unbiased, untainted. And we have identified also the bliss that can be the basis for a new way of being in the body, and that is safely, lovingly even. With this we can blissfully take up space in the planet, instead of in fear and all the other ways that we normally take up space.

And so we found clarity and bliss as the materials for our new mind and new body. This particular tradition is very explicit, and quite rigorous about going from step 1 to step 2, and so on. Everything is defined so you can actually check and make sure if you have found your virtual body, and if so if it is still impure or pure, and perhaps even how impure. If you really want to get granular, you've got the map to do that here, and we've gone through the journey, in a way. According to that map we are getting to a level of refinement that at this point is best to take

as an aspiration, take it on faith that the subtleties speak to something that is relevant, and that we can actually taste them.

Specifically, if you remember when we went through the third freedom, the freedom of mind, which is the pivotal part in our odyssey, the journey away from our familiar forms of suffering, we got through the purging part, and then we got to this pure essence of who we could be -- at least in the beginning of that, and at least an approximation of it. Then, inspired by that vision of who we could be, we emerged with a new and creative sense of embodiment, with the potential to be embodied as an impure virtual body. Basically, the virtual body is the sense of ourselves being able to live from a truly positive joyful place. Let's just put it that way. And we connect the virtual body with the ideal archetype of what we can do with it: If I were joyful all the time, this is what I would do, this is the kind of person I would be, this is the kind of world I would create. That began to happen at the beginning, in the first stage, the Creation Stage. Then, through a gradual process of immersing, of dissolutions and death experiences, and letting go of attachments and biases of our normal alienated sense of self, our stressed-out, hurried self, we gradually were able to move into our final immersion, our final experience of immersing the spirit into a total clarity, total oneness, total openness. And we finally got over the weird parallel fantasy that we've been taking for the real thing. Think about it, how convinced are we?... We go through our lives convinced that "I am over here, and everything else is over there." We never think about it. We go to science class since whatever young age, and we are taught that the body is made of matter, and it is part of an environment, and our mind is made of thoughts, and ideas, and memories and narratives that are part of a social and cultural environment. But we never stop to think "Am I really here while everything else is there? Am I really separate from everything else, or am I

part of everything else?" We can have all kinds of positive and negative thoughts, we can freak out, we can fall apart and be reborn, but we never stop and question that. And that just tells you how tightly held this fundamental self-protective grip is, this instinct that has our minds always on the look-out, looking out for Number One and on the look-out for this little bit of life I like and that other one that I don't like; Number One is special, different from everything else ..."

Of course, in a sense every one of us is special, and every bit of life is unique and beautiful. But on another level that is just a psychosis. And the worst part is that once we say "This is me, I am over here, I am walking here, I am living here..." everything else becomes "not me." It becomes kind of a threat, a confrontation waiting to happen, it becomes "What is going to kill me, what is going to hurt me?" And so we separate ourselves from everything else. This is like being kicked out of the Garden of Eden, this is what that act in the Bible represents, it's Paradise Lost. We can no longer feel part of anything, connected, one with anything, because we are too busy being separate -- because feeling separate leads to feeling threatened, and frightened, and so it's time to self-protect.

Now, imagine that, through this practice, we could gradually understand that it is not true that we're separate. We have had enough science to know that it's not true. We're all made of atoms, all of us and everything physical, that's a big thing to have in common. We know that. And now we are trying to go beyond the intellectual level of understanding, and to feel, to sense that it is not true. The way we do that is in meditation. As we try to experience the separateness clearly it seems obvious at the beginning, but after investigation it doesn't seem that obvious. And gradually it no longer seems like the obvious fact, the massively

obvious fact of our lives that "I am over here and everything else is what is not here." Actually that is the same as the essence of Cartesian philosophy, "I think, therefore I am." But from a Buddhist point of view it's like nobody ever really taught Descartes to think. If he had known he would have been able to dismantle and dissolve that sense of separateness and certainty of ego, of identity and differentiation. And then he would have been able to understand something, and that is that we can put together the mind with the body, and that he could have put together his self with the universe.

And that is what we are trying to do in this practice. Once we have gotten the clear light that is an actual clear light, we got the virtual body. This body is impure, it still has an umbilical cord back to "me." When we are willing to cut that umbilical cord then we can see what it's really like, in the world. Just admit it, we are part of something bigger. What is it like? Let's put not only our toe in it, let's put our whole being in it, dive into it.

We dive into it and we see that it doesn't annihilate us, in fact it actually feels kind of nice. Not that I have had that experience per se. But in my practice, in my simulations it seems to be getting nicer and nicer rather than worse and worse. So maybe I am on the right track; or maybe I am fooling myself, ... Anyway, we get to that place and we feel that sense of "I am really part of the universe" -- and that is our clear-light mind.

Then, when we reemerge from that we have these two things: we got the virtual body, and it reemerges from the real clear a bit less impure, because the real clear light has the power to purify. And because, in some sense, we have been purifying that body all along; that body has already melted, dissolved, in the clear light. And it's as if it comes out as a diamond body, a pure virtual body. But it

is still not totally pure, there is still something to do. We are still in the fourth stage, and that is the stage between having the virtual body and the real clear light. At this point we are mainly purifying our emotional afflictions.

The way we experience distress is by getting sick. We all know this. And this is most upsetting when we get hurt, angry, shamed or pissed off, or whatever. All that goes through the first part of the purification process. We overcome what we call affective or emotional blocks.

When our mind is disturbed we can't see very clearly, we can't let go of things very well, we're kind of on guard and holding on. And when we get to the final stage, when we have the diamond body and we are immersing repeatedly in the actual clear light, at some point the two come together. Out of that experience we enter the fifth and last perfection stage, the stage of the "learner's integration" or the "learner's communion." At this stage we are really working. Until now our mind and our body seemed separate, right? Our new mind and body seemed separate, it felt like "in here is my new mind and over here is my new body." But at this point the new body is so transparent that it is just the other side of the new mind. We have dissolved any sense of separate physical embodiment. And the new mind is so connective that it feels like it's the other side of our new body. The two are together. But there are still taints. That is the point where we are at. That is when Mahāmudrā comes in.

So, at the end of the last stage our new body and new mind, these two new levels of our being, are together. We experience clarity when we are open, and joy when we are ready to live in a much more integrated way. That is our new real body, we own it, and we start to live in it. Eventually they come together, they feel like married together. And so at this stage of the "learner's communion"

we're learning how to see more and more. Like a good marriage, it is a good situation for learning how to be closer to the other side of our being and eliminate the subtle distinctions. We'll come back to these distinctions; at this point I just want to give you an overview.

So, in short, in the third stage we go from the mind isolation to the clear light. With the mind isolation we get the impure virtual body, and then we start to dissolve that body in the clear light, and we enter the fourth stage. At this stage we practice working together with the impure virtual body and clear light on eliminating the obscurations of the subtle afflictive emotions that make it hard for us to totally connect the two. And, gradually, clarity becomes the flip side of pure bliss. In other words, they decenter us from those experiences, and then, when those come more powerfully together, we work on the "leaner's communion." At this final stage we are removing the cognitive obstacles, like the sense that my body is different from my mind, the sense that "this is my body, because it seems so here, it seems so solid" and "this is my mind, I am Joe at dinner, tea, whatever, floating around in there ..."

If you start to analyze your body, and you dissolve your body over and over again, confidently, not fearing that it has to be so separate, after a while the strong feeling of the material body seems to be more like a bubble, and you seem to be able to see right through it.

The elements of the mind-body distinction that get clarified in the fifth stage are the distinction between mind and body, the distinction between subject and object, and the distinction between superficial and ultimate. So, imagine what your experience would be like if you couldn't tell your mind from your body, if you couldn't tell the subject from an object, or if there was no difference between the



surface of things and the profound depth of things. What would that experience be like?... It would be different, it would be really different. And that's where we are heading.

Tsongkhapa said that, in this final stage, there are twenty-five forms of communion, and twenty-five different ways to overcome the sense of duality. And he mentions four: The difference in the life cycle of existence between survival and transcendence; the difference between the physical and the immaterial, or what is matter and has form and what is immaterial, transcendental, mental; the difference between the self- consecration of the mental body (what I'd like to be, the subjectivity of I like to be "me") and the clear light (when I don't feel that sense of subjectivity); and the difference between superficial and ultimate, or between appearance and real emptiness, which means seeing through appearances, seeing what is not apparent, what is deceptive.

I know this is hard to get a handle on this. This is doing emptiness meditation on a very high level. Has anybody read any of Nāgārjuna's works, maybe the *Mūlamadhyakārikā*, the Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way? I encourage you to read it. There is a good translation by Jay Garfield. That translation includes one of Nagarjuna's famous teachings, which goes something like:

Everything is real and is not real  
Both real and not real  
Neither real nor not real,  
That is the way of the Buddha."

This is the way he teaches, through antinomical opposites. If you have read any of esoteric material you may see similarities here. The idea is this: because the way our minds tend to reify things, the most primitive element of our suffering is that there is a part of us that wants to cling to forms. Forms feel familiar, they feel solid, they feel like something we can get a handle on. That is why we think of ourselves as our body image. That is why our identity is the picture on the passport. But there is also a part of us that is very immaterial, very formless, and we don't know what it is. It's like, "What is that about?" As long as our minds are run by that self-reifying tendency, the tendency that values what has form, and clings to what has form, we can't appreciate what we really are. And what we really are is "such stuff as dreams are made on" as Shakespeare wrote. We are open, and fluid, and creative, and constantly transforming. The healing process is based on emptiness, emptiness is described as the best medicine. Nāgārjuna describes it as the cure for all views. But emptiness itself is not the view. Those who take emptiness as the view, the Buddha's pronounced incurable. Because normally when we think "emptiness" we think of a void, of nothingness, a big black space, or a black hole that is going to swallow everything up. But that is actually an artifact of the self-protective mind that clings to form as if it were us because it feels safe and familiar.

How do we see through form? For example, we know we all have bodies, we all know we are going to lose them at some point, and we don't like to think about that. We don't like to think, "well what else am I?" And we don't think "I know I am going to lose my body, so why do I get so attached to it? Why don't I get attached to something else, something that is much harder to lose, like the mind?..." We go through this process of using the experience of emptiness, that is the recognition that when we look carefully there is not such a big difference

between things that have form and things that lack form. As the Heart Sutra says: "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form." Or, to be more precise: "Matter is emptiness, emptiness is matter, matter is none other than emptiness, emptiness is none other than matter." That sounds like hogwash, mystical, metaphysical, paradoxical poetry, something like that. But what it means is that the difference is not as big as we think. We think that there is an intrinsic difference, an independent, permanent, fixed difference. We think that "this is really my body for all time, morning, noon and night, that's it." And that other space, that thing that my body is like in the deep sleep state of mind for example, that is not me, that is not my body, that is death." That is what we think. But when we look at our body, and we examine it carefully, it starts looking like something else.

When I took anatomy, and histology, in medical school, we all got a big textbook. At that time the big thing was electron micrographs, photographs with showing microorganisms, cells and other very small things like that. There were micrographs of different cells, they looked like alien subway tunnels, or like deep space. They are beautiful, but they didn't look anything like me! It was like, "is that really inside of me?" It looks more like another universe. It's like the images in that movie I've mentioned before, about traveling through the human body, from the 1960s, "The fantastic voyage." This reminds of Roseanne Roseannadanna in old Saturday Night Live episodes, quoting her Granma Nanna's wisdom: "Roseanne, life is like a fruitcake: at first it looks so juicy and good; but when you come close to it and you look really carefully it has all those green things and you don't know what it is!"

This is the Nana RoseannaDana take on emptiness: When you look at anything do it very carefully; if you actually do that it doesn't end up looking

anything like what it started as! When I looked at my body in histology class, I couldn't find my body. I had a similar experience when I went to the anatomy lab, and I looked at this dead body, maybe of some wonderful generous person who donated their body, but to me it looked like a bunch of tangled meat. And I never went back. I studied from my anatomy textbook and I did just fine. The point is that I couldn't bear the threat to my sense of self, or my social sense of empathy, or humanity, something in the way we were treating this thing that used to be a person. I don't know what it was, really, maybe some social taboo had been violated, or it was just my self-protective instinct. But, for whatever reason, I got the heck out of there. And I didn't go back.

Maybe I didn't know better. Because when you look at anything carefully enough, it disappears. I mean, whatever you thought it was originally just disappears. That is what emptiness means. It doesn't mean that there is a big space and we are going to fall into it. It doesn't mean that we do not exist, that we are all in a big sleep and we are going to wake up as zombies or something like that. It doesn't mean that. It is like Nana RoseannaDana says, look carefully, because you don't know what it is. So let's start looking carefully. And then the reality seems to be that our minds are powerful experience generators, powerful perception generators. They are the most powerful virtual reality generators ever developed. They are amazing things. Their main purpose is to enhance the differences between things, based on two premises: first, "I am much more important than anybody and anything else, so I look out for number one, me!" There is a real evolutionary purpose to that: if I don't look out for me and I am more interested in what is over there, I may be eaten by a bear. But that threat is very exaggerated at this present time. And the second premise is, "I am interested in happiness and I am not interested in suffering; I just want to go

where the happiness is, I don't want to go where the suffering is, I am not interested in that. Happiness is really, really good. Pleasure is really, really good. Suffering is really, really bad."

And of course life is not like that. Happiness turns into suffering; pain turns into transformation and healing, it happens all the time. And the purpose of emptiness is to act as universal solvent, it's the opportunity for change, to help unstick our minds from the binary processor within us that is always trying to trick us, to get us into an existence based on those two premises. It exaggerates the difference between things. For example, you and I look pretty much the same. If any alien landed on Earth and saw us, it would know that there is not much difference between you and I, we are both the same kind of thing; the same would happen with a biologist and a medical doctor, human biology is the same, basically. But we think of ourselves as very different, unique. That difference is an exaggeration. We are not as different as we think. And by clinging to that concept of differentiating myself and putting a stamp on myself in a certain way, I feel as if I have something to hold on to that seems to satisfy and legitimize my self-protective instinct. That is the reification of duality and reification of self-concepts. That is what our distortion of reality is all about. That is what keeps our minds covered up, and tangled up.

So, how does this practice work? By generating a very positive, very capable, inspired sense of self that comes with a built-in self-dissolving mechanism. We practice building up and dissolving that sense of self over and over again, to the point that it becomes very hard for us to see that new self as solid, and experience it as solid, in the same way that we experience our afflictive self, the self with the compulsive identity. Building up and dissolving is the

method for realizing total clarity and openness. And that becomes the way for jumping out of our ordinary minds and into reality itself, and see that our minds are reality. We see our minds objectively, from the outside in, as an object. And when we look at ourselves in that way we really see ourselves, we see that we are pretty cool, pretty beautiful, we humans are pretty wonderful living things, like flowers. And so we are pretty cool.

And how do we see everything else in the world? We see that we are part of something much bigger than our own self, and all the other beautiful beings around us are equally real. They have equal value and equal beauty. And so now it is hard for us to get carried away by apparent threats, and continue to waste energy overprotecting ourselves, or over-accumulating, or over-seeking, or over-reaching, always in search of more and more satisfaction. Because now we are over it, we are out of it, we are out of that race.

Now we have that blissful sense of self that is self-dissolving, both cognitively, because the self-image has been critiqued from the beginning, and emotionally, because it is joyful, because through yoga practice we have connected with the positive affect experience that is naturally expansive, and naturally open, open to love, bliss, care, joy, peace. They are all naturally open. We do this in yoga, we expand our heart in openness.

There are two ways to trick our evolutionary minds. One, we give our mind a new prosthetic self to help us get outside of the fear, and to get rid of the armor. We did that in the Creation Stage. And two, we learn how to go back and forth from our ordinary self to our prosthetic self, dissolving that sense of self, losing it and finding it. It is like playing peekaboo, you lose it you find it. And in this way we overcome fear, the fear that builds attachment, the fear that somehow feels

like I have to hold on to it. We no longer fear that "I only live over here, this is my place, the only place for me." We start to work on our awareness, Our awareness becomes connected to its expansive, formless, open nature, and we become capable of connecting with everything.

When we have profound experiences, reflecting on them can affect us in very powerful ways. So when you have powerful experiences, you can use them to change in powerful ways -- for example, normal changes in life that are intense experiences, like childbirth. I was with Emily at her place the other day, she was playing with her son, and she turned to me and said: "It's so weird, he wasn't there, and now he is!" Just think about that, what does that say about us and what we're made of, the fact that we can make new life, a new person, a whole person? It not like making a robot, or an artifact, right? Tsongkhapa says -- and I'm reading from page 527 of "Sustainable Happiness:"

"Therefore by such skylight illumination, from the store of luminances that remain the same reality as voidness, all the world realms are illuminated. The actuality of the indestructible diamond body, inseparably and indestructibly together like a shadow and its subtle elements, without transmigration and uncontaminated, liberated from all instincts of addictions, accomplished in mastery of whatever one wishes, like a fish leaping from water; or like suddenly sleeping and awakening, a form of a reality body of supreme joy arises; such a form being named 'great master altruist' and 'freedom' since one is definitely freed from all bonds of cyclic life."

That is just a brief poetic lovely statement about the subtle body, the diamond body. But here's what I was looking for. This is Tsongkhapa explaining the work at the fifth perfection stage (page 526):

"Before attaining the objective clear light, when the magic body achieved from the five energies light rays is present, the mind is not the clear light of the same taste as the bliss-mind ultimate is present, there is no superficial reality body that serves as the magic body. Thus, there is no communion since these two (mental and physical, superficial and ultimate realities) are merely alternating."

So even at these advanced stages we still can't see clear light and virtual body together. It's like we can't think of our mind and body together. Think about it. When you think of your body, your body seems to be very real. But when you think of your mind, you think of space, a kind of a dark space somewhere, or light space, or whatever. You don't think like you do about your body, right? That is a trick of your dualistic mind, enhancing the difference between things. That is still operating, even up here at the last stage. That intensification of bias shows you that mental constructs are still at work. If mental constructs weren't at work, we would be able to see the other side of the clear light body, we would be able to see the clear light mind. Likewise when we look at the clear mind, on the other side we could see the virtual body.

So I am going to anchor this back in Sutric meditation on emptiness. Sutric meditation on emptiness is designed as an alternation between two equally noble, equally liberative mind states. The first one we talked about before. When you meditate on emptiness, when you take your normal mind and you try to free it, wake it up, shake it up, by examining something very profoundly. For example,



one day you might be doing whatever, and you have this experience: you break through your normal sense of your body being your body, or being an envelope, or this table being a table, and then the table, the envelope, and the body disappear! You have a deconstructive experience. You have a dislocation. It is like the computer just crashes. And this happens because you see that what you thought was "this" it turns out that "this" is not there. That is what they mean by emptiness. We are looking for one thing, but we can't find it. We are not finding the apparently real, apparently separate, apparently solid, apparently fixed, apparently unrelated thing. The "not finding" is the experience of emptiness. However, this experience lasts only for a certain amount of time, and soon we dislodge. It only takes a minute.

It's like when you meditate on your body. You dissolve your sense of your ordinary body, of having your ordinary body, you start opening up more, you feel more spacious and open ... and it is not long before your mind reboots, and there it goes, the self-construct mode is active again! The little homunculus inside your head goes up and there they are again, your body, your self-image, you think you know what you look like, and so on and so forth.

However, at some point at this stage, this time, there's a big difference: you just realized that it wasn't there when you looked for it. So, when you looked at it again, it was different, just like an illusion that you have examined. It's the same sort of thing when you submerge a spoon in water, and you are not thinking much when you look at it and you think it's bent. But you take the spoon out and it is not bent at all. You put the spoon back in the water, and now you know that, even though it looks bent, it is not bent.

Those two corrective experiences are called two separate things: one is called the "spacelike equipoise," when things suddenly are much more spacious and formless than we originally thought, because we have dislodged the mental formula that we were using to perceive them as limited and clearly separate. And then comes the "dreamlike aftermath." Maybe some of you recognize these terms? I mentioned to you that in the Sutric practice, in the bodhisattva practice, the mind training and all that, the "spacious equipoise awareness" is getting used to the fact that something isn't there when you thought it was there. It's when your body is not really your body, when you realize it wasn't as real as you thought it was. That is the basis for the enlightening mind, the "Truth Body:" you reboot and you realize that you are not as real a Joe as you thought you were, and so you can practice being a kinder, gentler person. You know the old Joe is not really you. And you know you can be a little nicer, and a little bit more connected to other people. That is the basis for compassion, for building the compassionate body. So, "spacelike equipoise" and "dreamlike aftermath" are analogs of what we are doing here. The two are sometimes called emptiness and appearance.

There is a beautiful text, a very important text, Tsongkhapa has in his "Three principles of the Path" that is a basic Lam-Rim text, and that Bob Thurman translated very nicely. It's in his book, "Essential Tibetan Buddhism" and it is only three or four pages long. But it is a very important verse where he says, "Appearance is inevitably relative, and the void is bereft of conviction."

What does this mean? "Appearance is inevitably relative" refers to the superficial reality: Every appearance can be looked at in different ways, it can be sliced this way and that way, it can be examined and analyzed in many different ways, because appearance depends on context. Moving on, "And the void is

bereft of conviction" means emptiness doesn't have a label, it doesn't have a brand. It is a freedom from something. It is a space, it is an absence, something we thought was there is not, like when you have an empty bank account that doesn't have a balance. It is empty. So this is the void, and it is valuable because it is bereft of conviction. Understanding the relativity of appearances is important.

Tsongkhapa says that as long as appearance and emptiness arise separately you haven't achieved the "right view." When the two arise inseparably, simultaneously and without alternation, when you look at an appearance and you see its emptiness, right there, then you are done with duality.

Tsongkhapa says the purpose of the tantric practice is to provide a quick path. Why is it quick? Because you can meditate on the causes of developing both an enlightened clear-light mind and a virtual, blissful, compassionate body at the same time. In the Sutra path, on the other hand, you have to spend eons meditating on compassion, practicing compassion; then you have to spend eons meditating on emptiness, practicing emptiness; then you have to spend eons putting them together.

So this practice is much quicker because in one meditation you can have the clear light mind, because you dissolve your ordinary body into clear light. And you can have a virtual body because you reappear in the form of a deity, right? In one meditation you can practice and nurture the seeds for both virtual body and clear-light mind. Now, here is a fascinating thing. Even in this practice that is supposed to be so quick, we still can't experience them together until the fifth stage. Our minds are still so either/or, so dualistic, that when we are experiencing our virtual body, when we are merging with our deity full of bliss, we are not experiencing our emptiness, we are not experiencing clear-light emptiness and

translucency of all things. And, vice versa, when we experience clear-light emptiness and translucency of all things is because our virtual body has dissolved into it and died into it, and so we are not experiencing the virtual body.

On this last stage we start to get it because the virtual body has become so thin, so translucent, transparent, pure, refined, that it's just on this side of clear light. And clear light has become so joyous, so vibrant and connective, that it has just decided to take on the virtual body; and the two have started to melt together into a whole body-and-mind. That is the communion practice.

In a sense it's obvious. Of course we have to have this combination, the virtual body and the clear light mind, or the joyful body and the radical openness and clarity of the world, that's what we need, and they are the best things inside of us. They are the best tools we have to commune with everything. Think about it. If you want to commune with another living being, what is the best mode to do it in? It is bliss! If you want to be open to another person's experience and feel totally unseparated from one with them, what is the best tool you have? It is the clear-light, radically open spacious mind. Those two things inside of us are what most allows us to connect: The bliss allows us to connect positively -- "oh it's you, ok!... And the openness allows us to connect in a free way, a receptive way: "I see what you mean, I can hear you, I can be in your shoes, because I am not in my shoes ..."

Those two things, the virtual body and the clear-light mind, are what most allows us to commune with the world around us. And that is why developing them, building a new way of being out of them and sealing them in this new way of being is the ultimate practice. It is the best practice to seal our connection with the universe and everything in it, to see that ultimately we live in the world, we are

not outside, we are not opposed, we are not partial, we are one with, part of, connected to, open to it. And that is when we've become an "objective self" -- to use the language of the philosopher Thomas Nagel. "We are trying to climb outside of our own minds" he likes to say.

We have developed an objective self that includes an understanding of our self from the outside in, and that is the understanding of emptiness. We seem to be so different when we look from the inside out, so unitary, surely an entity. But if we look at ourselves objectively we see that we are not. That virtual body is understanding ourselves from the inside out in the most connective of ways, it is the most connective experience within us that want us to engage, wants to help us engage. And it helps us develop this very positive sense of self.

One last thing about this. I have no idea if I am following my outline here. Probably not. But I guess that can be a good thing. I will say one last thing, interesting on many levels, interesting vis-à-vis the practice of the three bodies of enlightenment. Because we talked about converting the three parts of our lives, death, transition and rebirth, into the three bodies of enlightenment. That is converting death into the "Truth Body", transition or development into beauty or joy, or the "Beatific Body"; and life as the "Emanation Body" or manifestation of truth and joy. Those are the three bodies of the Buddha. One of the interesting questions about this practice is, how does it relate to our everyday life? Well, if you think of how weird this all sounds, how far that is from our ordinary experience, maybe we should be arrested. If a psychiatrist would come here he would probably lock us all up. But this is not designed to separate us from our ordinary lives. It is not designed to do that. It is designed to place us within the reality of ourselves, to orient us in relation to life from the very best location. That

means finding the very best materials within us for engaging with our lives. A beautiful way to illustrate this is in this practice of the three bodies.

In tantric language, the clear-light mind is the "Truth Body." The virtual body is the "Beatific Body" beautiful and joyful. And the "Emanation Body, where is it?

If you want to do this practice rigorously, if you get initiation and you do this on a daily basis, this is the way you engage your whole life into the practice: After you do your meditation and you come out as your virtual body, in the form of whatever your deity is, whatever form you want to help in, you take on that virtual body and you reanimate, you incarnate, you descend back in your ordinary body. Usually you do it from the crown down. So, imagine if you will, you become so different from your ordinary sense of self, from the identity of your coarse body, that now you have this body made of mind, of joy. And from that body made of mind, you imagine parachuting into your ordinary coarse body. You come to the crown and you dissolve in it. And there you are, just like Woody Allen in that movie, "Sleeper," up in the head and of course having some sexual fantasy ... Anyway, the point is you enter in your ordinary body as your mental virtual body, and your ordinary body becomes your "emanation body." Imagine if you could live within your ordinary body and think "I am not really this body, I am really this total clarity, I am really this pure joy, this body is just some sort of apparatus, a way to be, or a dream, or reflection..." Imagine if we could live life like that. Other people would still think you are Joe or whoever, they would still recognize you and say "Hi Joe, how are you?" But you wouldn't be the same person.

This is exactly what happens when people have very powerful transformative experiences that fundamentally change their nervous system, like

near-death experiences, and also more life-oriented experiences, like having a baby and raising a child, transform people enormously. They transform the nervous system, they transform the way we connect to others. Becoming a grandparent, losing a parent, losing both your parents, all these experiences transform us.

I like to use analogies and metaphors that help this seem not so weird. A biological analogy for the clear-light mind is a near-death experience. 24 percent or so of the people who have cardiac arrest and get resuscitated have some experience of being outside their body. And when they come back they feel fundamentally different, many of them for the better, although some of them not so, because they don't have any training, they don't know what they are doing. For them it just happened, the near-death experience. Nonetheless, for most of them their relationship with their body will never be the same, because they lost it already. They lost it once, and they came back to tell about it. That brings in a very different narrative.

A metaphor for the virtual body is found in this very interesting subset of people with temporal lobe epilepsy, known as Dostoyevsky's disease. This form of epilepsy afflicts the temporal lobe. Individuals don't have seizures, but they have these states, like auras and things like that, all with a blissful form. It is called euphoric temporal lobe epilepsy, or TLE. So when individuals have a seizure they get blissed out and they feel totally connected with all things. A group of colleagues are trying to get TLE removed from the list of diseases. They think it is not such a bad thing, to get blissed out. But what is interesting is that these people who have euphoric TLE, research shows that over time their personality completely changes. They tend to become much more religious people, spiritual

people, they tend to become more caring, empathic and generous, and less freaked out about life. This is because they have this incredibly blissful experience, and that changes their chemistry somehow. These are medical phenomena that can perhaps break down our sense that this kind of blissful experience is not accessible to us, because they are too mystical, or too esoteric, or whatever. But no! They are right here in our mind, all the time, it is just a matter of how long it will take us to get that out.

There are two analogies from Western psychotherapy that I'd like to mention here. One is Heinz Kohut's "cosmic narcissism." Kohut is a beautiful mind, he is trying to stick to the Freudian line while reintroducing the notion of God. Cosmic narcissism is basically an expanded sense of self that is supposed to be like Freud's "oceanic feeling." He feared these unitive states and said that they were all regressive. But this kind of practice is not regressive. In fact it's progressive if practitioners engage in it as part of a path of disarming and developing a more social self. What Kohut is essentially saying is that if we develop our narcissism, that is our capacity to have a loving self, and we direct that love toward all living beings, which is what cosmic narcissism is, then we can have this new larger sense of self. That is ultimately quite positive, that we love, just as our mother or father loved their children. It is a natural thing. It is not religion, it is not spirituality, it is not even meditation practice. Maybe it is chemistry, I don't know. But we all know that love happens all the time, at least every time somebody has a baby or a new pet, right? That is something about us humans that is totally natural. But we just don't use it so much, we totally underuse it. That's Kohut's interpretation, and vision.



Then there's Julia Kristeva, a Lacanian philosopher and psychoanalyst, a deconstructionist and a feminist, she is like an esoteric linguistic literary critic, and she writes about what she calls the chora. She says that Lacan's notion of the real relates to a part of our being in which we are always developing. Chora is another word for the womb, the nurturing space that exists before birth. She says that all humans have always had this part, that this part is present in humans beginning at the embryonic stage. And, actually, this is true. I was speaking to one of our faculty members, Neale Theise, who does research on embryonic stem cells, and he integrates a more spiritual notion of revitalizing, of rejuvenating, into the biology of regeneration of stem cell research in a very interesting way.

Be that as it may, let's assume that there is a part of our minds that is always free. And we experience that part in primal states, when we go into deep sleep, when we have an orgasmic experience or a near-death experience, or when we are just recharged, or discharged from being who we are and open to a fresh take. This is why when we wake up from a deep sleep we feel fresh, we are refreshed. Julia Kristeva believes that that is our real essence, the essence of our nature and the real nature of our mind. And out of it is this potential to keep growing and transforming, through it we can connect with all living beings. This is the intuition of the mother. The woman who is giving birth understands something different about life, about having a body. But we all have that capacity. We don't have to give birth, literally, luckily for us guys. Maybe this is why Tantra is reportedly easier for women.

I was going to talk a little bit about Kalachakra, but I think I will save that for the retreat. So come to the retreat and you will learn about the Tantric neuroscience of Kalachakra, what makes kalachakra different from more traditional

approaches, how Kalachakra understands the Tantric nervous system, the different levels of consciousness, the process of suffering versus transformation, and even the clear light and the virtual body. They are subtle differences, and they are really quite fun to play with. But I don't want to cram all that in, it might get us distracted and confused. We are probably already distracted and confused enough, right?

We should try to end our four-year journey together on the note of some clarification and consummation. Who would like to share some thoughts about where have we've come. Is this a fun perspective? Are we arriving where we started, or are we recognizing it for the first time?

It is good to have a sense of community and a sense of journey, and progress, a sense that there is something to strive for, something better to open our minds to, something to reach for. Even if it is something within ourselves and we are not in touch with it yet, but it is ultimately where the truth lays.

Paulina has kindly offered these beautiful white votive candles with a little red in them. Red and white, these are the tantric colors. Did you know that? They represent the male and the female, or the solar and lunar energies, and together they make way for blissful openness. There is a candle for each of us, so you should come up and take one on your way out.

One question is about the different practices, how they overlap and how we choose among them. And the answer is, well, this is a gradual path. Experience and knowledge are accumulated and things become clearer as we progress. Once you understand all the fancy language you know that essentially it's all the same basic practice, just a different way to approach it. For example,

Tantra starts from the end result while sutra takes it from the beginning, the seed; mindfulness of mind is like the sutric equivalent of clear light. And so on.

Teachers of Dzogchen practices in Tibet teach ordinary people like us, not spiritual professionals. The basic Tibetan Buddhist texts, like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, *The Natural Liberation Teachings of Padmasambhava*, the *Songs of Milarepa*, and so on, are taught in all Buddhist traditions in Tibet and to ordinary people. So everyone has access to the more exotic and esoteric teachings, which are taught using poetry, and also in meditation, meditating on your natural mind, realizing you have a mind.

What people need to know in this society is this: you have a mind, and your mind matters; so what are you doing with it? Are you paying attention? What is your mind up to lately? What state is it in? That is the teaching of the clear light. Now, what about your body, is it happy? Or, as the Tibetans say, is it blissful or is it miserable? Is it stressed out or is there any feeling of relaxation and relief? That is the fundamental seed of these high-level realizations. Or, put in another way, these high-level realizations are just further developments along the way, part of a natural progression. It's very simple, it's about how to be in your body in a mindful and caring way, not fighting, not violent; and how to be in your mind in a way that it is clear, not confused.

This is the ultimate method. Practice on yourself. First, try to assimilate the things that we've been talking about. And you can practice very simply, for example doing simple mindfulness and the Four Noble Truths, which we learned in the first year of this program. Or you can do the mind training that we learned in the second year, with basic compassion practice, or simple medicine Buddha practice. Any of these simple basic practices will do. If you keep your daily

practice, day in and day out, you will change. And people will feel that change. We humans are very sensitive, we have a built-in sensitive radar. If somebody changes a little bit, that radar senses it and sends a signal, and that has a ripple effect. It does, and people do feel it. Let's say you have a short temper, but then, after some practice, you do not get angry and fly off the handle as easily, you don't get as impatient, or it takes you longer to get impatient. Or, another example is when you become genuinely more interested you are genuinely a little calmer, and people notice. People naturally gravitate towards people who are calmer and happier. So when you do you will notice that people are more attracted to you. They will become more naturally open, they might come to you and ask for advice -- "What do you think? What are you doing? What are you on?..." That is the Buddha's creed, the dependent-arising mantra:

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN TATHAGATO HY AVADAT  
TESHAN CA YO NIRODHA EVAM VADI MAHA SHRAMANAH SVAHA

In other words, all things arise from causes. And one who discovers those causes and learns how to control them has found the way.

This reminds me of the story about Namgyalma and Shariputra, two of Buddha's students, who went to town. And some people saw them walking around, in their robes, and they asked: "We love the way you move, who are you, who is your teacher and what does he teach?" Or something like that. It is in the way we move that we move people; and that is why we focus on the embodied compassion practices. People really feel it when you can bring a little bit more humanity or largesse to your interactions.

That is the reason why I am here, reviewing this wonderful material with you. I myself felt great relief and was greatly encouraged by learning all this material. It made me feel that we can really heal and change. It made me more hopeful. I found that there is a way to do this, it isn't so exotic or so impossible. And I see that it was important to move along the learning curve gradually. It was important to move along with it, because at some point, somehow, it does break down the barrier to taking action, actually doing something. We all know that it is easier to learn something than it is to do something. But you will experience how once you learn, and it feels quite satisfying to learn, it really does tend to motivate you to do something, do something with that new self, with that vision. When I see people getting more involved in this kind of practices I feel the connections and hopes growing inside of me.

One of the wonderful things about this tradition is its openness. Many cultures are somewhat xenophobic, they are not so keen to invite people into their groups, they want to have exclusive clubs. And many cultures are not living cultures, full of exotic symbols that we can't decode anymore -- although thanks to the Rosetta stone we can decode some of the writing in the Egyptian ruins. But this culture is so alive, and all of these teachings and artifacts are part of a living process, a process that we are all invited to dive into, which is very unusual. No one is considered as a real outsider. The nature of this culture is open, open to all. And that is pretty rare. I find that very inspiring. Everyone is welcome, everyone is seen as part of it all.

At Nalanda Institute we are expanding our reach to make the teachings more accessible. Two of our programs will soon be available online programs, for access from wherever you are, or almost. One is this four-year program. And that

is why the classes have been recorded and filmed, so that we have a full archive and we want to use it well. We thought about how to make it available in a meaningful way. One way by having online interactive chat meetings or classes spread through the course of the semester, so that people have an actual live experience.

The other program that is available online is the Certificate program. That program already has a virtual incarnation in Toronto, it is run in Toronto as we speak. And we are talking to somebody to do it in Barcelona. If anybody knows people who would like to invest in a very meaningful project, even a small amount, we need money to develop these materials. I'm confident we will get it. This is an interesting thing, and there is not that much like it out there. With this video we have the basis to start strong.

All of you who are serious about this practice should think about how you would start teaching, eventually, at some point. That means helping somebody else breathe. And ultimately that is what you do with it, because as you now know this is not only for you but also to share. The community is extremely important. Those of you who have been through this four-year process, you are my special group, because you have a personal relationship with this stuff, a cumulative relationship, accumulating teachings and experiences over four years, at least. We want to find ways of continuing to come together and to continue to grow, and also to find ways to connect with all of Nalanda and the community at large. I know that some of you are actively participating in the transcription of the courses. We have the first two years and people are working on the next two years, and so the four years will be available as a more accessible text, whereas

"Sustainable Happiness" will be the reference text for those who need the nitty-gritty, the details.

Before closing I want to mention one last practice within the Gelugpa tradition, the tradition of the Dalai Lama, the "Yellow Hat" tradition, that integrates many of the elements of the four year program into one singular practice, the "Guru Puja." Some of you might be familiar with it. If you have read Bob Thurman's "Jewel Tree of Tibet" it is based on this practice. It is incredibly rich, it is one of the hottest practices of Gelek Rimpoche and the Gelugpa lamas. The Guru Puja stands right in the cusp between the ordinary Mahayana compassion practice and the Tantric practice. It integrates both sides of this curriculum; and the Lam Rim is also in there, as a review at the end. This is a very beautiful versified practice covering all the elements. So it serves as a consolidating practice.

The Guru Puja also serves as a very good foundation for Tantric practice; it prepares you for it. It sets you up in a way that is very resonant and consistent with Tantric meditation, iconography and so on and so forth. It is a beautiful practice. I was thinking about doing that, and the following spring we could do the sister cause, written in the 17th century by Lobsang Gyatso, one of the great geniuses of the Gelugpa tradition.

Also, there is a whole series of different versions of the Mahāmudrā practice that could be interesting. We could do some of that. Or we would do something else. Think of it this way: In the past four years you've been to college, and now you're headed for graduate school. And this is a self-selective graduate school.

The way I'm used to run classes like this one is by consensus, of what people need to do and to learn. We can meander our way through this material and go into it more deeply, and use more traditional sources. We could use practice texts.

A lot of what we went through is theory-based. If you want to move forward it's time to consolidate, and move into reflection and practice.