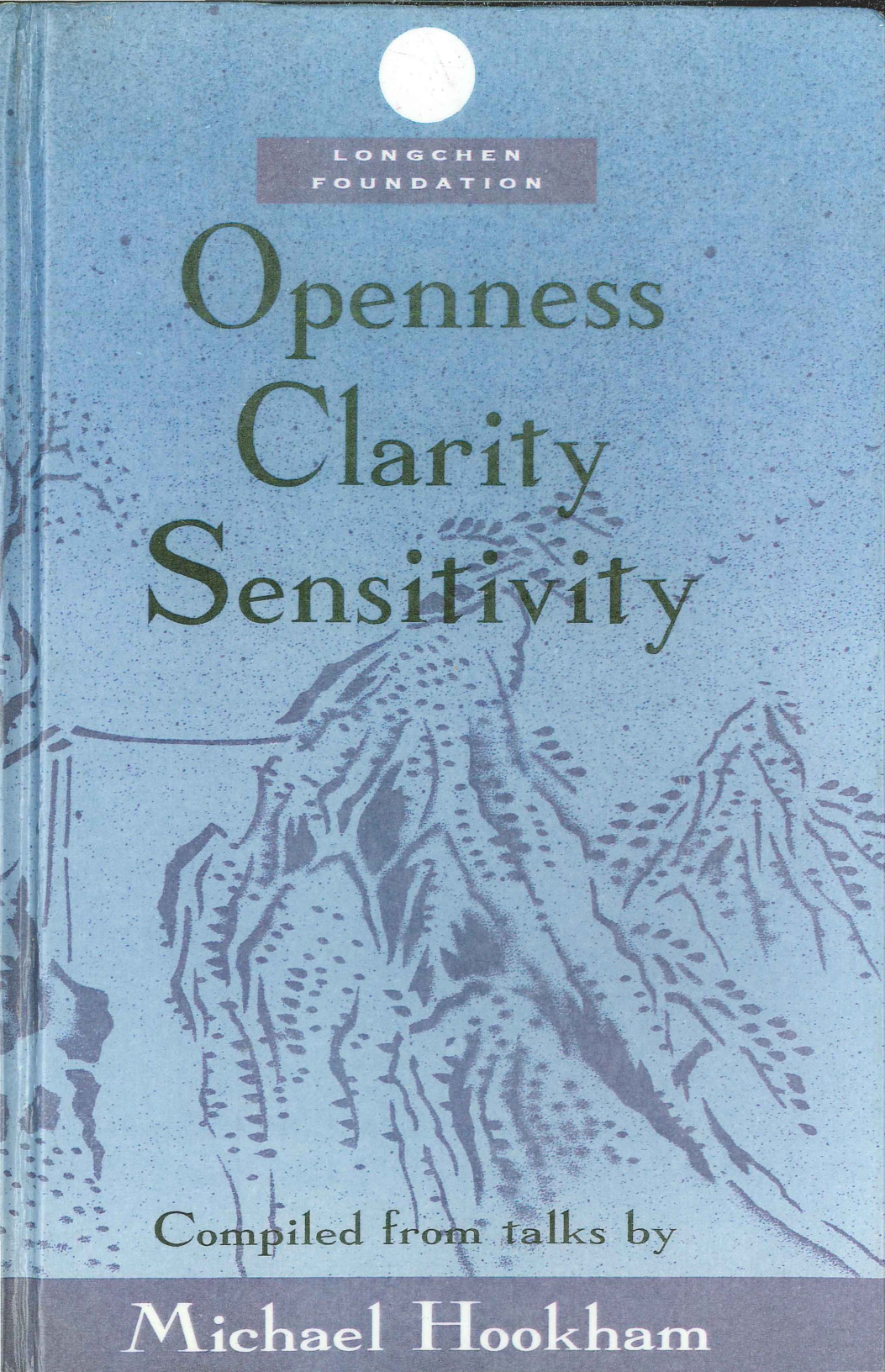




LONGCHEN
FOUNDATION

Openness Clarity Sensitivity



Compiled from talks by

Michael Hookham

First edition published 1992 by:
Longchen Foundation
30 Beechey Avenue
Old Marston
Oxford

Copyright © 1992 Longchen Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission, in writing, from the publisher.

ISBN 0 9511477 2 2

Contents

Contents	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Editor's Preface.....	v
Section I: Realizing The Nature Of Mind.....	9
1. Confidence In The Nature Of Mind.....	11
2. The Path Of Non-Doing.....	25
3. Initial Experiences Of The Nature Of Mind.....	27
4. The Three Nyams.....	35
5. The Direct Realization Of The Nature Of Mind.....	39
Section II: Basic Meditation Technique	43
6. Posture.....	45
7. The Breath	51
8. Commitment To The Practice.....	57
9. Thoughts And The Insight Beyond Thoughts.....	61
10. Balancing The Five Faculties	75
11. Balancing Concentration And Energy	79
12. Balancing Wisdom And Faith.....	91
Section III: Daily Life Practice.....	97
13. Openness	99
14. Clarity / Awareness	103
15. Sensitivity.....	105
16. Noticing Non-Awareness	109
17. The Four Kinds Of Mindfulness.....	113
18. General Advice On Mindfulness Practice.....	127
19. Questioning.....	129
20. Specific Problems In Daily Life Practice.....	133
Parting Advice	139
Appendix	141
Index.....	145

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of those students, who have helped create the final version of this book by their efforts and enthusiasm over the last few years. In one way or another everyone who has been involved has helped. First there were those who attended and helped organize the original weekends at which the talks were given. Then there was the job of transcription, editing and the creation of the first rough draft which had the engaging title of 'The Sixty Page Document'. This circulated for about two years before finally this book was brought to completion. During that time the material was worked on by students of the Nitārtha School through weekend courses. The feed-back from the discussions at these weekends has proved invaluable in assessing the effectiveness of the language used and in high-lighting areas that needed clarifying. Thanks are due to all those people who attended those courses and contributed their comments. Particular thanks are due to Josie Laboulle, Rayya Ghul, Nick Rimmer, Andre DeVries, Lissie Taylor, Simon Baugh, Cheryl Chivers, Pat MacDonald, Arthur Rhodius, Alan Smith, Barbara Wanklyn, Roger Kayes, Chryssoula Zerbini and Ian Goldsmid, who helped with transcription, proof-reading and comments, and to Yvonne Booth and Joff and Moira Tanner for helping design the covers.

Especially I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sally Sheldrake for all her many hours of patient work both on the original draft and the editing and arranging of the final draft over the last six months. We are all very indebted to her for her energy and dedication in the task of bringing this book to see the light of day.

I would also like to thank John Cleaver for all his invaluable advice and help in technical matters concerning the computer and the final stages of the publication.

Shenpen Hookham.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The origin of this book is a series of introductory talks that Michael Hookham gave in 1989-90, just before beginning his three year retreat. The first draft of the transcription of these talks has been circulating privately within the Longchen Foundation study groups at the London Buddhist Society, Oxford and elsewhere for two and half years already. It has provided an invaluable basis for my own teaching and has been so much appreciated by all our students, that I persuaded Michael to let us publish it for wider distribution. Although this required a certain amount of further editing and arranging, Michael was consulted at every stage of the process, so it is still very much his words.

Being a Westerner, and having over twenty years of experience in teaching Buddhism to fellow Westerners enables Michael to teach in a style that takes into account our particular needs and aspirations. We hope this book will prove helpful to the general reader wishing to expand and deepen daily life awareness and meditation practice. However, our primary intention is that this book be used as a basic text-book for the Mahayana training programme that we are developing (see the Appendix for details).

Four decades ago, when Michael first came into contact with Buddhism, Westerners wishing to deepen their knowledge of that subject had very little to go on unless they could master one of the canonical languages and study the original literature.

Ironically, whilst we are now fortunate to have so much literature on Buddhism available to us in our own language, we can easily be overwhelmed by the vast scope and quality of the material on offer. In traditional Buddhist societies, access to the most profound and detailed teachings was strictly controlled. Students had to prove to their teachers their suitability and worthiness to receive such transmissions. It is hardly surprising therefore that we, who have not the

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

advantage of being brought up in a Buddhist cultural milieu, should feel daunted by what we find before us. How are we to begin to approach it? This book has arisen in response to that problem. Through it Michael hopes that many others will find confidence in the Buddhist path which, independent of the many cultural forms in which it is expressed, has remarkable consistency in terms of the depth of human experience that it unfolds and clarifies.

Michael has himself practised Buddhism for forty years in the midst of a conventional modern life as a mathematician, physicist and computer consultant. For over twenty years he practised under his main Guru, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche who died in 1987. Following his death, Michael has continued to practise under the direction of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, a yogin and scholar of the highest accomplishment.

With broad knowledge and experience of the Buddhist tradition in general, and of the Dzogchen* tradition in particular, and strong connections with his own teachers, Michael provides a very rare opportunity. He communicates the essence of the Buddha's teaching, without getting lost or confused by the richness and complexity that has developed in its cultural expressions.

Michael concentrates on helping us to connect to the immediacy of our ordinary experience. Every now and then, however, he makes a sudden leap and we catch a tantalizing glimpse of some vaster vision - a sense that we are being led into a profound and perhaps even a shocking new perspective on reality.

It is at this point that many of us feel a tremendous gap between our aspirations and the actuality of our experience, between an intuitive sense of vast spiritual potential and the obvious limitations of our present state of being.

* Dzogchen is the highest teaching of the Nyingma School.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

It is pertinent to ask ourselves what is the good of vast vision and high aspirations when we do not know how to begin to realize them.

In this book Michael addresses the dilemma expressed in such a question by reminding us again and again how the only way open to us is confidence in what is intrinsic to our being.

The book stresses the importance of having confidence in the nature of mind - the indestructible heart essence of our being. It is what, at heart, we essentially are - it is that aspect of our being that can never be destroyed. It cannot be destroyed because it was never created - it is beyond creation and destruction, beyond time and space. It is mysterious and yet so familiar, indescribable and yet so simple...

The indestructible heart essence is variously referred to in Mahayana* texts as the True Nature of Mind, the Buddha Nature (*Tathagatagarbha*), Ultimate Reality, *Bodhichitta*, *Prajnaparamita*, *Buddhajnana*, Emptiness of Other (*Shentong*), the Heart Drop and so on.

This nature of mind has three inseparable qualities - openness/spaciousness, clarity/awareness and sensitivity/responsiveness. These terms can be understood on many levels, yet whatever the level, the words themselves suggest qualities that we appreciate in others and wish to have ourselves. In terms of the Dzogchen tradition they relate to Essence (*ngowo*), Nature (*rangzhin*) and Compassion (*tukjay*), or Emptiness (*tongpa*), Clarity (*salwa*) and Manifestation (*nangwa*). However, in this text, Michael is not trying to transmit the profound meaning of Dzogchen, but trying to connect us to a sense of confidence in our own nature. Once that confidence is firmly established we can approach a Dzogchen teacher in a proper manner. Without it there is a danger that cultural misunderstanding will make any attempt at relating to that tradition a disappointing excursion into a

* The Buddha's teaching on the Bodhisattva Path.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

fantasy world of our own making.

All our experience, whether positive or negative, can serve as the basis for our spiritual awakening. We do not need to adopt some special life-style or find the perfect place, time or conditions to practise. We can discover the path of awakening in any walk of life, in any experience, in any activity, by turning towards all our experience with courage, honesty, genuine interest and a light touch.

It is heavy-handed judgementalism that is so often our greatest stumbling block. We use our aspirations and ideals to judge ourselves and others as worthless or as failures, or to create conceited personal identities. We are afraid to face our actual experience lest it should not live up to our preconceived ideas.

Michael has found a way of talking us through our self-doubt and hesitations, opening the way for us to relate properly to the teachings of the great Dzogchen Gurus of the Kagyu-Nyingma Tibetan Buddhist tradition, to which he belongs.

In general we have tried to keep technical language to a minimum. Sometimes, however, we have used Sanskrit words or even, occasionally, Tibetan words because the full range of meaning could not be captured by any English term, or the closest English equivalent had the wrong connotation. We have tried to ensure that such terms are defined in the main text at their first occurrence.

More detail on the theoretical and doctrinal background to this book can be found in the chapter on *Shentong* in 'Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness' by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso (published by the Longchen Foundation) and in my own work 'The Buddha Within' (published by the State University of New York Press).

Shenpen Hookham
Oxford 1992

Section I
Realizing The Nature Of Mind

To rest in the boundless sphere where thoughts appear and disappear like bubbles - that's very fine:

To have sharp and vivid awareness free from self-reference - that's very fine:

To have a heart melting with compassion free from other-reference - that's very fine:

The mind that knows all this - that's the tight grip of ego.

Michael Hookham
4th June 1992

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

Buddhism is concerned with becoming aware of and realizing with increasing depth the nature of mind, which is in all beings and which transcends anything that we could grasp and own. It is the very nature of experience itself and in the end, experience is all we have. Our particular personality and way of being is a rather confused expression of that basic nature of mind that is common to us all.

The nature of mind is experienced in terms of three inseparable qualities: openness (which could also be called spaciousness), clarity (which could also be called awareness) and sensitivity (which could also be called responsiveness or well-being).

*Openness,
Clarity And
Sensitivity*

We in the West seem to lack a genuine and fundamental confidence in ourselves. If we have confidence at all it tends to be somewhat crude and egocentric. We do not seem to have confidence in what we basically are as human beings. In other cultures, particularly in the East, this seems to be much less of a problem. It is very common for us to think of ourselves as hopeless bundles of complexes and bad habits - essentially worthless and just a problem to ourselves and others. Emotionally we feel empty and hollow - but not in the deep sense in which Buddhism talks about emptiness, which is a feeling of openness and spaciousness. Rather we feel closed and cut off - diminished and lonely.

*Having
confidence in
what we
basically are*

Spaciousness is something we could feel complete confidence in as the basis of our being,

*Openness is
Spaciousness*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

experience or awareness. It is the boundless quality of the nature of mind. It carries with it a positive sense of well-being and health which is the opposite of feeling claustrophobia and strain. For any sentient being, there is always some sense of space even if only in the sense that it seems blocked. Even a feeling of claustrophobia reflects an awareness of space.

*Clarity is
Awareness*

Awareness itself is intimately connected to our idea of time. The whole notion of time implies the presence of awareness. Sometimes time seems to go faster or slower, but for all sentient creatures there is always some sense of time passing.

There is a quality to awareness which is very attractive in itself. It is not that we get anything out of it particularly. It just feels good and positive in itself. It conveys a sense of realness and aliveness that is enough somehow.

*Sensitivity is
Well-being*

The sense of well-being that is always associated with awareness tells us that it is right to be more aware. Increased awareness brings an increased sense of openness and sensitivity and somehow we are attracted to these qualities for their own sake. They feel good. As we build up an awareness of spaciousness, we increasingly notice our clarity and awareness and this triggers our natural responsiveness.

Yet, strangely, we tend to shut off awareness very early. Why, if we value awareness so much, do we shut it off so firmly and so quickly? Is it that we are frightened that we are going to see something about ourselves, others and the world that is unpalatable in some way? It is as if we were afraid that if we looked too closely, everything would somehow fall apart or become unmanageable.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

Actually there is no need to feel that, since the nature of our being is fundamentally good and carries within itself a sense of well-being. It is not something shocking or terrible. We can afford to be open and we can develop confidence, because this well-being is fundamental to our nature, transcending the usual idea we have of ourselves. We tend to think of ourselves as separate people with particular notions, feelings, perceptions and so on, but the nature of mind is exactly the same in all beings.

All sentient beings have sensitivity in the sense of having the general ability to feel sense impressions and to respond, no matter what the impressions are or how they respond to them. So we all share in this fundamental nature.

This sensitivity is what communicates a sense of well-being. We need to connect to this in order to feel good in ourselves. Without this it is impossible to feel good towards others. That is why it is standard Buddhist practice to develop friendliness towards ourselves before even trying to develop it towards others.

Even if we feel that there is not much in our lives to feel good about, there is always our basic sensitivity. As long as we are experiencing or are aware of anything, there is always sensitivity there and that is somehow good in itself. So we have to connect to the sense that it is good to be alive, to be sitting meditating, to be aware, to be experiencing anything at all. We have to become aware of that quality of goodness within ourselves in order to appreciate it in the world around us.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

Buddha

Nature: The

Indestructible

Heart Essence

To be sensitive there has to be some degree of openness and awareness, so these three qualities are the basis of what it is to be a sentient being, whether animal or human or anything else. There is therefore a basic kinship between all beings that goes very deep - right to the very essence of what it is to be alive and sentient.

Yet, we vary in the extent to which we experience the spaciousness, clarity and sensitivity of our nature. When fully experienced, without distortion, blockage or veil, it is the Buddha's boundless enlightened awareness and responsiveness; in other words it is boundless wisdom and compassion. So the very essence of what it is to be sentient and alive is also the very essence of the Buddha's enlightenment. It is there in the heart of our being already and it never changes. It is our indestructible heart essence.

The word 'Buddha' means the 'Awakened One'. What a Buddha awakens to is the reality, the living presence, of the vastness and vitality of our natural openness, clarity and sensitivity. These qualities are the nature of both the Awakened One, the Buddha, and of beings before they awaken.

*Not conceptual
creations*

The three qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity are behind all we experience. They are what we are - our personality, feelings, emotions, thoughts, even our body comes from them. We do not create them - they create us. They are not something that we can manipulate or play with. They are just there, naturally, as our heritage as sentient beings - absolutely intrinsic and basic to what it is to be alive and conscious.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

Actually, both mind and body are of the nature of space, awareness and sensitivity and both are intrinsic to what it is to be a human being. We have some control over the body and we feel that we own it. This seems to imply that it is not completely intrinsic to our nature, whereas the mind, because it is the underlying basis for all our experience, certainly seems intrinsic. So we tend to identify with our mind and treat our body rather like an appendage, or even as a slave. Yet neither our body nor our mind are really under our control. We know very well, for example, that many of our bodily functions are not under conscious control at all. It is important to realize that both body and mind are intrinsic to our being and are inextricably related. They have a natural way of being that is independent of our ego-control. Although we think we control them or that we ought to be able to, in fact it is our constant ego-intervention that distorts the functioning of both.

Body and mind

These qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity sound good, and so we immediately feel we want them or want more of them. We might ask how we can obtain or increase them. It is important to stress that the three qualities cannot be our possession. We can never say, 'It is my clarity, my space or my sensitivity'. No-one owns them. They are nobody's personal adornments. Nobody can use them to make themselves feel special.

*Not a personal
acquisition or
attainment*

Yet even if your personality became completely disorganized and you, in some sense, ceased to be you, there would still be those three qualities. There is nothing you can do about it. You will always have them.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Intrinsic to the
nature of the
universe*

In a very profound way they are intrinsic to the universe itself. There is much reasoned argument in the Buddhist tradition explaining this point but it would take too long to examine here. It would mean introducing such pertinent questions as, 'What do we mean by the universe anyway?'

*No increase or
decrease*

Although we can recognize these three qualities in ourselves to some extent and we can envisage how they could be vast, open and vital, in fact, as far as our present experience is concerned, that is not how they feel. Buddhist practice is about bringing out those qualities as fully as possible. We cannot really talk about enhancing them because they are in fact fully present all the time. We cannot really say we are increasing an underlying awareness. Awareness is awareness, it cannot be increased or decreased.

*Not a content
of mind*

Since these qualities are not under our control, they are untainted by our ego control and manipulation - they are just there. They are what we essentially are in a more fundamental sense than the ego is.

Worrying about things and feelings of guilt, unhappiness, and so on, come from focusing on the content of thoughts. For example, when I feel depressed or rejected, I focus on thoughts about the past and future, right and wrong, loss and gain and so on. Instead I could focus on the spacious, clear and sensitive nature of my being that gives rise to such thoughts and feelings. The three qualities have nothing to do with content, they are the nature of the awareness process itself. So it is not a matter of being aware of a particular thing, but of having that function of awareness.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

Again, it is not that there is anything in particular to feel spacious about. It is simply that spaciousness is there because that aware, awake quality of our being involves space.

When we feel a bit claustrophobic, trapped, constrained, hemmed in, pushed into a corner or that something is blocking our view, or dulling our mind, we do not feel very aware. Nevertheless, the very fact that we are alive means there is *some* awareness there. Without a certain amount of space, awareness and sensitivity we would be dead. These qualities are the essence of what it is to be alive. They have nothing to do with whether we feel good or bad, happy or sad.

They are not moods. They do not come and go. We should not think that we have to hype ourselves up to feel joyful all the time, or be clear and aware all the time. The three qualities are fundamental to every experience. Whatever we are experiencing, they are there.

Not moods

We began by saying that we lack confidence in what we basically are. The reason we can talk of confidence is that there is something to discover or realize called the 'nature of mind' or the 'indestructible heart essence' that we can rely on. Because we are alive, we have space, sensitivity and awareness, so we can go deeper and discover what those qualities actually are. It is wonderful to think that it is enough that we are alive. The whole question of whether we are a good or a bad person is totally irrelevant.

Confidence

The feeling of a desperate need to prove ourselves has somehow become an obsession in our culture. We have been brought up to feel we lack inherent worth and so have to do something

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

to justify our existence. Whatever we do we always feel that we have never quite done enough to prove our worth, however successful we are.

All this is a sign of lack of confidence in our own basic nature. We identify with our confused habits of mind rather than with what we essentially are. It is true that the three qualities are covered over, to some extent, by confused habits of mind, but as we gradually start to recognize those fundamental qualities for what they are, we can let go of those habits. We can get rid of habits but not of what we fundamentally are. Because habits of mind are very difficult to get rid of we should strike at the source of them, which is our lack of confidence in what we are - boundless space, awareness and well-being.

Sky and clouds

The three qualities are with us all the time, every moment. Like the sky, they do not disappear the moment we stop thinking of them. We do not have to be aware of them consciously for them to be there. They do not disappear, even when we are asleep or unconscious.

The problem is that the nature of those qualities is obscured. But the obscuring process is not always present, it is not intrinsic to our being. The habitual thought patterns that hide the mind's basic nature can be compared to clouds covering the sky. Both positive and negative thoughts and feelings are like clouds. The basic nature of mind is beyond all judgements of good and bad, happy and sad. All such judgements are themselves like clouds. They come and go without affecting the sky which is never spoiled or tainted by them.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

In order to build up that sense of space and to appreciate it, we need to have already a certain amount of awareness and sensitivity. So there is a kind of feed-back process with spaciousness, awareness and sensitivity/well-being, all feeding back into each other. Confidence is an expression of our sense of well-being and enables us to expand and let go further into spaciousness, which in turn affects our awareness, sense of well-being and confidence.

*The three
qualities feed
back into each
other*

Samaya means an inescapable bond. The sense of well-being described above arises from having space, awareness and sensitivity inherent to our nature. This is our inescapable bond with the nature of reality. Respecting, or protecting, *samaya* means accepting that reality fully as something we are bound to and can never escape from - as when we give our word to someone. We are bound by that. It is our *samaya*.

Samaya

To denigrate ourselves or others by regarding either as being less than what they inherently are, is to involve ourselves in endless struggle, conflict and confusion. This is because we are fighting against the inescapable nature of reality. Instead of accepting and respecting this fundamental *samaya*, we are fighting it.

The fact is that every human being is bound to those inseparable qualities. Whatever anybody does, nobody can get rid of them. Even the most evil person in the world still has some awareness and that awareness must be functioning in space, even if it is just the ordinary physical space in which a person moves around. Being alive means feeling things physically and emotionally, so there is always that natural sensitivity, if nothing else. It is inescapable.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Concepts can
be used to
remove
concepts*

At first, when we practise, we create a slightly conceptualized version of these three qualities. Although any conceptual effort distorts them, we have to start somewhere and a conceptual appreciation and confidence in them is a start. For most of us it is already a big step to move from our usual low opinion of ourselves to having even the beginnings of the sort of confidence we are talking about here.

As we practise, the mind becomes more refined and we see through the coarseness of the way we thought before. We start to appreciate the difference between conceptual ideas about the three qualities and more direct experience of them. It might take a few years before we notice this, but the time is well spent, because at the end of those years we have something invaluable in terms of vaster and clearer vision.

FIVE NOTIONS THAT CORRECT HOW WE THINK OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS

*1. I have
intrinsic worth.*

First we have to correct the way we think of ourselves. This is done through meditation, by means of which we gradually become aware of our intrinsic worth, because meditation is about connecting with a simple awareness of the three inseparable qualities of the nature of mind.

As this awareness increases, everything that happens, the ups and downs and so on, are simply like clouds in the sky. There is nothing that is intrinsically a problem. Meditation is not about wanting a cloudless sky. As long as we

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

know the sky is there, the clouds are not really a problem. The clouds can come and go as they please.

Meditation is about recognizing that sky-like quality of our being. This gives us a feeling of genuine confidence in ourselves, because it rests on the knowledge that we have intrinsic worth and potential.

I remember Trungpa Rinpoche saying that we sometimes feel as if we need a heart transplant, as if our own heart were not good enough, as if it lacked the qualities of a true and good heart. But there is no need for a transplant. Everything we need is already in us, in that sky-like quality of our being, so we should develop tremendous confidence in that.

Secondly, we have to recognize that our negativity is not intrinsic to our being. We may think, 'I don't have enough compassion,' or 'I'm not really a good person,' or 'Can I really follow this path?' or 'Aren't I too weak an individual to do it?', but it is meaningless to say we are too weak to follow such a path. That sky-like nature is intrinsic to our nature so of course we can connect to it. Our negativity is just adventitious - not intrinsic to our nature at all.

2. *My faults are not intrinsic.*

Thirdly, we have to apply this to others as well as ourselves. Recognizing that they also have this intrinsic sky-like quality prevents us from feeling either superior or inferior to others. We all share in exactly the same sky-like quality.

3. *Others have intrinsic worth.*

This leads us to the fourth notion which is that the negativity of others is not intrinsic to them any more than our negativity is to us. Even though we see others behave in a way we judge

4. *Other's faults are not intrinsic.*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

to be bad, or we recognize that they have faults, this is no reason to regard them as inferior or to feel contempt for them. However badly they behave, they can never escape from their essential nature and the pain of not being able to recognize that.

A constant pre-occupation with criticizing and finding faults in others is often the reverse side of our own guilt feelings. There is a kind of relief, if not to say pleasure, in blaming others when they behave badly, as if somehow blaming others absolved us from blame ourselves. This is all quite unnecessary and inappropriate. Why not reflect on the fact that the 'badness' of others is not intrinsic to their nature, just as our own 'badness' is not intrinsic to ours? Since we all have the innate nature of mind, we can all eventually realize enlightenment. We are all quite wonderful - all we need to do is to train ourselves to see it.

5. *I can love
others as
myself.*

The fifth and last notion is that because of the identity between ourselves and others, we can have equal love for self and others. People who hate or feel bad about themselves have a problem with this. Once we develop trust and confidence in our own nature we can start to feel empathy and fellow-feeling towards others. Then we can respond spontaneously and naturally to their needs and desires.

We may feel that we want to be like that but something is blocking us, so that we think that we cannot. This sense that it is not possible comes from a deep-rooted identification with our own negativity. Meditation is the means of removing our fixation on that wrong idea by reminding us about the nature of mind. Gradually this carries over into our everyday life.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF MIND

If you are wondering how perceptions, thoughts and emotions obscure the nature of mind, an analogy might help: for example, when our eye is jaundiced, we see white paper as yellow. Something in our vision needs correcting although there is nothing essentially wrong with either our eyes or the paper. However, if we think the paper really is yellow and try to make it white we are doomed to failure. Like any analogy though, this comparison only works up to a certain point.

*The illusory
nature of our
perceptions*

A simile that is often used is that thoughts and emotions are like optical illusions. Take, for example, a drawing which can either be seen as a chalice or as two faces. Without changing anything, a simple shift in the way we look at the lines of the drawing creates a whole different picture.

A common example in the Buddhist scriptures is a single beam of white light shining on a crystal. Without changing the nature of the light at all, the crystal's power of refraction can make a whole spectrum of different colours appear.

The three basic qualities of openness, sensitivity and clarity are the essence of our being and the source of all that is good, genuine and true about us; they are the source of life itself and give rise to the sense that there is something to attain, something to realize, something beyond ourselves and even beyond the world to which we can aspire. It is as if that clarity and awareness that is in us already knows what it seeks to discover and will give us no rest until we have found it.

*The source of
all genuine
inspiration and
aspiration*

2. THE PATH OF NON-DOING

Most of the time we go around in a kind of self-induced torpor of non-awareness. The thrust of the Buddhist path is to remove that non-awareness. Through Buddhist meditation we give the mind space to sharpen and expand its awareness.

When we meditate or practise awareness in our everyday life, it is not a thing about which we can say 'I'm doing something.' If 'I' were doing something, then it would always turn out to be mistaken. The whole process is really one of 'undoing' conceptual thoughts and creations.

*Seeing, not
doing*

Since the practice does not consist of 'doing' any particular thing or developing any particular kind of conceptual framework, it is more a process of unlearning than of learning. It is a matter of learning not to engage in certain old habits of relating to the world and our experience.

*Unlearning
process*

These habits, both positive and negative, arise in that space of well-being and at the same time they are nothing to do with it. They could neither cause nor destroy it, however bad they were.

The three qualities pervade all our experience and as we practise they are gradually revealed or unveiled. What we are 'doing', is working at removing obstructions. Buddhist practice removes those things that prevent the three qualities expressing themselves in their fullness within our experience and thus prevent them from radiating out into the world.

*Unveiling
process*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*The quest to
discover the
nature of mind*

Both sitting meditation and carrying the practice out into everyday life become a kind of quest; a process of discovery. It is not a matter of trying to find 'truth' as a kind of conceptual formula or idea. It is about actually discovering something real within ourselves.

*A process of re-
alignment*

It is simply a matter of learning to align ourselves with qualities that we have already and yet which have nothing to do with the ego process of proving ourselves or defending ourselves.

*Manipulated
calmness is not
stability of
mind*

The aim of Buddhist meditation is not simply to become calm, although this can be a welcome side effect. People often treat meditation as if it were a therapy to help them solve some particular problem such as tension or disturbed emotions. The problem with this approach is that it is too project-oriented. Although Buddhist meditation does eventually lead to greater mental peace and stability, it is important to understand that this is not the direct focus of the meditation. If one focuses on calmness, the tendency is to try to manipulate the mind or dull the awareness so that it stops moving so much. This is the direct opposite to what is required.

3. INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF THE NATURE OF MIND

Meditation and daily life practice are a path of discovery, because there is something to be discovered. It is called the 'nature of mind', 'Buddha Nature' or the 'indestructible heart essence'. But what is it? That is what we each have to discover within ourselves. The path is the awakening process by means of which we come to recognize it.

The process starts by our seeing the three qualities of the nature of mind in their distorted form, which means beginning with an initial conceptual understanding. This becomes more subtle as the path is traversed. At some point we start to experience 'flashes' (in Tibetan - *nyams*) of intuitive understanding or insight, which enable us to see the three qualities more clearly and to experience them more fully. However, experiences (*nyams*) along the path are unstable and sometimes misleading. Though they are interesting and sometimes quite helpful, they are fundamentally irrelevant. The real challenge of the path comes from sticking with the long, slow process of developing stability of insight or realization. This means that instead of 'flashes' one experiences direct and complete realization of what is true. This is the goal of the path - complete and perfect awakening.

We have difficulty believing that the sky-like quality is intrinsic to being human because what seems to be intrinsic is the confused, mistaken perception that we are experiencing all the time. Although we talk about meditation and about

*Our present
confused
experience is a
distortion of the
three qualities of
mind*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

connecting with the sky-like quality, most of the time in everyday life we are simply working with confusion. That is why it is important to understand that confusion and the negative and positive emotions that arise in that state are themselves expressions of the three basic qualities, albeit in a distorted form.

It is not difficult to see that all the positive qualities associated with Buddhahood are expressions of those three qualities. It is not so easy to see that all the negative states we find in ourselves are expressions of them too. For example, one of the Buddha qualities is compassion. This means real compassion that is a sense of well-being, endless like the sky, aware, sensitive and responsive to the suffering of beings. On the Bodhisattva* path we can see such a quality emerging as the Bodhisattva practises generosity, right action, patience and so on. Although that compassion is not a definable or graspable quality, we can recognize it when it is present.

Compassion or generosity and so on also manifest in us from time to time, but we tend to distort them into something rather solid and graspable. We tend to claim a compassionate response as 'my' compassion or 'my' generosity, thus limiting it and making it finite. It would pay us to consider that perhaps it was not 'my' compassion or 'me' at all. Perhaps it was a glimpse of the sun of our true nature peeking through.

The most difficult thing of all to see is that this is also the case with negative qualities like

* A bodhisattva is a person working for the enlightenment of all beings.

3. INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF THE NATURE OF MIND

desire and hatred. They are also distorted manifestations of our true nature. When the boundaries are removed they are revealed as Buddha qualities. Although this is difficult to see, it is still worth thinking about, even right at the beginning of the path.

Hatred, for example, is the quality of striking out to destroy or remove obstacles. It is limited by the confused perception of self and other, good and bad and so on. When these limitations are removed, the ultimate essence of that kind of hating energy is not hatred, but the Buddha quality that removes obstacles by seeing the ultimate non-existence of any kind of obstruction. When that vision is perverted so that the obstruction is seen as solid and real, this energy turns into hatred in the ordinary sense that we know it.

By practising awareness in everyday life, we start to realize that desire and hatred arise from partiality. In the case of hatred that partiality expresses itself as wanting something not to exist, wanting it destroyed. As we begin to realize our own quality of openness or spaciousness, we are able to see that it also exists on the side of the hated object. Then the quality of our hatred starts to change too. Finally it is no longer hatred - it is something rather undefinable in ordinary language. But the energy and dynamic of what was hatred remains and has become something creative.

Desire is similarly a distortion of a Buddha quality. It is the sense of possessing something of great value and worth which produces well-being. There is a sense in which that is already there. Distortion occurs through the mistaken perception of a difference between subject and

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

object. We feel that something good and desirable is out there, that we need to reach out to in order to grasp and possess it. When we see that the sense of well-being that the object seems to have is actually a quality of our own intrinsic being, what was desire remains but becomes that quality of sensitivity and responsiveness associated with well-being - the Buddha qualities of bliss and compassion.

Stupidity is a distortion of the Buddha quality of spaciousness. By thinking of ourselves as separate individuals, cut off from others and the world around us, we feel shut in. We want to shut the world out and this makes us dull and stupid. We cannot see and do not want to see the vastness of our own being, nor its emptiness and spaciousness. In this atmosphere neither clarity nor sensitivity can thrive. When we start to let go of the strategies we have developed as a defence against seeing the spacious empty nature of our being, what was stupidity remains but has become the Buddha quality of ungraspable spaciousness beyond all concepts and conceptual contrivance.

*This is not a
form of
reductionism*

From the practical point of view it is important to be careful lest talking about space, awareness and well-being becomes a kind of reductionism. It is possible to make the mistake of thinking that since the dynamic of the world, the way we behave towards others, our sense of beauty and so on, are just expressions of those three qualities, we should try to impose this view on everything.

That is not what is meant. Do not try to deny or dismiss the rich variety of qualities found in the world within and around you. Learn to work with them all in the right kind of way. Work

3. INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF THE NATURE OF MIND

with them in terms of openness, awareness and well-being in order to appreciate them all fully and equally, not in order to reduce them to a bland sameness.

For example, we tend to think that our generosity and sense of beauty are good - and so they are, but they are still partial. I might be generous, but not *that* generous. I might have a sense of beauty, but it is not all-encompassing, not *that* accurate.

By practising with these three qualities in mind, our sense of beauty, our sense of generosity and so on expand, making them vast and beyond imagination. Our joy in things becomes something that surpasses the physicality of what is usually meant by joy.

Our ordinary sense of body cannot contain the full intensity of the three qualities and tends to filter them or reduce their power. As our awareness expands and deepens our sense of body changes and we experience everything more intensely.

We tend to think that it is through the body and its senses that we are able to experience anything at all. However, there is a profound sense in which the body is actually part of a narrowing process. We are unable to experience things properly because they get confused on account of having to be experienced through the body. Although it is true that at present we cannot conceive of experiencing anything in any other way, we can at least begin to notice that the body as we think of it is a product of our concepts, a 'body image' that our mind creates. We express ourselves through this image, which is in itself part of the confusion process.

*Our
physicality
limits us*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Beauty and
Enjoyment*

Ananda once said to the Buddha, 'The half of the holy life, Lord, is the friendship with what is lovely, intimacy with what is lovely (*sobhana* - beautiful)'. The Buddha replied, 'Say not so, Ananda! Say not so, Ananda! It is the whole, not the half of the holy life.'^{*}

So the idea that some people have of Buddhism being a cult of coldness and disconnection from any kind of feeling is a total misapprehension. Rather it advocates enjoyment. Awakening is a process of enhancing the quality of everything we experience in our everyday life.

*Increasingly
subtle mental
states*

We start by focusing on openness, awareness and well-being as expressed in rather gross mental states - getting some connection with those. After a time we feel we have succeeded to some extent. Usually this simply means that we have connected with a rather more subtle mental state than before. That is all right though. It is all part of the process of training - we are not expected to get it completely right first time. We just keep training and gradually, because our mind is focusing on that new subtlety, it starts to spread into our everyday experience.

Gradually, even that starts to feel too coarse and we see further subtlety. That is all part of the process. We cannot expect to notice the subtlest levels of coarseness until our mind has already become more refined.

*Like peeling off
layers*

It is like peeling the layers off an onion. We keep realizing that there is yet another level of subtlety in spaciousness, clarity and well-being

^{*} From the Samyutta Nikaya of the Pali Canon; quoted here from 'Some Sayings of the Buddha', by F. L. Woodward, page 139.

3. INITIAL EXPERIENCES OF THE NATURE OF MIND

that we had never noticed before. However, that also may be very subtly conceptual. Eventually we realize the relative coarseness even of that.

We go through a series of levels in this way and eventually our intuition, or whatever you want to call it, becomes sufficiently sharp for the experience of those three qualities to arise as they actually are in themselves - in all their vastness and splendour.

When we begin to connect to experiences that are approaching an actual or direct realization of those qualities, strangely, those experiences seem to approach us from outside ourselves, as if they were something that was happening to us, rather than being our very nature.

*A force
independent of
self-will and
effort*

We engage in the practice because somehow we would like to be better people - a wiser, more compassionate, energetic, generous, grateful or whatever. It is as if, although we think that we do not have those qualities, we sense that it is possible for us to have them - that is why we want them. They are things we would like to acquire. At some point, however, we realize as a direct experience that the source of all those qualities is not some kind of abstract ideal, but is alive and within ourselves. Although we have a real relationship and connection with it, it is not something that we can manipulate or win over.

Trungpa Rinpoche described that source of our being as an irritating quality that we cannot do anything about. We cannot swindle it or inveigle it. In other words those three qualities manifest freely under the right circumstances. It is a power or a source of life that we cannot cheat or trick.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*The three
qualities are
one*

It may seem as if the three qualities are three different experiences. At first it is useful to distinguish the awareness, the space and the well-being. Actually, however, all three are a single experience of awareness that is everywhere. The potential of that experience of clarity is everywhere and intrinsically carries with it the quality of sensitivity and well-being.

4. THE THREE NYAMS

There are three major experiences (*nyams*) that spontaneously arise in meditation practice at some point, although it would be a mistake to think meditation was about trying to create these *nyams*. The three *nyams* are called 'freedom from thought', which arises from the quality of spaciousness; 'clarity', which arises from the quality of clarity, and 'bliss', which arises from the quality of sensitivity. In other words, the three *nyams* correspond to the three qualities of mind.

When these *nyams* occur we begin to experience the qualities of spaciousness, clarity and sensitivity very strongly in what you might call an objective way - objective in the sense that they happen by themselves and do not seem to be a product of our own mind or effort.

The actual meditative experience of spaciousness or of non-thought (*mi tok pa'i nyam*) is an experience of being free from the reference point of your ordinary thoughts. You are just there in a very profound sense.

In the clarity experience (*sal nyam*) the mind becomes very vivid and sharp. This is clarity and awareness together. It might even be associated with some sense of light, so that you have a sense of clarity spreading everywhere, revealing what was previously obscured.

The bliss experience (*day nyam*) is connected with sensitivity, responsiveness or well-being. The quality of sensitivity is always associated with a feeling of well-being, so in this experience everything feels good. Your whole body and mind feel great.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Three nyams at
once*

It is possible for all three experiences to happen together. This is a very special experience. You feel great, you feel brightness and space and they are experienced together. The brightness suffuses the space and you feel this well-being everywhere.

There is nothing wrong with any of these *nyams*. They just happen as a natural part of the path - not even necessarily during the meditation period.

*The problem to
avoid*

The problem arises when you start thinking, 'Ah, I've made it at last. This is what it is all about.' Here, it is possible to deviate from the path. It is very easy for a Westerner who has never done any practice before to be bowled over by experiencing one or more of these *nyams*, thinking, 'Wow, this must be what it is all about!'. If you went to a meditation teacher, he would probably do something like shrug his shoulders and say, 'Oh yes, that always happens when people meditate. Don't bother about it. That is not what meditation is about'.

The reason the teacher would say such a thing is that you could easily start thinking it was about having these experiences and making a big deal about it. You could start creating a kind of fantasy world out of those experiences. It might be a delightful world, but it is not what Buddhism is about.

Buddhism is about appreciating all experience equally: not to get excited by good experience, downcast by bad or disappointed by neutral experience, but to feel an equalness to all experience. Whether you judge it good, bad or neutral is irrelevant; the important point is to rest in the nature of experience itself.

4. THE THREE NYAMS

Buddhism is about seeing that whatever world we find ourselves in is created by our concepts. First we see them for what they are and then, in a very profound sense, we see what happens beyond them. When you begin to see the nature of reality clearly, something happens which is beyond so-called 'objective' experience.

*Buddhism is
about
realization that
goes beyond
fantasy worlds*

It is a 'seeing' or understanding which is beyond concepts. The so-called 'objective' experiences of openness, clarity and sensitivity are understood as actual expressions of your own inherent nature. This is very different from merely experiencing them as 'objective' states that happen to you.

In the case of a true realization, one recognizes that those qualities are what one actually is, beyond any conceptual understanding. That is quite different from a *nyam* where somehow, in some subtle way, one conceptualizes the experience and turns it into some emotionally gratifying, rather wonderful 'objective' experience.

*The important
difference
between nyam
and realization*

It is very important to realize that the qualities are not thoughts or concepts in themselves, but that the *nyams* are almost thoughts in the sense that there is some conceptual contrivance involved. The *nyam* itself is derived from the corresponding basic quality, but this basic quality, in itself, has nothing to do with thoughts.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

5. THE DIRECT REALIZATION OF THE NATURE OF MIND

When you have the actual or direct realization, you suddenly see that there never were any clouds. Then there is not a quantitative change but a qualitative change in the way you experience everything. It is not just a matter of increasing subtlety; suddenly there is a change in the way the whole thing is perceived. This is actual realization - it is called enlightenment or awakening when it is complete.

Direct realization is a qualitative change - there never were any clouds

Imagine watching a film and getting totally absorbed in it. Imagine that the film does not just include things we see and hear but involves all our senses - bodily feelings, smell, taste, touch, mind, memory - everything. We become totally absorbed by the film, maybe arguing with ourselves about what is going on and wanting particular things to happen. Then we suddenly realize that it is only a film. There is actually a whole different reality going on around us all the time. The film was nothing really and there is this wonderful world around us which is so much better than the film. Enlightenment is like emerging from the film - or to use a more traditional image, like waking out of a dream.

Enlightenment is like emerging from a film or waking from a dream

We shall see that in meditation we are taught to use the rhythm of the out-breath as a kind of support. It is important to know that eventually one does not have to focus on the breath particularly, because one has a very real and direct experience of the mind being endless. 'Mind' here is being used in the sense of the totality of one's experience or being. Ultimately,

Mind is endless

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

no matter what you are aware of, that awareness quality has no limits. You can actually rest in that endless quality as a single experience.

*Not a content
of mind*

It must be stressed again here that when the mind is described as endless, having this sense of well-being and so on, we are not talking about a content of mind. It might seem like that because it is difficult to express it in any other words. But when we are talking about 'awareness itself', or 'mind itself' we are not talking about a particular consciousness or a particular awareness. Endlessness simply means there are no boundaries whatsoever. There are no reference points by which one could define it as something. Its quality is everywhere.

*Endlessness is
more spacious
than space*

It cannot even be described as being like space, because it is more vast than space. Our limited notion of space comes from a sort of low-level awareness of that endless quality. The trouble with using the word 'endless' is that it sounds like our ordinary idea of space.

*Limitations of
language*

Unfortunately, there is nothing much that can be done about this, because at present we experience everything in a very limited way and all our words express ordinary ideas and experiences. When we want to extend or expand our experience of things, the only words we have to use are our ordinary words with all their overtones of limitation and imperfection. So one is stuck with using words in a somewhat dubious way.

We often use the words 'generosity' or 'beauty', for example, in quite a mundane sense. However, when we want to express an inspirational sense of generosity or beauty, we

5. ACTUAL OR DIRECT REALIZATION

find there is no special vocabulary, so that we are forced to use the same words again, choosing an ordinary word that most closely relates to that inspirational quality. When you think about it, what word is there for generosity or beauty free from the gross limitations of our usual experience of those qualities?

Mahayana Buddhism tries to use language in such a way as to convey this sense of inspiration, but no language could ever be entirely satisfactory. We use words like openness, clarity and sensitivity, spaciousness, awareness and well-being, but there are not really any words that correspond to what they are. It is just that those words are suggestive. They seem to come near to the mark as subtle conceptual equivalents that act as hints, triggers or pointers.

So I would like to emphasize again here that well-being in this context is not well-being in the ordinary sense of just feeling good in a limited and imperfect way. Nevertheless, that limited sense of well-being that we all experience relates to the fundamental nature of everything, that 'well-being' which ultimately cannot be discriminated as good, bad, or anything else, and for which we do not really have words. In order to give some sort of indication of the area of experience we are talking about, we choose the nearest experience we have that connects with it and use the nearest word that expresses it.

*Well-being is
more than
feeling good*

In the same way, when we have the direct or actual realization of the nature of mind, there is, finally, an overwhelming feeling of what could almost be called 'satisfaction'. Trungpa Rinpoche used to say 'It is wonderful to know that you don't have to do anything'. This goes with the realization that there never was anything that

*Not having to
do anything*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

had to be done to make things come right. There never was anything to correct.

Section II
Basic Meditation Technique

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

6. POSTURE

Although it is recommended that you sit cross-legged on a cushion or kneel on a meditation stool, sitting on a chair is also all right.

The important point is to make sure you are in a comfortable, alert and relaxed position. To be alert the back has to be straight, but if you pull yourself straight into a ramrod position you create strain. Don't do that. On the other hand, if you slump or let your head drop forward you become dull and sleepy. That is not good either. If you sit on the edge of a high cushion with your weight thrust forward on your knees, you strain your legs and back. On the other hand, if you sit leaning backwards you are off-balance, which again will lead to strain.

The weight should drop down from the crown of the head like a plumb-line through the navel and into the cushion. The rest of the body should relax around this central axis. The spine should feel all of a piece, each vertebra resting gently on the next like a loose-strung string of pearls, the head resting lightly on the top as if the chin were floating on the surface of the ocean. The chest should feel free, neither thrust out nor caved in.

Choose a cushion, stool or chair that is of a height and shape that suits you. Do not strain to sit in the lotus or half-lotus posture, but you may find that if you can gradually ease your body into that position, it is the most comfortable and stable position to be in for long periods of meditation.

The shoulders should be relaxed. If you pull them back too strongly you cause strain, but if

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

you let them droop forwards your chest cannot expand easily. It might help to think of your body relaxing from inside the centre of the chest and spreading outwards in a sphere from that point.

The hands should rest on the thighs where they feel comfortable and your shoulders feel relaxed.

The eyes should neither be shut nor fully open. Look down at a natural angle of about forty-five degrees. In this way you keep some sort of connection with your environment without being distracted by it. If you shut your eyes there is a tendency to go too much in on yourself so that it becomes almost a kind of escape from the world. Although it is important to be centred in yourself, you also need to keep your connection with the world. Having your eyes open should be no more of a problem than having your ears open.

To sum up, whatever you do, make sure you avoid any position that makes you feel strained or constricted on the one hand or dull and sleepy on the other.

Points to avoid

Having heard that it is good to sit in a lotus or half-lotus position, some beginners think that to do the thing properly they should try to force themselves into this position. Symptoms of too much force are thrusting forwards and too much weight on the knees. Sometimes beginners think that to settle for a more comfortable position is too 'soft' an option. It is important to emphasize that meditation is not some kind of endurance test. In the East, where people have sat cross-legged all their lives, this position is natural and comfortable - that is why it is recommended.

6. POSTURE

The three qualities are expressed symbolically in the posture we adopt for meditation. When you sit cross-legged with your eyes open and arms out, there is nothing in front of you, so there is no protection. This expresses openness. There is a sense of being united with the environment and space - the opposite of closing off. The hands are not across the body which could symbolize an attempt to defend or protect yourself. Having them out, open, on the knees expresses spaciousness.

*The symbolism
of the meditation
posture*

It is true that the external space is just a symbol of the mind-space of openness itself; nevertheless, in a profound sense, physical space is connected with the open spacious nature of our being.

There is symbolism associated with all the physical attributes of the Buddha. Sensitivity and responsiveness are expressed by our feeling of being firmly connected to the earth. This symbolism is found in the form of the Buddha image, where he is depicted with one hand over his knee with fingers reaching down to touch the earth. The gesture (*mudra*) of touching the earth in this way depicts his calling the earth to witness just before his enlightenment. It was a declaration of his right to be there, going through the process of awakening. He was doing it not just for his own benefit but for the benefit of all beings. As the Buddha made this declaration, he called the earth to stand witness to all the good deeds he had performed in all his former lifetimes in order to come to this point of enlightenment. The evil forces thereupon withdrew. The idea is that the forces of evil did not want the Buddha to become enlightened and destroy their power, so they challenged his right to become an enlightened one.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

We all have these forces within ourselves that try to deny the presence in us of the basic qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity. These forces can also come from outside ourselves so that the inside and outside forces can unite and appear to us in the form of demons. Not only do these negative forces try to deny we have these qualities, but also that we could *ever* connect to them or realize them. They might suggest to us that we do not even have the *right* to try to realize them. All this links into our sense of personal worthlessness and self-hatred.

By having our arms outstretched towards the ground and by sitting firmly with a strong sense of connection with the ground, we call the earth to witness our right to be here and to become enlightened. We can feel confident that if we had not acted skilfully in the past, we would not be choosing to be here trying to become enlightened now. The fact that we are here, making this choice, proves our right to be here. This is important. Without that kind of confidence in our natural connectedness we cannot open out into the meditation.

Longchenpa and other Tibetan masters are often depicted in paintings with both their hands forward in what looks like a double earth-touching *mudra*. This *mudra* is called the relaxation *mudra*. It might even be translated as the 'holiday' or 'taking a break' *mudra* (*ngalso chagcha*). It expresses that sense of being perfectly at home in one's world and the space in which one finds oneself. This gives a tremendous sense of groundedness and presence. Sitting like this is a positive step in the right direction. It is aligning oneself with confidence, unguarded, alert and upright. It sets the scene for the meditation.

6. POSTURE

In itself it may seem a small thing, but small things build up. The physical posture we adopt affects our mind. A non-defensive posture actually has an opening effect on our mind. The open, spacious quality of our being expresses itself physically, mentally and emotionally. Closing off mentally or emotionally affects our posture and vice versa. Not only that, but in a profound sense the body really does link directly to the true nature of our mind or being.

The nature of mind is stable like the earth. It never moves off somewhere or changes into something else. It always remains as it is. This does not mean that it is anything that we can fix on or recognize as some sort of entity - it is just a quality of strength. It has the ability to handle anything that arises - not in the sense of manipulation, but in the sense of its being able to accommodate everything, like the elements, space and earth*.

Clarity and awareness are expressed by our sitting upright facing out into space and really wanting to be part of that. It is the opposite of sitting slumped over. That position suggests a wish to close down and go to sleep - as if one had a great weight on one's shoulders. Far from waking up and facing life, there is a sense of wanting to recoil from it. The message is one of oppression or even depression. So not only does the meditation posture affect how you feel about yourself, it affects your whole feeling about life, both in the meditation session and outside it. A

* In Buddhist thought there are five elements - the usual four, earth, water, fire and air, and then a fifth one which is space.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

good posture expresses a sense of openness and ease with everything.

The uprightness of the posture expresses still alertness - the quality of being ready for anything, though not in the sense of feeling nervous. Imagine you were alone in a room and you heard a sudden slight movement that you were not sure about. You are not sufficiently bothered to get up and do anything about it, but you are curious. You are curious to know what it was. Think about what you would be doing with your body. You would find that your body would automatically straighten. If you really wanted to know what that sound was, but you were not nervous, you would not look around the room in a slumped position, you would automatically sit up, awake - with sharp faculties.

*Move if you
feel strain or
pain*

Although the mind is foremost, the body is important because the mind tends to follow its lead. That is why the physical posture is emphasized. However, if you have some real physical problem connected with the posture, change position. For example, if your legs feel really uncomfortable, move them and refold them. Remember, meditation is not an endurance test. It is possible to damage your legs if you are not used to sitting with them crossed for long periods of time. However, as you move, maintain awareness - notice the feeling in the legs, the feeling of wanting to move, of moving and of feeling comfortable again - try to do this without losing that sense of space and openness. You will find that if you follow this instruction of keeping your awareness as you move, you will naturally move less. Fidgeting comes from losing awareness so that the mind and body both become restless.

7. THE BREATH

In a profound sense the breath is associated with speech and communication. They all involve movement and an energy exchange. They all ripple out from a central point, dissolve; and re-emerge from that point - a movement out, dissolving, and out again, linking the centre with the periphery. The prime focus of this particular meditation technique is space and the awareness that expands out into space, dissolves and re-emerges from that space. The breath is an obvious focus for such a practice because of the natural link between the out-breath, space and awareness.

*The rhythm of
the breath*

People often find focusing on the breath a problem. They cannot let go of trying too hard to focus on it. Even ignoring it seems to become a problem. That is why the emphasis should be on a sense of well-being, an opening out to whatever experience arises, giving it space, letting it be and resting in that sense of well-being and space associated with being alive. Meanwhile the breath continues naturally, providing a background sense of rhythm. This means that you are not actually meditating on the breath itself, but on the rhythm. The out-breath moves out into space and you just surrender to that feeling and you let yourself relax physically and mentally into that. If the mind rests naturally like that, then just let go more, using the out-breath again if it helps. If it does not help, just continue to relate to the space in as natural a way as possible. If you feel you need more help, return to the out-breath and repeat the 'letting go into space' instruction until a natural sense of space and awareness starts to develop.

You should not try to focus sharply all the

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

time and you should not try to rest all the time but gently alternate between the two - sharp focus, expanded awareness, sharp focus - in a quiet, naturally rhythmic way. In this way you use the breath as a vehicle for expanding into spaciousness, endlessness, vastness, openness (whichever word you feel happy with). There is movement associated with the out-breath and then a still, relaxed melting into space. Whatever emerges out of that space melts back into it again. It is natural and rhythmic.

This relaxation into space is associated with the quality of well-being. The sense of well-being is there all the time. Letting go into the out-breath is associated with developing confidence in that. It is a kind of fearlessness. Then there is simply the sense of well-being and space - an uncluttered mental environment.

If you try too intensely to create space, it leads to the opposite of spaciousness. There might be a slight anxiety about trying to create space. That is why it is good to let the mind rest on the rhythm of the breath and gradually let go into space in a natural way.

In this particular practice the breath is not meant to be approached analytically. Do not try to work out exactly what the out-breath is or where it is and what it looks like and so on. The idea here is to keep things very simple and relaxed. Do not get into any kind of conceptual investigation, do not make a 'big deal' out of it. Keep it light and uncomplicated. You are just letting go of something you were holding onto. That is all. There is no sense of limits, nor are you trying to merge with limitless space. It is more like just letting there be that space and openness. It is already there within you - you are

7. THE BREATH

just letting your mind rest in that.

Most of the problems with this technique arise from trying to make it more complicated than it is. It is not a special *yogic* breathing practice. Follow the natural pattern of your breath - do not try to change it at all.

Points to avoid

There is a tendency, to start with, to make a longer out-breath to give yourself more time to focus on it and so on. This is a mistake. The symptom indicating that you are doing this is shortness of breath or some sense of strain connected with the breath. If this happens, without getting up or changing position, just tell yourself to stop meditating. The chances are that you will find that the sense of strain disappears.

In fact you may find that as soon as you 'try' to meditate again the problem comes back, only to disappear immediately you 'stop'. A sense of irony should strike you - you have to laugh at yourself. The mind is very suggestible and silly in its way. It is important not to get too serious about it all. As time goes on you will gain a lot of insight from seeing how much the mind is influenced by just very slight changes in your thinking.

The alternating in- and out-breaths are analogous to the process of *shamata* and *vipashyana*. *Shamata* means calm abiding and *vipashyana* means penetrating insight or awareness. The sharpness of strongly focused awareness (*vipashyana*) spreads out into the stillness and spaciousness of the mind at rest (*shamata*) and dissolves into that space, only to re-emerge as another point of sharp awareness which proceeds to spread out and dissolve again. It is a natural rhythmic process. If you try to

*Shamata and
Vipashyana*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

focus too sharply and too fast, the ripples start to bounce off each other and create the impression of confusion. As soon as you let the confusion dissolve into space, the awareness and clarity return and start to spread out into space again.

There is no need to try to stop anything or force your mind to be peaceful. If you leave the mind be, the sharp focus of the thought process or of the emotions spreads out into space and the mind starts to feel peaceful, spacious, accommodating and transparent. On the other hand, if you keep trying to manipulate the mind to make it more peaceful, the ripples just bounce off each other more and more and you feel that you are being buffeted around relentlessly by endless thoughts and feelings. You feel hemmed in by your thoughts and emotions so that you can hardly breathe any more. You feel you cannot take any more, it is all too much, too solid and too real.

The ebb and flow of the practice is the alternation of the sense of movement of the out-breath or of the insight into space, with the sense of peace between the out-breaths. That sense of peace and spaciousness is the *shamata*.

To begin with, and perhaps for a long time, it is a good discipline to keep making yourself return to the rhythm of the out-breath. If you have never tried to meditate before, you need some sort of discipline to keep your mind from simply following its usual tracks.

Non-
manipulation

You do not have to hype up, or crank up a feeling of happiness, joy or whatever. The sense of well-being I am talking about does not spring from something that you have to try to bring about. It is simply the case that merely to rest in

7. THE BREATH

that state of space carries a sense of well-being.

As you breathe out, let go into a sensation of space, vastness and openness. It is like looking out into the far distance from the top of a mountain with the ground falling away below you. There is an exhilarating feeling of openness and freshness that is attractive, bracing and alive. Nevertheless, in the meditation, you should not think 'I'm on top of a mountain' or anything like that. I simply mention this and other images, so that as you hear them and think about them some natural response might be triggered in you. That is all. They are just hints or pointers at the 'flavour' of the practice. It is for you to discover for yourself exactly what is being hinted at.

Hints

Another hint is to think of the sense of relief and relaxation that follows a period of oppression. At the moment you realize it has been lifted, you cry 'Ah!'. The relief and astonishment leave you feeling open and free, dispelling all sense of oppressiveness. You might find it helpful to think or say 'Ah!' to yourself as you let yourself relax into the meditation on the out-breath.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

8. COMMITMENT TO THE PRACTICE

The 'Ah' comes from the heart. You have your heart's wish at last. Now it is just a matter of developing confidence in that. You are confident and glad to be doing the practice because it will lead to the discovery of the mind's nature, your heart's wish.

The heart's wish

In the end, all you need is confidence in the mind's nature, the nature of your being. That is all the well-being that you need. All you need to do is learn to just rest in that space and nothing else. You could call this confidence 'boldness'. You boldly let go into that sense of space.

Confidence

You may feel a bit anxious, you may feel that if you 'let go' too much something awful might happen. So you might think, 'I'll let go, but I'd better not let go too much'. This reservation might dog you for a long time, but as you practise you learn that you can indeed afford to let go completely. The practice gradually builds up your confidence so that you see that your 'holding back' and your reservations arise from a mistaken view of the world. As you awaken to the natural space and clarity of your being, you gain confidence and can let go of your sense of self and your sense of needing to control everything. It feels right and the mind rests in that.

We learn to let go of that constant sense of problem, of 'There's something wrong here'. We take new delight in being a human being on the path to awakening. There's no big problem.

Because we have such a strong tendency to think the mere fact of being alive is a problem

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

somehow, it is good for us to make a deliberate move in the opposite direction. When we practise we should deliberately link into the feeling of the glory and wonder of actually being alive. This is what is meant by a sense of well-being.

*How often and
how long
should one
meditate?*

In terms of how long to meditate, first it is best to build up from short periods to half an hour or more at a time. However, in the course of a busy life, even a few minutes of silent contemplation is helpful. If you really want to involve yourself deeply in the practice, you should meditate for at least half an hour a day. An hour at a time is even better.

It is important to do retreats from time to time. It is usually possible for most people to do at least a weekend, if not a week to ten day's retreat sometimes. A month is even better.

*Walking
meditation*

When doing over an hour's meditation it is good to do periods of ten to twenty minutes walking meditation. Walking meditation is useful because if you are not used to sitting for long periods, especially if you are sitting cross-legged, then your legs may get a bit uncomfortable. But the prime reason for the walking period is not just to give your legs a break.

During the walking meditation, walk at a natural pace (there is no need for exaggerated slowness as is used in some meditation traditions), drop the awareness of the out-breath and just rest in the spaciousness of a kind of panoramic awareness.

The idea is that the walking can create extra energy and a different kind of awareness. It is a case of merging the sitting meditation with some

8. COMMITMENT TO THE PRACTICE

kind of physical movement, which helps towards bringing the meditation into everyday life situations - the eventual aim of the whole process. Our commitment to the practice includes carrying the meditation experience into our daily life practice.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

It is not entirely wrong for there to be, at first, some sort of effort in trying to create a sense of spaciousness and so on. At this stage you are trying to develop some kind of vision, which to begin with is a bit ragged. Gradually you learn how to practise in a smooth, natural way and eventually the practice takes over by itself. Before this happens, it is almost as if you are manipulating it, because of the need to direct the whole process. Later on it becomes more joyous because it is rolling along by itself, as if it were carrying you rather than you pushing it.

*A certain
amount of
'effort' is
inevitable at
first*

Before you reach this stage, it is as if you were spending time and effort getting to the top of a mountain in order to enjoy the view from there. When you arrive at this stage, it feels as if you were just there in the countryside - no effort. It is all perfectly natural. There is no need to say to yourself, 'Oh, I have to see this as a really expansive piece of countryside.' In the same way the practice eventually becomes natural and self-powered.

With the out-breath you connect with the active aspect of trying to develop more sense of space and vision, but this only ever seems to develop to a certain point. There is always a sense of a limit or boundary of some sort. Then suddenly insight (*vipashyana*) arises and for a moment all the barriers come down and the vision is unlimited. This did not arise from a sequence of experiences of increasingly unlimited vision - more and more of the same, as

*Vipashyana is
true vision or
insight into
boundlessness*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

it were. The experience of having no boundary at all is an opening into a totally different dimension. Unlimitedness is qualitatively different from limitation. No matter how all-inclusive and vast the space within a boundary may be, even if it goes on for millions of miles and seems very open, it always remains within a boundary. To step out of this into boundlessness is an experience of insight or true vision. The way to approach that insight into boundlessness is through letting go more and more into our present sense of space, even though this is contrived and limited.

*Vipashyana is
cutting through
concepts*

Certain background thoughts or concepts create and support our notions of past, present and future, and of the space or mind in which thoughts arise, stay and disappear. However, even to think in terms of time, space, mind and thoughts limits us.

Insight undermines all these fundamental, fixed notions and after a while they are all seen to fail. Even before we have gone beyond them completely, there is a sense in which they become less concrete and solid. The mind becomes looser and more transparent so that, in some indefinable way, one feels one is making progress. This is the beginning of insight, the beginning of really experiencing the three qualities of the nature of mind. The development of insight is sometimes accompanied by the three *nyams*, but there is no saying when or how the *nyams* may happen. The most important thing is the steady deepening of insight or realisation.

*Insight
(vipashyana) is
not actual
realization*

The initial insight is not to be equated with the actual realization (*adhigama*, Tib. *tokpa*), which involves the complete disappearance of conceptual notions about space and time and so

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

on. You have to continue working with the experience of insight and in this way it becomes increasingly expansive. You have to carry on gaining insight and developing increased stability of mind for a long time.

At first, what you are doing is making your conceptual framework more spacious and subtle. You are not actually cutting completely through it. You cannot work in any other way. You have good experiences (*nyams*) associated with that spaciousness, but it is still in a way the same old story. Then, suddenly there is an experience beyond anything that has gone before. You actually experience the collapse of your whole conceptual framework. It is only then, when those boundaries collapse altogether, that something else can happen that is qualitatively different. Even so, at first this will be only an extension of the *vipashyana* experience. It only becomes actual realization when it is stabilised.

Even before insight starts to develop you begin to notice how busy the mind is. It is important to notice that all the busy-ness in the mind is actually just the mind thinking. To start with you can label it all 'thinking' as you notice it. After a while you get used to the fact that this 'thinking' is just going on and on endlessly and you start to become interested in the whole process rather than in the actual content of the various thoughts and feelings that come up.

*Labelling
thoughts as
'thinking'*

At this point you do not really need to keep labelling everything as thinking. Your mind is already more spacious and accommodating and you can just let yourself become more aware of the rhythmic process of movement and stillness, focused awareness and dissolution into space. You become increasingly aware of the clarity,

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

spaciousness and well-being accompanying all experience. So you do not have to try to focus on every out-breath. Maybe you will find you do not need to focus on the out-breath at all. The clarity and awareness itself can be the movement that balances the stillness of the *shamata*. The important thing is that there is movement of some kind. Without any movement the mind just stagnates into dullness and sleepiness.

Eventually you learn just to let go of any sense of boundary between inside or outside, near or far, and so on.

*Thoughts and
feelings arise
out of that
space and are
that space*

When we say thoughts, feelings or emotions arise in the space of awareness and sensitivity, it is only a manner of speaking. In fact, they actually are that space. Thoughts and feelings arise, appear and dissolve and the practice is just to be aware of this arising and disappearing, and to relate to the fact that everything is an expression of those basic qualities. So there is no need to be perturbed by anything you think or experience. It is useful to remember this for daily life practice also. Here you need to develop a recognition of these qualities in everyday experiences.

*Notice your
attitude to your
thoughts*

You should notice not only the thoughts and feelings that arise in your mind but also your attitude towards them. For example, when you find yourself thinking that thoughts are intrusive, it is important to recognize that you are thinking that. You do not have to think they are not intrusive; you do not have to have any opinion about them. Simply be aware that the thought that they are intrusive is also just a thought.

*Do not identify
with your
attitudes and
opinions*

Once you adopt a certain attitude, such as deciding thoughts are intrusive, you stop treating that attitude as a thought and instead you

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

identify with it and give it some kind of special, almost permanent status. It is no longer regarded as a passing experience along with all the rest. It becomes 'me' - it becomes special. Having decided that thoughts are intrusive, you think 'I really want to get rid of them' and you no longer have the confidence of letting everything arise naturally and pass away without any problem. From this time on there will always be some anxiety about the presence of thoughts. So focus on the feeling of 'I don't want there to be any thoughts'. Recognize it as just the same as any other experience. If you adopt this kind of attitude then there is never any break in the meditation. Your mind becomes more and more stable and clear because every time something comes up that seems to be a break in meditation, you turn towards that feeling of a break or disturbance and treat it just like any other thought.

The increased sense of well-being that this brings allows for greater sensitivity. Usually we identify strongly with our attitudes and opinions, regarding them as too precious to criticise or let go of. We always find some good reason for why we are as we are - to discriminate strongly between what we like and dislike, what is right and wrong, good and bad and so on. But to identify with all this is to have a very poor idea of ourselves. It is a long way from recognizing the fundamental sense of well-being that is at our very core.

That sense of well-being is a kind of strength which allows things to freely arise, stay and go. It is a much better kind of strength than the pseudo-strength of identifying with various passing contents of mind.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Non-possession
of thoughts*

You should relate to thoughts with the same sense of non-possession as you relate to the nature of mind and its three basic qualities. The simple coming and going of thoughts is a natural function of the mind. They arise in a particular way due to conditioning causes and then disappear again as conditions change. They are part of a natural process, just as the rhythmic sharpening and dipping of awareness is.

Evam principle

The natural rhythm of the awareness focusing, drifting off and coming back into focus is an expression of what is called the *evam* principle. This is the general principle of how everything follows a rhythmic process of emanating from a certain point in space, spreading or rippling out into space from that point and disappearing into space. Then again something emerges from that space and so on. It is another way of saying that everything has a point of origin, a creative phase, a staying phase, a spreading or disintegrating stage and a stage of disappearance into space. From that space something new constantly emerges in an endless rhythmic process.

Our breath follows this rhythm all the time. In the meditation practice we follow the rippling out motion of the breath into space. The ebb and flow of our focused attention follows the same pattern. The thought that crept in, when the mind was not sharply aware, was able to take advantage of the spacious, open quality of the mind at that time. Our awareness of the presence of a thought is the clarity aspect of the mind intensifying. It arises with a sharp edge of awareness that then spreads outwards becoming more and more spacious and indefinite. Out of that space arises the next thought or sharp edge

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

of awareness. Acknowledging thoughts and letting them go is the spontaneous, sensitive or responsive quality of the mind. The three qualities flow into and out of focus in a natural rhythm. Meditation is about all three qualities.

We tend to think that we can control what we think, but actually thoughts just pop into the mind. We tend to think that we can make ourselves concentrate but actually the mind just becomes absorbed and concentrated naturally. Thoughts and gaps between thoughts, focused attention and drifting off are natural functions of the mind. We should give up the idea of trying to manipulate or change anything - in a very profound sense there is nothing to do.

The tendency is to think, 'This is a distraction', 'This is not meditation', 'I'm wasting time', 'I'm not doing it right', or whatever. You adopt a stern attitude towards yourself and order yourself back to the breath, determined to try harder - hoping for greater success. This is not what is required.

*Avoid getting
too tight*

The alternative is to give in to habitual patterns and to follow the natural flow of the mind. A whole chain of associations follows from every initial impulse - 'I feel bad... I must be feeling this way because something happened today', 'That was nice - I hope it happens again', 'Has that ever happened before?' and so on. You could follow trains of thoughts endlessly. This is also not required.

*Avoid getting
too loose*

Instead, as you become aware of thinking something such as a feeling, an image or a train of thoughts, attend to it. Turn your attention onto it fully in a gentle, accepting way. It is as if you were the host and the thought or feeling was

*Treat thoughts
as guests*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

the guest. You step forward and greet your guests, acknowledge their presence, welcome them, appreciate them for what they are and then politely move on. You do not rush off to the next thing. You give the guest a sense of space and peace - and then turn your attention gently to the next thing, which, of course, in the context of the meditation is the out-breath.

Boredom

When you first start to practise, you may find it quite engrossing - trying to connect with the rhythm of the breath and space and so on. It is like a new game. But then the mind gets bored with it; it floats off onto something else. However, it does not matter how many times the awareness drifts off and comes back - the important thing is to notice that it comes back and how to respond when it does.

Include stray thoughts and diversions in the meditation

Treat whatever the mind floats off to as part of the meditation. Whatever it is - whether it is something you are worried about or something that you are pleased about; maybe it is thoughts about how long the session is going to go on for, or a noise outside - whatever it is, do not try to push it away. Everything becomes part of the meditation practice. Nothing falls outside it.

Almost always there are stray thoughts of some kind floating through your mind. Mostly you can just ignore them and allow the meditation to be the dominant focus. The problem comes when the mind becomes diverted and absorbed in these thoughts that sometimes, if not often, have nothing to do with the meditation itself.

With stray thoughts that do not divert your attention from the meditation, simply notice how they arise against the backdrop of this space,

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

which is open and at rest. Although thoughts arise from space and within space, that space is never different or separate from them.

With diverting thoughts that have absorbed your attention for a while - since at that time your awareness has taken a dip - there is nothing that you can do. As soon as your awareness sharpens up again, treat whatever thoughts are there in the same way as you treat stray thoughts.

Gradually, as the thoughts are allowed to remain, they become transparent and fade away in their own time. You just allow the whole panorama of your experience, thoughts, perceptions and emotions to arise in space, be there and then dissolve away again.

A big disturbance that you feel overwhelmed by can be thought of as dissolving into space with the out-breath. It is important not to think that you have to conquer anything. You just have to let it be and let it go. Because your mind is like space there are no hooks for anything to hold on to, so everything just moves freely through space.

*Big
disturbances*

It might help to notice your physical posture when a big disturbance comes up. Take care to let go of any physical tension that is building up. Letting go on the out-breath helps with this.

If it is a strong emotion, it might help to think of it as a big wave that is crashing over you. All you have to do is to remain firmly grounded and let the wave wash over you. You are not the wave, you are the ground. The waves come and go, but you remain.

Remember the example of the clouds in the sky. Space, awareness and well-being are like the

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

sky and everything that arises, whether it is a big or a small thought, perception or emotion is just a cloud. Clouds are not intrinsic to the sky. They come and go, but the sky remains. Our mistake is to keep focusing on the clouds as if they were the sky. If you do not lose awareness of the space and vastness of the sky, you can appreciate the quality of the cloud formations. On the other hand, if you think only of the clouds they can make the situation feel very dark and claustrophobic. So learn to appreciate the sky, and then it does not matter fundamentally whether there are clouds present or not.

*The lordly
judgement of
the person in
charge*

You may sit down for an hour's meditation but after about half an hour, you think of a compelling reason why you should stop and do something else. For this reason it is important to think ahead and set aside a period of time that you know you can commit yourself to. Then, when such feelings of compulsion arise, all you do is to notice them.

We might be able to handle stray or diverting thoughts and feelings that are relatively superficial without much problem. We might feel slightly irritated or annoyed, but it is almost as if we can observe that and include it all as part of the process of meditation. However, at a certain point, it is as if someone breaks in on the whole scene and suddenly takes charge. It feels rather like a parent breaking in on a children's game. Such intrusions are quite difficult to handle. They suddenly change our whole attitude to everything.

For example, I might suddenly feel that what I'm doing is a waste of time. I might feel so antagonistic to the practice that I cannot *just* observe that feeling. In fact, the chances are that

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

I will not regard it as simply a part of my meditation at all. Although I started out with the intention of seeing the sameness of all the different kinds of thoughts and feelings that came up in the meditation, suddenly this particular kind of thought convinces me that it is totally special and is not to be treated in this way. Suddenly, my antagonism, my elation, my dislike, my creativity, my worry or whatever it is, is no longer part of the meditation. It is no longer something for me to relate to or cope with because it is actually *me*. It is the 'me' who has been in the wings, as it were, watching the whole process and now it has decided that enough is enough.

What has happened is that I have identified with it completely. It functions as a lordly judgement that makes some pronouncement such as, 'This is not good for me', 'I have better things to do with my time' or 'Now I have experienced something wonderful - I must go and write it down'. It is as if a third person has suddenly appeared and taken charge of the whole situation. This is the sensible, separate person who controls our destiny and makes decisions for us. This is the one who makes decisions about whether we continue the meditation or not, or whether we go on holiday or not, or what career we should follow. This is the person who says things like, 'Oh I have to do something about my anger - I'm quite an angry person'. This is that reasonable person who separates himself off and talks about himself to himself.

What we do not realize is that the person who is in charge and rules our life is, in fact, still just a collection of emotions, feelings, thoughts

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

and so on. Although the observing 'me' seems to be different from the observed 'me', in fact it is no different from the 'me' consisting of all the observed thoughts, perceptions and emotions arising in the mind.

It is when we begin to realize this, that we can begin to appreciate that the backdrop of space, awareness and well-being really is something separate from that whole process. It does not change, whereas the person who seems to be in charge changes all the time. His opinions, emotions, prejudices and ideas change, but even so they are what we identify with. We think all this is 'me', but actually it is just something that arises within that space, awareness and sensitivity. It is just a feature of that. The person in charge is not anything special and his lordly judgement is by no means binding.

Guilt feelings

It is tremendously important to recognize this, because it is the person in charge, with his lordly judgements, who perpetuates all our guilt feelings. When we feel guilty two things happen. First we side against ourselves and then that part of ourselves that feels criticized sides against others. So the other side of a feeling of guilt is a feeling that others are bad. This leads us to attack them, if not verbally or physically, at least, in our mind.

This is a very common problem in the West. It is important to notice those feelings of guilt - 'It's all my fault', 'I am bad', 'I blame myself', which then moves on to 'It's their fault', 'They are bad'. These thoughts and the feelings that go with them are actually just thoughts or feelings. They are nothing special. The problem comes when we identify with the sensible person in charge who is making these kinds of judgement

9. THOUGHTS AND THE INSIGHT BEYOND THOUGHTS

as if they really knew what was what. In spite of appearances and feelings, this person is not really you in any profound sense. In the meditation, notice that that lordly judgement appears in space as just a phenomenon or feature of that space.

Once you have developed strong self-confidence - a very good feeling about that space - you have no problem about the thoughts that arise and disappear. It does not matter what kind of thoughts they are. It does not matter if they are what we call 'bad' thoughts or 'good' thoughts. They are in that space and because they are in that space there is no problem. There is nothing that one cannot stand to see.

*A non-
judgemental
attitude arises
from confidence*

You may worry about having thoughts and about their being good or bad. In fact, the more worked up you get trying to adopt some sort of judgemental attitude towards them, the more of a problem you create. The irony is that you create a problem where there never was one. Thoughts have power only insofar as you have a judgemental attitude towards them, such as always trying to push them away or always allowing them to seduce you. In this context it is important to realise that even thinking that thoughts do not matter is a judgement.

On the other hand, if you just allow them to be seen, so that they arise and disappear in that space, then it is suddenly like the first day of your holiday - as if something had been lifted so that there was all this time and space in which you could relax. From just a shift of focus, what was a problem is simply not a problem any more.

What happens is that when you lose awareness of the primordial quality of space and

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

openness, you become obsessed with minor things like particular thoughts, emotions, feelings, ideas, prejudices and so on. These always come and go - they have no stability. On the other hand, the three inseparable qualities have stability. It is the kind of stability that allows you to relate or connect to anything. Nothing is too challenging.

*Problems
remain but
your attitude to
them changes*

Nobody is saying that if you meditate you will cease to have problems. There is no magic that totally changes everything all of a sudden. Instead, there is a new feeling of hopefulness. It is as if right at the beginning of the process you can somehow glimpse the end of it too. In an intuitive way you feel the rightness of what you are doing and that feeling can carry you through a lot of what might otherwise seem quite negative circumstances.

10. BALANCING THE FIVE FACULTIES

There are two pairs of faculties (*indriya*) in our being that need balancing, and a faculty that balances them. The two pairs which are to be balanced with each other are:

prajna (wisdom/intelligence/insight) which has to be balanced with

shraddha (faith/confidence/letting go into), and

samadhi (concentration/meditation/absorption) which has to be balanced with

virya (energy/enthusiasm/interest).

The balancing faculty is

smriti (mindfulness/awareness).

The five *indriyas* are found in all Buddhist teachings from the Hinayana* right through to Dzogchen. All the practices that exist are for the purpose of balancing these five faculties more and more finely.

In relation to the three qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity, mindfulness can be thought of as the openness/space; *virya* and *samadhi* as the clarity/awareness and *prajna* and *shraddha* as the sensitivity/responsiveness.

Balancing the *indriyas* is like learning to fly. It is as if mindfulness is the bird itself and the other two pairs of faculties are its wings. The bird has to balance its wings in order to fly. It is like the mythical *garuda* bird which has panoramic vision; it has the capacity to fly even through storms and high winds because it can

*Like a bird
learning to fly*

* The most basic teachings of the Buddha.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

see what is necessary in order to balance the other faculties and then respond accordingly.

Mindfulness is the only faculty that cannot get out of balance, in the sense that one can never have too much of it. However, if the other two pairs of faculties get out of balance various problems result and these have to be dealt with by increasing their opposite. So, for example, if energy is strong but concentration is weak, the mind becomes very restless and over-excited. If the concentration is strong but the energy weak, the mind becomes very stable but inactive. If the *prajna* is strong but *shraddha* weak, then the mind cannot let go into the insight and it becomes objectified and remote. If the *shraddha* is strong but the *prajna* weak, then the mind will tend to believe anything without bothering to test or examine it - so it becomes fixated at a certain level of understanding and there is no progress.

At first, your knowledge of the five *indriyas* is like a tool to use when you have problems with your practice. When problems come up you can reflect on the five *indriyas* to see which of the faculties has got out of balance. You might not be able to do much about it immediately, but it will give you an idea of the overall direction you need to follow on a more long-term basis. You will have the clarity to know what is wrong and then you can be more open to the necessary changes and respond sensitively. At this stage it is like the bird strengthening its wings ready to fly.

At a higher level you will develop a more intuitive feel for how to balance the faculties. This is more like the bird beginning to take off from the ground and getting a feel for flying. Eventually, merely by seeing what is wrong, one

10. BALANCING THE FIVE FACULTIES

is able to correct it.

Mindfulness is like the vision and balancing mechanism of the bird, but it is not a faculty divisible from the other four. In fact each faculty shares in the nature of the others to some extent. There is no *prajna* without *some* mindfulness, concentration, *shraddha* and energy, and the same applies to the other four.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

11. BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY

This notion of balance relates to the two main kinds of meditation obstruction, which are placidity and distractedness. Placidity is the state of mind being settled but not alert. In other words it has a certain amount of concentration, but very little energy. Distractedness is when the mind is disturbed by too much energy. In other words it has energy but very little concentration. In the first case the mind becomes too settled in a complacent, dull sort of way. In the second case the mind is very alert and energetic, but it cannot focus on anything sufficiently clearly. Good meditation balances the quality of liveliness and sharpness of mind with stability. Before this happens there is always the tendency to fall into either a too placid state or a restless state.

PLACIDITY

- Strong absorption and weak energy

In the case of sleepiness, you feel dull and unlively. You could feel that you are not paying attention properly and you may even fall completely asleep, or your mind may fantasize about something in a rather dull way. This is obviously not what meditation is about. You should certainly try not to go to sleep, although later on it is possible for a very skilful practitioner to incorporate even sleep into the meditation.

Sleepiness

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Sleepiness
associated with
a sense of
boredom*

Sometimes you feel quite perky just before the meditation, but as soon as you sit down to meditate you suddenly become very sleepy. When the meditation session is over you suddenly find you are tremendously lively again. This is very common.

It suggests that your sleepiness is nothing to do with physical tiredness. It is just that you have come to associate meditation with a feeling of boredom. The way out of that is to do something to get your energy going. It might mean doing something as simple as opening a window or running on the spot.

*Do not depend
on 'corrective
practices'*

Although there are various techniques that can be applied for remedying various faults in the practice, such as visualizing white lights in different parts of the body, these are not practices I recommend particularly, because if you are not careful you end up relying on tricks. You could end up having a whole bagful of tricks for use on different occasions; some are for when the mind feels dull, others for when the mind is excited. For example, imagining a black dot in the lower part of your body is supposed to calm down an excitable mind; reflection on death and impermanence helps clear a dull mind.

What can happen is that instead of meditating you find yourself looking for faults and trying to remedy them all the time. This whips up the judgemental mind rather than helping you to let go of it. That is why I think it is best not to get too involved with things like that.

*Going with the
sleepiness can
be instructive*

There is an advanced practice for when you are falling asleep. Although it is advanced, you could try the beginning stage of it sometimes. It

11. BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY

will help you later on when you come to do this kind of practice. Also by practising this way you will see things about the mind that you would not otherwise see.

Sometimes, when you find that you really are very sleepy, you can learn to let go into the sensation of sleep. Usually we try to resist this, which produces a problem of tension. We end up trying to fight it off, without any real awareness of what is going on. However, it is possible to see something about what happens when you go to sleep. The following method is for those times when you are so sleepy that you cannot keep to the usual awareness practice, which naturally has the effect of waking you up.

What you do is to let your attention sink down as if dropping off to sleep. You slump a bit and maybe actually sleep for a few seconds. Then you wake. You acknowledge the sleepiness. You are trying to develop awareness associated with that edge of sleep. Actually this is the hardest thing to do. You do not just allow the sleep to happen and you do not resist it. It is as if you go with it - pushing down with it, going into it - even slumping a little bit more for a moment or two. As you do this something happens - it is like pressing on a buoyant ball or bubble, you go down and then you lift up in a kind of gentle way. You will have to experiment.

If you use this technique you finally become aware of the images, associations and fantasies that flash into the mind just before you actually fall asleep. It is important to see these at some point because actually that is what is happening all the time.

Flash fantasies

It can be rather a shock. The fantasy may last

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

only for a fraction of a second while you are completely awake. There is no time to slump because it is over so quickly. It might be during the meditation or while doing something else - maybe talking to somebody or when you are focused on something, and then suddenly the mind just 'blanks out'. Remarkable things can happen in that time. Mental images appear and disappear and you forget them in a moment. You would probably deny that they ever happened. If you meditate in this way you suddenly begin to catch the content of that moment and the vast amount of things that go on, flickering at the edge of your awareness all the time without your knowing it. You slip in and out of fantasies and weird notions about the world very easily. Yet, somehow, you are able to keep up this facade of being totally ordinary most of the time, even to yourself. It is interesting to discover these disconcerting things about your own mind, and the mind in general.

You might have read something in books on psychotherapy or psychoanalysis that suggest that things like this go on. However, it is a different matter to actually experience them - to realize your mind has strange little compartments that open and close. Your mind is as active as that even when it does not seem to be doing anything. It is good to do this practice even if just to see this.

*Advanced
practices of
sleep
meditation*

There are meditations that are specifically to do with sleep, such as the practice of trying to spend most of your time asleep. It is quite an advanced practice. It sounds easy but actually it is very hard. It is hard even to stay asleep most of the time, let alone trying to be asleep and aware at the same time.

11. BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY

Shantideva was a great Indian scholar and meditation master. He lived in the famous Buddhist monastery and university of Nalanda. They did not like him there because he never seemed to do anything but sleep all the time. One day his colleagues decided to play a trick on him. Thinking he had no idea what was going on around him, and that he must have forgotten all his great learning, they invited him to give a teaching to the whole assembly. To their surprise he held forth with great eloquence and this is how the *Bodhicharyavatara** was composed.

The point is that he was doing this special meditation from which he had obviously learnt a lot about the mind. Even at a relatively early stage, it is possible to get flashes of insight into emptiness just at the moment of dropping off to sleep.

With placid states other than sleep, it is not always so obvious that they are negative states, so you might even be fooled into thinking they were proper meditation. Sometimes you start to meditate with a good deal of brightness, clarity and energy, together with stability of mind. This state might last for a while, but then as you begin to settle into the meditative state, the energy and brightness start to fade. You feel very comfortable and that you could sit forever. It appears to be easy to meditate. In this kind of state your body seems very stable, feels very pleasant, rather cold - but you do not care about that. So the mind goes completely blank and

*Frozen ice
meditation*

* This text is a great classic of Mahayana literature available in several translations into English, for example, 'A Guide to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life' by Stephen Batchelor.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

quiet. There just seems to be nothing going on, but you are not particularly awake or aware. This is the so-called 'frozen ice' meditation. It is obviously not right. You have a certain level of awareness but it is not very strong, whereas the relaxation is very strong.

It can happen that you have an image in your mind, especially when you have been practising a meditation that deliberately develops calmness. For this you use a meditation object of some sort to focus on - it could be a coloured disc or a Buddha image. You reach a state where this meditation object appears in your mind and remains there, quite still. You can go away and eat a meal or something, and when you come back it is still there. It is just as if it were on a shelf somewhere. But it is in your mind. You can remain for days with this object in front of you and feel very calm and relaxed. Even if you feel an itch or something you do not scratch it. It is as if your body has nothing to do with you. The itch seems like an external phenomenon; it is just an itch out there in space somehow - you do not mind it being there. It is the same if you feel a pain or your legs go to sleep - you do not particularly want to do anything about it. You do not feel involved with it at all. Such a state can go on for days and days, or much longer. But really that state has no life in it.

*It can be
mistaken for
progress*

You could start to think it was good to be in a state like that because it seems to be a state of detachment. You could think 'Oh, I must be getting very detached because even though my legs are hurting, it is not really bothering me. My mind is fixed on the meditation object and I cannot get away from it. I seem to be perfectly stable. From all the things that I've read about in

11. BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY

Buddhist literature, this must be a positive state.' You may begin to think that it would be a bad thing to interrupt such a state. However, intuitively you feel there must be something wrong with this somewhere.

Actually, because this state might seem to be good, it is worse than an ordinary state of dullness that could never be confused with meditation. Also it has very little energy associated with it.

It is noticeable that in this state, although it seems that you have one-pointed concentration, in fact the object of meditation which is so fixed and stable is not the only thing that is in your awareness. The mind can go off and think about this and that and then come back. The object is still there, but the attention actually left the object to do something else. This is how you can tell that the mind is not really one-pointed.

*It is not
actually one-
pointedness*

They say that this state, if practised for long enough, results in rebirth as an animal because it blunts the intelligence. In this kind of state there is a tendency to experience things as rather gross, like 'fat fingers' or the body starting to feel like a ball without any arms and legs - a sort of lump of dough.

*It blunts the
intelligence*

You could feel quite happy in that state, so it is important to think about what you are doing the meditation for. If, before beginning meditation, you always remind yourself about what you are meditating for, you will not be fooled for long by such states. You quickly see that nothing happens in them.

*Think about the
purpose of
meditation*

In the West a lot of ill-informed people think that meditation is about making the mind blank and having no thoughts. Nothing could be

*All blank states
of mind are
negative*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

further from the truth. If your mind has gone blank, this is a sign that your meditation has gone completely wrong.

*Concentration
in which there
is insufficient
energy*

The problem with 'frozen ice' meditation is that there is too little energy associated with it. There is no life. Nothing moves. Frozen ice means it is really fixed like that. Most people do not get this problem - at least not straight away. To get into that state involves a great deal of initial concentration and energy, so it is different from the state of dull blankness that we usually experience. Both states are fundamentally the same problem - there is a certain amount of concentration but very low energy. In the 'frozen ice' state there is more concentration, even quite strong concentration - but it is not balanced with sufficient energy.

*Solution for
both blankness
and 'frozen ice'
meditation*

In either case, there are two things that one can do about it. The easiest solution is just to break off the meditation. Walking meditation is helpful for stopping that kind of thing happening. If you were by yourself, meditating like that, you could break off and go for a walk in the country - look out over a wide open space to have a sense of upliftedness. You could even try just imagining such a scene; anything to get your mind moving and increase its clarity. You could even try splashing water on your face. Then you return to the meditation to see if your mind is refreshed enough.

The other solution is to try to do something about the problem while remaining in meditation. This is very difficult because you have to deliberately develop energy and this is surprisingly painful. That is why once you get into such a state, it is hard to get out of it. It is as if your mind has become a great weight, so to

11. BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY

make it do anything is like trying to push a heavy car uphill. It takes tremendous effort.

DISTRACTEDNESS

- Strong energy and weak absorption

When the mind is distracted it is easy to see that it is not settling to meditation, but there is a subtler form of this problem which is more difficult to deal with.

As with ordinary distractedness, this subtler problem leads to the creation of a personal world which is very involving, exciting and interesting. More subtle kinds of distractedness appear in a number of guises, their common characteristic being loss of contact with the ordinary world. It happens because at a certain point, after the meditation has been going well for a while, the concentrated and stable aspect of the mind falls away to some extent - but the energy aspect is still very strong and powerful.

*One's own
personal video*

The mind might start producing mental imagery in great profusion, with tremendous creativity. Many things appear in the mind's eye or ear - they are mostly auditory and visual, together with thoughts of various kinds. It is not so common with smell, taste and touch, although it does happen. Most people experience this a little bit when they drop off to sleep and see pictures in their mind. But in this case, it is much more than that and is happening all the time. It is not like the ordinary vague images that go through your mind when you are thinking. Here they are absolutely clear, sharp and brighter than things that you see with your normal vision. After a while a whole story-line develops. First of all it might not be any particular story; it might

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

just be a series of disconnected pictures. Then you find yourself sucked into this and losing contact with the idea of meditation, because your mental world has become so fascinating and interesting. Things from your past might come up that you thought you had forgotten and you might link into that. It becomes like a private world of your own created around you.

We all do this to some extent anyway. We fantasize and experience things internally about our lives and our relationships, but in this case it is much more vivid, and very much more sense-saturating. It is a bit like reading a book or watching a video, except that the sense input is much more complete. Everything begins to arise very spontaneously and easily. According to Trungpa Rinpoche it is well known among practitioners that yogins sometimes get so trapped into this that they enter a kind of hibernatory state in which they need less and less food. They are lost to this world and are away somewhere else. This is the extreme, but you could be trapped into such a state for quite a while thinking that this is what meditation is about.

*Strong
imaginative or
creative states
can arise*

With most people it is more likely to take the form of some very strong imaginative state arising out of the meditation. If this gets extremely intense, it develops into a complete mind-set full of mental imagery. You may start to feel tremendously creative. If you have a literary gift of some kind, you might feel impelled to stop meditating and start writing things down. Ideas flow freely and easily. Perhaps there is a story-line, but more often it tends to be a set of disconnected images. If this goes too far you may start talking to yourself and

11. *BALANCING CONCENTRATION AND ENERGY*

behaving in a crazy way. In this case it is necessary for something forceful to happen in order to bring you to your senses. You have to be made to calm down. In very extreme cases the teacher might have to knock the pupil out. That is when it really has gone too far!

It is normally better not to try and slow oneself down, as this makes it seem as if the natural energy of the mind is some sort of a problem. Rather, you should focus on the space in which all this energy is happening and rest in that. The energetic, creative play of the mind is then seen within the perspective of all that space. As your sense of space increases the energy is naturally balanced.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

12. BALANCING WISDOM AND FAITH

The basis of *prajna* is clear awareness, which focuses and then spreads in the rhythmic way that I have already described as the *evam* principle. *Prajna* in Buddhism can be roughly translated as 'wisdom'. Wisdom in English can mean various things such as knowledge, learning, erudition, soundness of judgement and so on. *Prajna* is more like a faculty such as intelligence. Perhaps it is best understood as our faculty to recognize truth and significance. It implies awareness, clarity, intelligence, intuition and knowledge - but above all, it implies sensitivity.

When we are working with balancing energy and concentration we are working with the energy of the mind. This connects to the basic quality of clarity and awareness. Although this is *prajna* too, when we talk about balancing *prajna* and *shraddha* we are really much more concerned with the sensitivity/responsiveness aspect of our being.

As we practise meditation and carry the quality of increased awareness arising from that out into our everyday life, we start to see more clearly the nature of our experience. We see the ever-changing, transparent nature of our thoughts, feelings and perceptions, and we start to see what really is 'us' and what are simply passing clouds. As we see this, something in our being tells us that it is right; it feels good to know this, to recognize this. This sensitivity is *prajna*.

*Prajna is
recognizing the
real*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Shraddha is
letting go into
what is real*

However, it is one thing to recognize the truth (*prajna*), and another to really let go into it (*shraddha*). We all recognize impermanence and we all feel vaguely better for remembering it, but then something cuts off the spreading of that awareness. Some part of us does not want to accept it, so it shuts off and we find ourselves unable to respond properly.

*The reality of
death and
impermanence*

For example, I know death comes to everyone, which includes me and my loved ones - but still I throw all my life's energy into trying to cling on to my own sense of self, my youth, my image, my position in life and so on. I may hope or believe that there is more to life than this but somehow I do not quite trust that.

*The reality of
our true nature*

I know that when I meditate I feel more in touch with what is real, but then I draw back - perhaps it is all some sort of confidence trick. I try to keep the best of both worlds. I never quite give up my worldly ambitions, but I still want greater clarity and vision so I keep practising.

At some point these two opposing forces clash. Are we going to give in to the *prajna* or are we going to try to pull back? This is where *prajna* has to be balanced with *shraddha*.

*Faith involves
letting go of
something*

Shraddha involves letting go of that sense of 'me'. When we see that even the lordly judgement is just a thought, we really have to let go into something quite new. A whole new space opens up and it can be a very shocking experience. Are we going to resist that or are we going to let go into it? Is our ego-process going to let go a bit?

Like *prajna*, that ability to 'let go' is also a faculty or power of the mind. *Prajna* senses or feels out the truth; *shraddha* is what allows us to

12. BALANCING WISDOM AND FAITH

let it ripple out through our being. It is what allows us to experience it fully and respond fully.

What happens if there is very strong *prajna* and not enough *shraddha*? To start with it may manifest as a delight in reading about the theory and practice of Buddhism or meditation but a great reluctance to practise it. It may manifest as so many doubts and anxieties about meditation and the experiences that arise from it that you just do not want to get involved with it at all.

*Symptoms of
strong prajna
and weak
shraddha*

Later it may manifest as a fascination with cranking up experiences that feel right and good, the way you expect real meditation to be - but then that becomes boring. You start to feel that you cannot be bothered to go through that again - you already know that experience. You may decide to go out and teach it to someone else or to write books or poems about it. Meanwhile, you find you are just not bothering to meditate much any more.

All these are ways of objectifying the dawning truth that you sense with your *prajna*. You would like to realize non-self so that you could somehow own such an experience. The last thing you want to do is to really let go of your secure sense of self, the self that you are really identified with. The lordly judgement is there telling you not to take things too far, to be sensible about all this. It is always there ready to take charge and keep everything under control.

To strengthen *shraddha* we have to keep hearing about the qualities of awakening and thinking about the qualities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who constitute the enlightened lineages, and have gone through the whole process of awakening and have realized the fruit.

*How to
strengthen faith
(shraddha)*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

In this way we gain confidence or faith in the whole process.

Then we have to keep relating to our own experience and gaining faith and confidence in ourselves. We do have the qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity. We can awaken, and furthermore we want to. Gradually, that power to let go into the experience strengthens and our fears, cynicism and hesitations weaken so that *prajna* and *shraddha* start to come into balance.

Symptoms of
strong faith
and weak
prajna

What happens if *shraddha* is strong but *prajna* is weak? In this case you find that when you hear about the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas and the three qualities of your being, you feel great joy and excitement. You are very keen to meditate even before you know very much about it. You might have a very active mind and find it hard to sit still but you do not give up. You push yourself and try to make yourself meditate but you never really listen or think much about the teaching. You do not want to think too much. You just want to get involved somehow. You catch hold of one or two ideas that attract you and that is enough somehow.

Even if you find you cannot practise meditation, you still just want to hang around and believe anything that sounds kind of right to you. You end up getting more and more confused.

If you are lucky, you put your faith in the right kind of thing and stick with it, so that eventually the teacher is able to get you to use your own judgement and your own faculty to recognize the truth - in other words the teacher gradually gets you to balance your *shraddha* with your *prajna*. If you are unlucky somebody takes

12. BALANCING WISDOM AND FAITH

advantage of your simple-minded 'faith' and leads you completely up a blind alley.

The way to remedy such an imbalance is to develop a sort of cynicism that does not believe anything until you have really thought about it and tested it out. It is not the dismissive kind of cynicism that someone with too much *prajna* and not enough *shraddha* might have. Behind the cynicism is a strong faculty of trust in your own ability to know for yourself when something is true. Therefore you are prepared to turn towards every experience in an open and honest way and to really ask yourself what it is. Asking yourself and asking your teacher very direct and basic questions is a sign of a good balance between *prajna* and *shraddha*.

*How to
strengthen
prajna*

Mindfulness just means being aware. We have a faculty to be aware and we can choose to align ourselves with that, or to try and blank it out and be 'mindless'.

*Mindfulness
does the
balancing*

There are states in which the mind is very clear and vivid and in which no thoughts arise. Your mind in that case is bright. It is almost as if you were in the sky. It is a completely different kind of state to any of those described above. Even here it is important to remember the basic Buddhist principle, never to get hooked on anything, not even meditation.

*Do not get
attached to
good meditation*

One can get hooked on all sorts of glorious meditative states. In other words you could start indulging in a particular experience or state, making a big deal out of it. That is no good. You have to cut through good states and experiences as well as negative states and experiences. 'Cutting through' here means letting them go - trusting in the inherent spacious quality of the mind.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

The heart wish

The key is our volition. What do we really want? If in our hearts we want to be aware, awake, sane, open, sensitive and alive; if in our hearts we long for deeper meaning, deeper peace, a deeper sense of well-being, then we should align ourselves with that wish. We should keep making that conscious choice at every opportunity.

The practice of mindfulness is aligning ourselves with our heart's wish. It is like the bird, aligning itself in the direction in which it wants to go. Then it flaps its wings to give them strength to lift itself off the ground. Once it is flying it uses its faculties to keep itself aloft and in the right direction. Finally it does this with no thought or effort. It is perfectly aligned and balanced.

Section III
Daily Life Practice

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

13. OPENNESS

Buddhist practice is not about will-power, control, manipulated calm, stopping thoughts, making the mind blank, and all the other wrong ideas people get about it. Instead it is about developing stability of mind through appreciating the three qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity - not just in meditation but also in daily life.

We need to develop openness towards situations and other people as well as towards ourselves. This means giving space to things, letting them exist completely as they are. It relates to having an open and honest heart or mind. For example, as you practise you begin to find things out about yourself that you do not like particularly. There are basically two ways of responding to this; either to turn towards those things and experience them fully, or to shrink away from them, trying to push them out of your mind somehow.

If you decide to pull the shutters down and not look at something, it becomes a charged area. As soon as that particular area of experience starts to manifest, it triggers an emotional button telling you to reject it. This means that whenever that particular area is touched upon, you automatically slide over it and keep justifying yourself to yourself so that you never look too closely at the matter.

*Openness is
true stability -
turning
towards rather
than rejecting
experience*

For example, you might think of yourself as basically a very kind person but sometimes you actually get very angry. Instead of looking at that anger you just deny you are angry and try to justify your reaction as really being a good thing somehow. If anyone questions that, you just ignore it or cut them off. The last thing you are

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

going to do is to examine your reaction with an open and honest mind.

If, when you discover things about yourself that you do not like, you decide to turn towards them, it is a bit upsetting. Yet, if you are determined to be open and honest, you say to yourself something like, 'I want to see this' or 'I want to fully experience and know what this is'. In other words, you open out into that feeling that you do not like. Simply to be able to open into your experience like this during the meditation or in everyday life already demonstrates increased stability of mind.

*Let that feeling
of wanting to
reject something
be a trigger of
awareness*

Train yourself to immediately turn towards anything that you instinctively want to shy away from. This means turning towards those things that you find unpleasant or unpalatable about yourself. In this way, the very feeling of initial shrinking or rejection starts to automatically trigger the state of being aware and open. This is how you learn to be open and honest, because in this way you can really experience things properly. So you can think of being open as meaning always to turn towards things rather than away.

*You do not
have to know
what to do*

Having turned your mind towards something in this way, you may find that you do not know what to do about it. Somehow you feel that there ought to be some sort of strategy or formula telling you what to do next. Trungpa Rinpoche used to say that it is not necessary to have a strategy. It does not matter if you do not know what to do. The important thing is to create a space, a gap. Once there is a gap something new can happen spontaneously. To start with, it does not matter if your mind goes blank and you cannot think of anything to do or say.

13. OPENNESS

The important thing is not to get complicated. Keep it simple. It is the attitude of just turning towards it, opening towards it, that is important. Eventually this brings its own inspiration.

*Simplicity
brings its own
inspiration*

Initially there is just this sense of opening out more. Then there is a sense of something flowing out of that in a natural way. The important thing is to make that first step of turning *towards* instead of *away*. Once the inspiration starts to flow from that change or shift, it will lead to a further sense of openness. Gradually a certain spontaneity starts to develop, and your responses and actions seem to become more appropriate and effective. This does not happen immediately and may not emerge completely for a long time, but usually some sense of relief and confirmation that this is the only way forward dawns quite quickly.

At first it seems like you are administering a sort of psychological medicine in order to cure yourself of your emotional problems, but as you let this quality of openness carry you further and further, you find it is something completely open ended. It carries you into areas of awareness and experience that you had not envisaged, nor even suspected existed. This simple shift of turning *towards* rather than *away* is sufficient in itself to carry you through to a whole new depth of vision.

*Not simply a
psychological
medicine*

Another aspect of openness is the general sense of spaciousness. In our everyday lives there is a tremendous sense of pressure. We feel we are being hassled all the time by our job, our responsibilities, by people and worries and so on. It gets to the point when even trying to relax becomes a hassle. In Buddhism we are trying to develop a feeling of not being hassled. There is

*Openness is
non-
manipulation -
not putting
pressure on
yourself*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

just no need to feel hassled because there is
always so much space.

14. CLARITY/AWARENESS

To see this omnipresent space we need to perceive things in a vivid and sharp way, which is what is meant here by clarity or awareness. The mere fact that we perceive anything shows clarity is present. What is needed is for it to expand and deepen through our aligning ourselves with it.

As you practise and develop the quality of openness you get periods where your mind becomes very clear and things appear very vividly. Initially these periods do not last very long - but when you first begin to experience this clarity, you recognize it as intrinsic to your being, just as the quality of openness or space is. It has tremendous depth.

At first we tend to take the natural space and awareness of our mind for granted. It does not strike us immediately that they could be experienced at deeper and deeper levels. Then, as we experience at greater depth one of these qualities, be it space, awareness or sensitivity, we appreciate the other two qualities more too. For example, as openness expands, awareness and sensitivity increase; as the quality of well-being (sensitivity) increases the sense of space and awareness expand and so on. This process extends without limit. There is no point at which the process stops. The three qualities feed into each other and extend indefinitely, each inseparable from the others, all being aspects of one reality.

*Discovering
greater depth to
these qualities*

So when we talk about being open, clarity is already part of that. If you see clearly, the quality of openness is there naturally. Nevertheless, for purposes of discussion we can distinguish a difference between these two qualities.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Clarity is
awareness of
mandala
principle;
samaya
connections and
energy exchange*

Clarity or awareness is about seeing the quality of our experience. If, for example, we have a negative experience, clarity is seeing the connection between that and other experiences in our life. It is being aware of the relationships and connections between things.

These connections and experiences can be thought of as our samayas, because samaya means an inescapable bond, and we have an inescapable bond with all our experiences and connections. Although we can choose what we do with them we cannot choose what our connections are. By being aware of our connections and respecting them, we connect to the mandala of our being. Mandala means something that has a centre and a periphery, and refers to the structure and dynamic of everything that manifests. The centre of the mandala affects the periphery and the periphery feeds back into the centre in a constant energy exchange. Recognizing the dynamics of all our mandala connections, (that is to say, the connections between mind, body, environment, self and others), is part of the awareness and clarity aspect of our being.

*Clarity is
awareness of
impermanence*

The other aspect of clarity or awareness is the recognition of change and impermanence. Experience is dynamic and is always changing. By resting the awareness in the flow of experience without trying to resist change, the clarity of the awareness intensifies.

*Awareness is
interest*

Increasing awareness is experienced as a sense of entering something new - beginning to see something that you had not noticed before that is somehow real and alive. Each time your awareness increases your experience feels more real and alive than it did before.

15. SENSITIVITY

This is that quality of aliveness, mentioned above. It not only causes us to experience well-being and joy but also suffering and unhappiness. For this reason we might sometimes want to shut off our sensitivity and develop some sort of 'thick skin'.

This quality of aliveness entails responsiveness and feeling for others. At its most intense it is the endless compassion of the Buddha. As you open to your own experience you start to feel the happiness and sorrow of others more and more too. Eventually that sense of fellow feeling makes you want to remove the sufferings of others as intensely as you wish to remove your own.

*Sensitivity is
ultimately
compassion*

As that sensitivity deepens, so does the openness and clarity of your mind and heart. You cannot divide your sense of personal dissatisfaction and misery from that of others. This might sound a bit heavy and claustrophobic - but when you no longer focus on your self, the wider vision associated with openness and clarity becomes a great inspiration.

Feelings of negativity and suffering can lead to inaction - a frozen sense of not being able to do anything. The remedy is greater awareness of openness and spaciousness. There is no limit to what the open mind and heart can accommodate.

*Thinking of
suffering can
make you feel
negative and
frozen*

Sensitivity leads to action. Developing the right kind of responsiveness to situations can only be done if you are open and aware enough to feel the nature of situations accurately and clearly. If you are aware of the emotional overtones of what is going on, if you know the

*Sensitivity leads
to action-
response*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

relationships and connections that exist in the situation, not only in yourself but in others as well, then you can respond appropriately.

*Emotions create
the world we
live in*

It is important to actually want to know how the emotions work, how they create the world we live in, and what the relationship is between our feelings and the way we perceive the world. Try to notice how your feelings seem to project 'out there' somehow. It helps to focus more 'in here' and not 'out there'. For example, if we feel angry, the angry feeling seems to be coming from some person or situation. It feels as if they are the source of the anger and that if they were removed our anger would be gone too. Actually, however, the anger is in our mind and body. The person or situation that we associate with the anger is actually external to us and cannot actually make us feel anything. It is the thoughts and feelings in ourselves that create the sense of anger. Sometimes even just noticing that produces some kind of opening effect, some sense of well-being.

*The confidence
of neither
controlling
feelings nor
being at their
mercy*

It is not that we have to learn to control our feelings - there are so many bad connotations to that notion. It is more that we begin to recognize a power in ourselves connected with our feelings so that we no longer feel completely at their mercy. It is not a manipulative power - it is more the power of having confidence in ourselves and what we essentially are.

There are various kinds of therapy that talk about being more connected with your feelings, but the power of confidence that I am referring to is much more than just another feeling. It would be too weak to say that you feel more connected to your feelings. Rather it is what Trungpa Rinpoche meant when he said that you start to

15. SENSITIVITY

become friends with negative emotions. You begin to have a genuine appreciation of them, almost a kind of rapport. It is as if they could tell you something or teach you something, rather than just being a problem. Ultimately and in a very deep sense, they are not something dangerous that you have to do something about, manipulate or make innocuous somehow. They are actually the pure energy of your being. That energy has become distorted, frozen or disturbed in some way, but it is nonetheless nothing other than the space, clarity and sensitivity of the nature of mind. It is important to always appreciate this.

16. NOTICING NON-AWARENESS

For daily life practice the first step is to recognize how we do not experience space, awareness and sensitivity properly or fully. This might sound somewhat contradictory. How can we recognize and notice what we lack? Think about it. Generally we feel that sometimes we are aware and sometimes not; but for that to be possible we have to have some level of awareness in the periods when we do not seem to be aware - otherwise how could we feel we had not been aware in them? The point is that awareness is continuous, although not always at full intensity.

A major factor in weakening the intensity of our awareness is the tendency to disengage from the six senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind) and to let the attention drift off into an inner world of thoughts, concepts and feelings - mindlessly following trains of associations and scarcely aware of where we are or what we are doing. We are lost in the labyrinth of our own mind but are not really aware of it being our mind. We are registering messages coming through the senses but we are not really aware of what those messages are saying. We are on a kind of automatic pilot - wandering around semi-conscious. We are doing one thing and thinking about something else most of the time. It is not that we are half asleep. In a sense we are awake because we are not exactly unconscious, but we are not awake in the sense of being present, focused and aware of what is going on.

One way of increasing your awareness is to notice how much of the time you are talking to

*Constant talking
to yourself*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

yourself. You might think, 'Well, I have to talk to myself because I need to think about what I am going to do next'. We may find this is true for ourselves at the moment, but it is said that Buddhas don't need to. So, it might be interesting to see how much of our own talking to ourselves is really necessary. We might find that we do not need to do it anywhere near as much as we thought we did.

Much of that talking to ourselves is just fascination or fantasizing - not actually functional in deciding anything. A lot of it is just imagining different scenarios of what would be nice or what wouldn't, what happened that we wish had not happened, what we hope or fear might happen and so on. Such hopes and fears are played out and repeated over and over again.

It is almost that we wish not to be aware of the actual present. We are always anticipating the future or dwelling on the past. In this way we constantly duck out of the immediate situation somehow. If we are going to wake up to what we really are, it is important to stop that kind of mental chatter for a while just to see what happens.

You can try doing this when you are walking along the street. We often talk to ourselves as we walk along - the question is whether we *can* stop it.

*Pressure to talk
to yourself*

The first thing you notice is the tremendous pressure to talk to yourself. Then, once you have a certain amount of edge on stopping yourself talking like this, notice the tremendous pressure to start again. Try to get a feeling of why it is like that. Try to get the flavour of that pressure. Do not try to come up with some intellectual reason

16. NOTICING NON-AWARENESS

why - just become familiar with the feeling of that emotional pressure to talk. Ask yourself whether you are trying to avoid something, or whether you are frightened of something. Is there something you do not want to happen? There are all sorts of things that it might be, but it is better for you to just look and notice for yourself.

Perhaps you will be appalled by how much you talk to yourself - but why be appalled? It is quite wonderful really. Suddenly you have begun to realize something about yourself. Maybe you never really noticed this before. There is something about the clarity of this realization that lightens the heart somehow - like a lifted burden. The lightness comes from the increased space. You are no longer just that endless train of thoughts, you are the space in which they happen. It might be shocking, but it gives you another perspective on your experience.

Often the sense of pressure, the pressure to keep talking and make a lot of noise, is coming from a fear of finding yourself alone. Of course, you know you are alone in the sense that the thoughts are all coming from you - but those thoughts are familiar and are kind of reassuring - like having some kind of self-created parental figure talking to you. It is so familiar and you feed on it; it reassures you about your own existence as the person you think that you are.

*Notice the fear
of being alone*

The important thing is to investigate the way your mind functions, to stop yourself doing what you normally do, and to see the pressures there that make you continue in the same old pattern. Often you will find they seem very reasonable - but you should not let yourself be fooled by them.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Feeling of
reasonable
outrage*

Do not be fooled by seemingly reasonable objections such as, 'This is silly. How can I go along without thinking?' It is important to notice any sudden feeling of outrage; just notice it. Maybe it is not true actually. Maybe you could function with a lot less thought.

*Buddhas do not
think*

If Buddhas do not 'think' at all, it is interesting and profound to ponder what that could possibly mean. How could they exist and function in the world without thinking? It does not mean that there is nothing going on, but it is not what we normally call 'thinking' either.

*Attending to
the senses*

In association with trying to switch off the mental chatter, try focusing only on what comes through the senses: for example, the feelings of your body as you are walking, or perceptions such as the trees, flowers, sky, road, traffic lights and so on.

*Sense experience
becomes more
vivid*

You will find that if you stop thinking in your usual very conceptual roundabout way, your senses become more vivid. You have more time to experience them.

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

Traditionally this kind of practice is explained under the heading of the four kinds of mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness of Body
2. Mindfulness of Feeling
3. Mindfulness of Mind (*chitta*)
4. Mindfulness of Phenomena (*dharma*s; mental and sensory events)

1. Mindfulness of Body

This means being aware of your bodily posture and movement and so on. You can become aware of this as you stop the mental chatter and conceptual thought, and focus on actual experience.

There are all sorts of exercises and games that you can play that increase your awareness of the body and its connectedness to the mind and the environment.

Certain physical exercises help

It is important to become aware of the world of your experience as an expression of the *mandala* principle. This means aligning yourself with the physical centredness and groundedness of your being. This gives you the basis for being able to open out into space, and thus you are better able to turn towards experience without being overwhelmed by it.

Mandala principle

Taking care of how you sit and linking to the rhythm of the breath in meditation is mindfulness of body. So is noticing tension in

Body in meditation

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

the body and gently releasing it.

*Being where
you are*

Most importantly, being present where you are physically is mindfulness of body. This does not mean you have to set up a watcher to make sure you know what you are doing all the time and to tell you off when the mind wanders. It means that you keep a gentle sense of connectedness, of being alert but restful, that links you with the spaciousness and constantly changing nature of the world of the senses - the body, the environment, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations and so on.

Although strictly speaking sensory input is the domain of mindfulness of *dharma*s, to be aware of the body at all you have to be aware of sensory input. The division of the mindfulnesses into four is simply a device for focusing your attention. In fact all four mindfulnesses are present to some extent in any mindfulness practice. There are no clear cut divisions.

2. Mindfulness of Feeling

*Likes, dislikes
and bland
neutrality*

This refers to our feelings of liking, disliking and bland neutrality. One way of practising mindfulness is to focus on the way all our experience is flavoured with these feelings. If we do not feel bland indifference we always feel for or against any experience. Our fundamental nature of sensitivity and responsiveness expresses itself as a constant stream of these three kinds of feeling.

First you notice it in a gross way. You suddenly notice liking or disliking somebody's perfume or you are annoyed when someone bumps into you.

Then maybe there is a gap where there is a

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

kind of neutral feeling in which nothing seems to be happening.

Maybe you start thinking of something pleasant. That goes on for a while and then fades out giving way to a kind of indifferent feeling again. Then something else comes up that you like or dislike.

At first the likes and dislikes seem to be blips of intense feeling against a neutral background. Gradually you begin to notice that even in that neutral period there are little likes and dislikes going on. So there are further subtleties to be investigated.

Eventually, you realize that you are liking and disliking things in tiny ways all the time. Even the strong likes and dislikes are not of a piece. A big like or dislike has pimples of more or less intense feeling with it. For example you might think, 'Oh I like that,' but then you notice there are bits of it you do not like as much as the rest of it. You realize that it is all a rather complicated process.

It is important to get interested in all this, but not because you are becoming interested in yourself in the sense of becoming self-absorbed. You become interested in the whole process in an almost impersonal way, seeing how it works in other people as well as yourself. You start to become more finely attuned to the way perception works - how you and others see things.

*Interest is the
key*

This increases your sensitivity to your own and other people's behaviour. Generally speaking it is our conditioning that determines how we are going to feel about something. So we can often tell from a person's conditioning or by

*Sensitivity to
others*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

knowing the circumstances leading up to a particular situation what she or he will or will not like. We often take such things into account automatically in our relationships with people. However, instead of noticing that we are all acting on the same three feelings that we all have in common, we tend to use these feelings as the basis for heavy judgemental attitudes towards ourselves, others and the world of our experience.

*Changing likes
and dislikes*

The first stage of this practice is to notice the constant stream of likes and dislikes and bland neutrality.

At a more advanced stage you can start to change likes into dislikes and vice versa. For example, you may dislike feeling nervous - but then by becoming aware of the feeling of nervousness you could begin to like it. Perhaps you would not really call it nervousness then. It is as if you have confused the mind so it does not know what nervousness is any more.

It is difficult to do this with big things but you can practise on small things. For example, you might get very indignant about something and then really feel that indignation and find that you actually like the feeling. Then the indignation seems rather funny in fact - it can even make you laugh.

*This undermines
fixed ideas about
yourself*

All this undermines your fixed ideas about yourself and your likes and dislikes. You might find yourself liking people you could not stand before - just by seeing how arbitrary your likes and dislikes are. You might begin to actually see that your mind works like that - the patterns of thoughts just change with circumstances. This process, of gradually coming to see how your

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

mind works, undermines the whole fabric of your fixed ideas about yourself and what you are. People tend to identify with their likes and dislikes very strongly. They seem to define what or who a person is. When you see that your feelings can change just according to how you think, you lose that sense of being a solid entity. It might make you feel a bit nervous about yourself. After all, you could actually become anything!

The importance of mindfulness of feeling is that it leads to continuity of awareness and to equalness or equanimity. Mindfulness of feeling means treating all feeling equally as just feeling. This does not mean dismissing feelings but really appreciating all feeling as feeling. In other words all feeling is sensitivity. You rest in the continuity of the sensitive, responsive nature of your being instead of reacting blindly, tossed this way and that by the ever-changing stream of conditioned feeling and response.

*Continuity and
equalness of
awareness*

When you have strong feelings or emotions - for example, when you want something very strongly, or you have very strong hatred for or fear of something - then that object becomes charged with that emotion. If, for example, I want something that is very beautiful which I cannot have, the fact that I cannot have it intensifies my feeling for it and enhances its desirability. If it had been something I had already, or that I could easily have if I wanted, the object would have had quite a different 'feel' to it. It would have appeared as nothing special. For example, I can easily mow down daisies and dandelions because emotionally I relate to them as weeds. I would be horrified at the idea of mowing down snowdrops because I relate to

Strong emotions

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

them emotionally as something special.

It is the same with things within ourselves. Some things we relate to emotionally as good and important to us and other things we do not want even to admit are there.

Sticking to external things first, it is important to see how feelings of like and dislike seem to cluster around the object itself as part of its 'objective' reality. In other words, my wanting and my hating get projected outwards from me onto the object. The hated object is not an object that I happen to hate, it is actually intrinsically hateful. It is as if the hate or annoyance is somehow a quality of the object itself rather than of the way I think.

Similarly with something desirable. It is not something that I happen to desire; it is actually intrinsically desirable. It is as if the desire or hatred hovers around the object. The important thing to become aware of is that the desire or hatred actually comes from my side - not the side of the object.

*Noticing the
physical effect
of strong
emotions*

Mindfulness of feeling can include mindfulness of body because you start to notice the effect of strong emotions on your body. When you experience desire, hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, dullness, depression and so on, notice how you have the wish to project it outwards and sort of blame the world or treat the world or life itself as if it were the source of it. It affects the way you hold yourself or move in the world. It even seems to affect how the world looks to you. For example, pride makes you push your chest and chin out and makes everyone else appear inferior to you; depression makes you stoop and slump and makes the

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

whole world appear dull and gloomy; fear makes you tense and turn away from things and the world appears threatening and dangerous; anger makes you frown and move noisily and the world appears hostile and unaccommodating; desire gives a hungry look to your eyes and makes the world appear seductive and tantalizing; happiness makes you smile and the world seems to smile with you.

As you become more aware, you could actually admire yourself! That might sound very un-Buddhist. But in a very special sense it is possible because you have the three qualities of spaciousness, clarity and sensitivity which are the intrinsic nature of the mind. They are nothing to do with you personally, so you can admire them. You are admiring the nature of mind, the nature of experience itself. It has this wonderful potential to create desire, hatred, pride and so on. Although we might think these are rather uncomfortable things, they are very alive. This sort of admiration or appreciation is not possible without awareness.

*Admire the
creative power
of your mind*

So always focus on the experience itself, not on the object that seems to give rise to the experience. Do not make the mistake of identifying the feeling with the object without even noticing the feeling. Be careful not to live your life in terms of feelings that you think somehow are invested in the objects rather than in yourself. Recognize that these feelings are in you - they are yours in the profound sense that they are the three qualities of openness, clarity and sensitivity expressing themselves. Even though it is true that they are distorted

*Do not identify
the feeling with
the object*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

expressions they are still showing you that you have those qualities.

*Relax into the
feeling does not
mean act it out*

It is a wonderful and awesome fact that one has the power and sensitivity to feel and create such things. It is important to simply appreciate and admire the nature of mind and to let go into it instead of always trying to manipulate it. This does not mean that you act out your anger or your greed or whatever it is. It means you stop projecting your feelings out onto the world and stop struggling with it. Instead you relax into the richness of your immediate and direct experience.

*Include negative
feelings and
opinions about
yourself*

It is very easy to denigrate yourself and dismiss your experience as worthless. You have been with yourself for so long that familiarity might have bred contempt. Maybe you were brought up to have a low opinion of yourself and to think that only certain ways of thinking and feeling were acceptable. This would make you feel that you were only any good if you achieved certain things or lived up to certain standards and when you see that you are failing, you feel the world will turn on you. You have no right to exist. All this is just feelings and opinions.

I do not mean you have to turn all that around and start thinking that you are a good person, that you are a success, that you are as good as the next person or whatever. I mean that you learn to appreciate that all feelings and opinions, be they positive or negative, are essentially none other than expressions of the true nature of mind.

*The awesome
power of our
being*

The appreciation I am talking about goes beyond all our usual notions of our existence and potential. When we look out into space on a clear

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

starry night we feel awed by its vastness, yet we are ourselves much more wonderful than that. We have awareness and sensitivity which gives us vast spaciousness of vision. This is the glory of the mind - nothing in the universe of matter compares with that.

Before you can admire it though, you have to become aware that it is there. You have to notice it is there in the power of your desire and the power of your hatred as well as in the power of your love, creativity and other good qualities.

You can think of all your positive and negative thoughts and emotions as an offering to that conceptually ungraspable nature of mind, which is the source of everything. Everything is an expression of its power and creativity. You offer your experience into that space in order that your realization flower fully into that space. That realization is an awakening into open, sensitive awareness or what could also be called endless, compassionate vision.

*Think of
everything as
an offering*

If you can learn to rest in that quality of appreciating the power of your emotions rather than letting them lead you by the nose, gradually your emotions will change and begin to function in a different way. For example, your hatred will no longer express itself as a fixated involvement with particular people or things that you do not like, nor will it be projected out onto them as if your feeling was invested in them. Gradually the rage of your hate and the greed of your desire will cease and the good qualities associated with them, that were distorted by being constantly projected outwards, will start to emerge.

*Negative
emotions are
transformed by
resting in their
essential nature*

The energy of hatred has been striking out

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

against things in the external world instead of striking at the narrowness of vision that has created the hatred. The energy of desire has been endlessly wanting to have and to hold things in the external world instead of appreciating that all the qualities it sought, such as richness and beauty, were within itself. Hatred and desire are distorted energy - the energy of your being that is essentially good.

So when you feel strong emotions you should switch from focusing on the external object that seems to be the cause of the trouble and turn towards what you are feeling in your own body and mind.

*The habit of
liking and
disliking is
firmly
entrenched -
notice it; do not
try to fight it*

In spite of all this you may find that you have a very strong habit to reason out why you like or dislike certain things. It may be a strong pattern in your mind to order all your experiences into those you like and those you dislike, and to spend a lot of time thinking out why and whether you have actually categorized each experience or object properly or not. You may find yourself thinking, 'Now am I sure I like that? Now what are its good points? Oh yes, that is certainly good. Yes, I definitely like that,' and so on. There is nothing wrong in that. The important thing is to notice yourself doing it. Notice yourself talking to yourself and trying to categorize things. Do not try to stop doing it particularly. Just notice it going on all the time.

*Feel the
impulsion to
discriminate*

After doing that for a while, see if you can stop it sometimes. If you find that very difficult, try to feel in a very direct way the impulsion that makes you do it all the time. Do not reason about it - just feel the emotion that impels you to make judgements all the time. Feel the directness

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

of the experience.

3. Mindfulness of Mind (*chitta*)

The importance of mindfulness of *chitta* is that it leads to awareness of the heart (*chitta*) in its deepest sense. *Chitta* means mind, in the sense of heart. However in the context of mindfulness of *chitta*, it means mentality, attitude or view. The background concepts that we carry round with us are *chittas*. A *chitta* flavours the whole of the rest of our awareness. For example, our idea of our existence in time and space, of the earth supporting us, of ourselves as human beings, of living in a certain country or town, of being a worthwhile person (or not) and so on are all *chittas*. Emotions that flavour our mood are *chittas*. The lordly judgement is a *chitta*. Our sense of self is a *chitta*.

*Conditioned and
non-conditioned
chittas*

Chittas last over a period a time, sometimes over our whole life. They are not like perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are gone the moment we become aware of them. Their influence is subtle and pervasive like space.

All our Dharma practice is about letting go of the *chittas* conditioned by non-awareness and letting the natural *chitta* which is openness, clarity and sensitivity in their profoundest sense shine through. This process is assisted by conceptual efforts to counter the negative *chittas*, in order to align ourselves with the natural *chitta*. The natural *chitta* is in fact the true nature of mind, the limitless compassionate heart, the Buddha Nature, ultimate non-conditioned reality, or whatever you want to call it.

In order to even start on this process you have to have mindfulness of *chitta*. First you

*Awareness of
chitta as chitta*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

become aware of *chittas* as *chittas*. This means that your concern is not to change them or remove them, but to simply become aware of them.

*The power of
the chitta of
intention*

Then you notice those that are conducive to openness, clarity and sensitivity, and those which are not. This requires reflection. Therefore it is very important at the beginning and end of any Dharma action, be it meditation or anything else, to reflect on why you are doing it, why you did it, and why it is good to continue doing it. The *chittas* you create in these moments of clarity are very powerful. They are much more powerful than thoughts that spin round in your mind when you are feeling dull and confused. They flavour the *chitta* and since they are aligning themselves with the natural *chitta* they are very powerful - they have the natural power of the truth.

This is why volition or intention is so powerful and important. The *chitta* at the centre of the *mandala* of your being is extremely powerful and flavours the whole *mandala*. The rest of the *mandala* serves it. If it is aligned with the natural *chitta* of openness, clarity and sensitivity, it leads the whole of one's being out of conditionality into the *mandala* centred on ultimate truth or reality.

4. Mindfulness of Phenomena (*dharma*s) - mental and sensory events

Mindfulness of *dharma*s is important once mindfulness of *chitta* is established to some extent and you have a certain amount of the stability of mindfulness of body, and the

17. THE FOUR KINDS OF MINDFULNESS

equalness of mindfulness of feeling. You can then gradually include in your mindfulness practice more and more of the various sensory and mental events that arise in your experience. This means not picking and choosing. All experience expresses openness, clarity and sensitivity, and so all of it is valuable.

Mindfulness of *dhammas* might be to see a flower, for example, and to identify it fleetingly as a fuchsia. The problem comes when you think, 'Oh a fuchsia, I really like fuchsias. I wonder if I ought to get a fuchsia. I could have one in my garden. That one is just the colour of my dress....' and so on - then you are away. First it is thoughts connected with the fuchsia and then after a while it is other things as well, until your mind has taken up all sorts of different things and you have completely lost your bearings. It is not that it is impossible to be aware of lots of overlapping thoughts, it is just difficult.

*Perceiving and
naming*

So to start with, in order to learn to see clearly what is happening, it is good to try to catch the idea that this is a fuchsia as it flashes through your mind. Then without any judgement of that being good or bad or anything, just let the idea drop again. Then something else comes up and you let that drop as well. In this way you get used to focusing your awareness on phenomena and then letting them go. It is as if you wanted to see a tree clearly against the sky. You have to create a space to do that. Being aware of phenomena and then letting go of them gives space to see the nature of that awareness. Later on you do not need to try to isolate perceptions in order to see them. It is as if you can see the tree clearly even in the midst of a great tangle of trees.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

*Levels of
subtlety*

You might think that looking around and appreciating the sights and sounds around you is just interrupting one conversation in your mind for another. That is true up to a point. You have to appreciate that there are different levels of conceptual thought. First you start with the grossest levels and then when you are used to practising being aware of a gross level (for example, the constant talking to yourself), then you can start being aware of a more subtle level, such as the constant naming of things. This is a very subtle and interesting practice, but you do not start with that.

18. GENERAL ADVICE ON MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

You should always start with increasing your awareness of the grossest and most obvious things before trying to look for subtleties. Pick what is obvious first and then move from the obvious to the subtle. It does not make sense to try to see subtle things first in the hope of seeing gross things afterwards. That is not how it works.

*Attend to the
most obvious
things first*

Some Westerners read a lot about Buddhism before actually starting to practise it. Then they have this kind of problem. They get all sorts of ideas about subtle levels of practice, before they have begun to experience even the most obvious things properly.

In general, with any kind of mindfulness practice, it is important, whenever your mind wanders and you find you were away, drifting off into mental chatter, to let that be a trigger of awareness. Do not come down heavily on yourself. Just notice how the new sharp focus of awareness that woke you out of your reverie arose spontaneously out of the space of non-focused awareness. This is the natural rhythm of *evam*. Learn to trust and enjoy that and keep your awareness light and simple.

*Let mental
chatter be a
trigger of
awareness*

The best way to practise is to put a particular part of the day aside deliberately in order to relax the mind a bit and attend to the senses.

*Triggers of
awareness in
your daily
routine*

You probably have some sort of daily routine, so it is good to use particular points in your routine to remind you to be aware. For example,

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

you can use your walk to work or just between two particular spots of your walk, or cleaning your teeth, or any other time that is suitable and happens regularly. If you do not choose a particular time the danger is that you will forget to do it at all.

You can 'empower' these times to trigger your awareness. You can 'empower' other things like natural imagery, sounds, actions and so on, so that they trigger awareness. For example, looking at the sky can trigger awareness of the spaciousness of the mind; the changing seasons can trigger awareness of change and impermanence; the sound of the alarm clock can trigger your awareness of your wish to awaken; pulling the curtains can trigger awareness of the wish to let in the light.

Do not overdo this. If you choose a few things that work for you, you will find the world of your experience will start to act like a friend, sending you messages to wake you up all the time.

19. QUESTIONING

The point of all four mindfulnesses is to stop taking the body, feelings, mental attitudes, thoughts and so on for granted. There is something strange and wonderful about our experience, the relationship between mind and body, between thought and feeling and so on. All our lives we have just taken the whole process for granted without questioning it. Mindfulness makes us start questioning everything. What is a thought, what is a feeling, an emotion, a perception, a concept? We should know because we are creating and experiencing them all the time - but do we know?

It is like someone asking how a telephone works and we say 'Well you just pick up the receiver and dial the number. Everyone knows that'. Actually that does not tell us anything about how the telephone works. Most of us never really ask about how it works. We just take it for granted.

The difference is that to find out how a telephone works we have to ask a technician. To find out what thoughts are we just have to experience them clearly for ourselves. We have all the data we need already.

Usually when we notice our thoughts we notice the content of the thought, not what a thought, any thought, actually is in itself. Often when we are meditating we notice thoughts and we might think 'Oh not that same old thought again!' or 'I shouldn't be thinking that!' or 'There I go - day-dreaming again' or 'Oh dear, here comes my depression again' or 'This is interesting', and so on. In other words, it is the content, flavour or effect of the thoughts that concerns us. But there is something very remarkable not so much in the

*Experience
thoughts for
what they are -
not their
content*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

content of the thoughts as in what they actually are. Any particular stream of associated thoughts is quite complicated. We can become quite fascinated with that and try to analyse why we are thinking what we are thinking. But there is something very simple that we are overlooking when we do that. It is the simple but very profound question of what a thought actually is.

*Not an
intellectual
exercise*

This is not some great philosophical question that has to be approached in a speculative way. Speculation is irrelevant here. It just creates more thoughts. What is the experience of having a thought? What is it you mean by 'This is a thought?' What is it you experience that tells you that you are thinking? What is that experience? Is that experience any different from the 'you' who experiences it?

These questions are extremely profound, but also extremely simple. It may take you a long time before your mind becomes simple enough to be able to ask such questions and to appreciate their significance. Nevertheless, such questioning is the key to the whole process. On the path to awakening you can afford to take nothing for granted; absolutely nothing!

*Our awareness
is our whole
world*

We think we live in the world and we think we are aware of it, but in a profound sense we know of no other world than our actual experience. Since this is all we know, it is valid for us to ask, 'What is a thought?' and to focus our awareness on the actual experience of thinking.

The question is, 'What is this?' It is not 'What is this thought about?' or 'What kind of thought is this?' We are not interested in the content or the flavour of the thought.

19. QUESTIONING

Looking at your mind at this very moment, it is alive and vivid. It is telling you directly what it is and what the thoughts are that arise in it. The answer is not an intellectual idea of some kind. The answer is the actual feeling of the experience. The actual experience of the thought. The thought itself is the answer and communicates the answer.

*The thought
itself
communicates
the answer*

This does not apply only to thoughts. It could be, for example, the whole of a particular immediate experience. You could ask yourself, 'What is this?', 'What is the totality of the experience that I am having at this moment?'.

These are very simple questions, but there is a tremendous amount of wisdom in really facing them and looking at them clearly and sharply. The effect could be so mind-blowing and mind-opening that it might be difficult to relate to. The incredible thing is that you have the answer in every moment of your experience. You cannot get away from it and yet you never think about it or question it. You never even look.

But there is no use in looking with your usual conceptual processes because that yields nothing. You end up in the same old game that you have been involved with all your life. You just end up thinking about something; thinking about the content or flavour of your experience or thought - not actually looking at the experience itself, in a non-conceptual way. Asking yourself these questions and trying to experience the answer in a non-conceptual way opens the mind and prepares you for transmission.

*Looking in a
non-conceptual
way*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

20. SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN DAILY LIFE PRACTICE

Mindfulness sounds somewhat as if you should be watching yourself all the time. It is impossible to avoid that manner of speaking. For a long time also it will be impossible for us to avoid that crude sense of duality between our self and our thoughts and feelings, that sense that there is a watcher watching the stream of likes and dislikes. It is a problem that has to be worked on gradually as we practise. For the present, the important thing is to notice things. Just being interested in our experience is enough.

*Not watching
yourself*

The problem comes when you have some sort of axe to grind. You do not just stop at being interested in the experience - you start to want to manipulate it for some strong emotional reason. For example you may want to practise awareness or mindfulness in order not to feel so much anger or fear or whatever it is. You think that by developing a meditative state you can somehow distance yourself from your feelings so that they seem to be happening outside yourself - as if they were objects detached from yourself.

This is a kind of double projection. The badness of the object and the badness of your feeling towards it are both made into outside objects. You do not even want to directly experience the feeling of dislike, anger, hatred or desire, attachment or whatever it is.

Not only is the bad object perceived as a threat - something trying to attack or invade you - but the angry feeling you have about it also seems to rise up as an enemy against you. So the world and your feelings all seem to present

*Feelings can
seem to rise up
as enemies*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

themselves as a tremendous threat.

Turn towards the feeling. Instead of trying to step back from it and objectify it as something separate from yourself, you can turn towards it and take a genuine interest in what it actually feels like.

*The power of
aspiration*

Maybe, at first, you have difficulty in working up a genuine interest, but you can at least aspire to it. We tend to underestimate the power of aspiration, thinking that if we do not succeed straight away then we are wasting time. Actually it is the constant trying that eventually triggers something genuine.

It might be that after trying for a long time you stop trying one day and then spontaneously, when you least expect it, a genuine interest suddenly arises and you can practise effortlessly.

*Do not push
too hard*

Trying like this can be quite uncomfortable and demanding. You cannot do it continuously. You have to let your attention come and go. So do not use your aspiration and interest - your wish to know - as another stick to beat yourself with. Do not start blaming yourself because you cannot practise properly or because it takes a long time to learn and so on.

The important thing is that you have begun to practise. You could practise in a very gentle way at first. You do not need to give yourself a hard time.

*Resistance to
opening*

What tends to happen is that although you may wish to be open, you get a bit emotional when a certain feeling comes up and the automatic response is to clamp down. This kind of resistance to openness is gradually worn down by the intention or wish to turn towards it and

20. SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN DAILY LIFE PRACTICE

see it. Eventually the mind allows itself to open up to it. Then as you see and experience the feeling that you did not like, you come to understand that it is simply a feeling, the same as any other thought or feeling. You can see that it is actually all right to feel it. It is not the big deal that you thought it was. This is a very important aspect of openness.

To some extent our life-style puts a certain pressure on us - but as it does so, it whips up in us a process by which we start to put pressure on ourselves in a quite unnecessary way. It is important not to do this.

*Feeling
pressurised*

Meditation is a chance not to be hassled. However, because of our habit of feeling hassled all the time we make meditation itself into some kind of problem. We start thinking, 'Oh, I'm having difficulty with the meditation - I'm not doing it right - I've got this problem' and so on. These are just thoughts and feelings to be treated like any others. Don't let them hassle you.

Buddhism is not saying that you should be different from how you are. It is not telling you that there is anything wrong with you. It is not saying 'You are supposed to be open - stop closing off all the time'. It is simply up to you. You want to be open and you are meditating to practise being open. The idea of failure does not come into it. The mere intention to be open will produce an effect by itself. There is no time limit - no pressure. Let it develop in a natural way.

*Feeling of
failure*

In everyday life problems arise, such as someone putting you on the spot somehow, and you suddenly find that you are not able to think clearly. Maybe they are attacking a weak point in your character. Maybe you feel guilty about

*Strong emotions
make it more
difficult to think
clearly*

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

something you should have done but have not. You want to protest, but you are not thinking clearly, so you just explode in a rather violent or vehement manner. This is not a response arising out of any kind of awareness. It is just an emotional response. Being more sensitive means allowing yourself to feel situations like that more acutely. A situation may feel prickly and you may feel very vulnerable, but instead of reacting emotionally, you just stay with it and feel that emotion, feel that situation pressing into your sensitive skin.

*Removing layers
of resistance*

It is the opposite to developing a thick skin. Trungpa Rinpoche often pointed out that everyday life practice was about learning to remove those outer layers of resistance or masks that we present towards others. By trying to present ourselves in a particular way, we are actually conspiring in some kind of deception.

We might think this is useful for some reason, but it is not openness, clarity and sensitivity. Eventually you have to learn to be open, aware and sensitive in any situation. However, this is a long process and only Buddhas can really present themselves with no masks at all.

*Dealing with
difficult people*

Sometimes, however inspired you are by the idea of everyone having these qualities, you run into people or situations where it is very difficult to maintain that inspiration. Obviously you can hardly say 'Your mind and my mind are the same', when you are arguing with someone. But you can recognize that sometimes you are one sort of person and sometimes another and that the same is true for others. Seeing this, you could learn to be kind to yourself and then by the same

20. SPECIFIC PROBLEMS IN DAILY LIFE PRACTICE

token you could be kind to others.

Something I personally find helpful is to think that the other person and myself, and in fact every being, actually belong to the same continuity of experience. In other words that person actually is me. The 'I' that is looking at that person is that person who is looking at me. I have to have a real conviction that one day I will be that person, or that I once was that person. Then it is really as if I am that person - as if I were really talking to myself. Maybe to you that sounds just as hard, if not harder than thinking of that person as having the three qualities. Try both and see what works for you.

*Think that the
other person is
you*

You will probably find that the practice works more easily in retrospect than in the heat of the moment. You apply your mindfulness as soon as you actually stop and think of it. For example, after the event, you might think you could have been more generous or whatever. Don't use this as an opportunity to make yourself feel guilty, but simply as an opportunity to increase your awareness and sensitivity.

*Things
sometimes work
in retrospect*

PARTING ADVICE

In your meditation and daily life awareness practice, notice which practices work in terms of increasing your openness, awareness and sensitivity, and which simply increase your sense of problem. Ask for advice in the latter case from someone who has experience of the practices - do not just struggle on unaided.

It is important to avoid getting too abstract. A sign of this is a sense of alienation between your actual experience and your aspiration. For example, your aspiration might be to see no difference in the openness, clarity and sensitivity of yourself and of others. If this gets too abstract you may find yourself thinking that this is true intellectually, but feeling increasingly alienated from others and the whole practice situation. It is important to turn towards that sense of alienation, relating to your experience fully in a non-judgemental manner. It is useless to simply try to endlessly 'crank-up' the feeling or experience that you think you should be having. By opening to your actual experience, rather than simply trying to correct or ignore it, you make discoveries that bring about spontaneous change.

In this way you adopt a way of thinking that deeply affects you and your behaviour. It is not enough to just assent to ideas because you like them or because they are traditional. Those ideas have to actually prove themselves to be beneficial. So examine the effect on your life of the way that you think. Having been inspired by a certain way of thinking you may find that in practice it does not help. Perhaps the solution is to persist in it for some time. However, it may be that there has been some misunderstanding. Part of the problem might be that you have misunderstood the practice. Part of the problem might be that it triggers the wrong response in you because of your particular conditioning. Therefore, it is important to seek guidance.

The point is that some things help you to connect to the practice and some things make it difficult. With this in mind, do not just slavishly follow a practice regardless of the effect it

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

is having on you. What you need to find is the essence of all the practices. Once you have made a connection with that, it acts as your touch-stone for telling whether any other practices you adopt are helping or not.

The essence of all the practices is the awakening to your own essential nature of openness, clarity and sensitivity. If your lifestyle or meditation are having the opposite effect - cutting you off, dulling your mind or making you insensitive - then it is time to re-examine what you are doing to yourself.

On the other hand, the practice is working if the way you live your life and practise meditation is giving you broader and deeper vision, while making you more aware of your own unskilful behaviour (in a way that helps you accept yourself and others). You start to see your unskilful behaviour in perspective. It is not essential, intrinsic or solid. You can let it go. If you are developing a lighter touch, a better sense of proportion, then however messy the details of your life may be, the general thrust of your practice is right.

APPENDIX

FURTHER DETAILS ABOUT THE LONGCHEN FOUNDATION AND ITS TRAINING PROGRAMME

This book is a basic textbook for the open learning system planned by **Michael Hookham** and called the '**Indestructible Heart Essence**' that is currently being developed by the Longchen Foundation.

The **Longchen Foundation** was set up by Michael Hookham under the direction of **Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche** and **H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche** in 1975 as a vehicle for teaching Buddhism in general and the Dzogchen tradition in particular.

When Michael met his principal teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, in 1965, he had already trained with several Theravadin Bhikshus over the course of nine years. Trungpa Rinpoche gave him extensive and detailed teaching on the preliminary and main practices of the Nyingma* Dzogchen tradition. After a few years Trungpa Rinpoche left for America and Michael continued to study and practice under his direction, visiting him in America from time to time. Trungpa Rinpoche encouraged Michael to take teachings and guidance from his own teacher H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche and to set up the Longchen Foundation. H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche told Michael to take further Dzogchen instruction from Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche (also a student of H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche). Since the death of Trungpa Rinpoche and H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche has been Michael's chief source of inspiration and guidance.

Both Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche emphasized to Michael that he should present Buddhism directly in English using

* The Nyingma School is the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism.

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

appropriate methods and language. In response to this Michael prepared the 'master plan' of the 'Indestructible Heart Essence' course of training for his students to develop while he was in retreat. Shenpen Hookham was given charge of the teaching and implementation of this training course during that time.

The 'Indestructible Heart Essence' is being prepared as an open learning system in accordance with the principles of a 'spiral curriculum'.

A 'spiral curriculum' is a learning programme that is designed in such a way that all areas of knowledge are connected to a central core theme which is approached by moving through levels of increasing conceptual complexity (the spiral) and along lines of enquiry that cut across these levels of complexity at various points (like radii).

The advantage of a 'spiral curriculum' over the more traditional linear approach to learning is that the students or the teachers can choose at which point in the spiral they want to start and then gradually expand their knowledge from there; the overall spiral principle constantly brings them back to the core theme in such a way that the connections between the different areas of study remain clear. The core theme of this particular curriculum is 'Indestructible Heart Essence'.

As an open learning system, 'The Indestructible Heart Essence' course is a learning programme that is designed as carefully structured written and audio materials. Students work through the course with the help of periodic guidance from a tutor, in such a way that both student and tutor are satisfied that the student has understood each specified teaching point relating to each specified concept area. The materials are designed in such a way that the students can work with them either on their own or with a group of fellow students.

20. PARTING ADVICE

If you would like more details about the 'Indestructible Heart Essence' course, please write to

**David Clarke
22 Valley Road
Brackley
NORTHANTS
NN13 5DQ.**

**OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THE
LONGCHEN FOUNDATION**

'ON FREEING THE HEART'

compiled from talks by Michael Hookham. (1988)

ISBN 0 9511477 1 4

'PROGRESSIVE STAGES OF MEDITATION ON EMPTINESS'

*by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Translated and arranged by
Shenpen Hookham.(1988)*

ISBN 0 9511477 0 6

AVAILABLE FROM : Dave Rowley
7 Clay Green
Alfrick
Worcestershire
WR6 5HJ
Tel (0886) 832090

ABOUT THE EDITOR

At the suggestion of Trungpa Rinpoche, Shenpen went to India in 1969 where she studied and practised as a Buddhist nun under the direction of Kagyu Lamas for over five years. H.H. Karmapa asked her to return to Europe in 1974 and later to translate for Gendun Rinpoche. In 1977 she met her main teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, under whose guidance she completed her doctoral thesis at Oxford University on Tathagatagarba Doctrine and Shentong. This was published in 1991 under the title 'The Buddha Within'. She has been involved with the Longchen Foundation since 1982, when she met and married Michael Hookham.

INDEX

A

adhigama, 62
anger, 99, 119

B

blank states of mind, 85
Bodhisattva path, 28
body, 14, 15, 31, 45
boredom, 68
Buddha, 14
Buddha Nature, vii, 14, 27,
123

C

chitta, 113
compassion, 28
confidence, 17
connections, 104
crystal, 23
cynicism, 94, 95

D

demons, 48
depression, 49, 118, 129
desire, 29
dharmās, 113
distortion, 27, 28, 29, 30
distractedness, 79
Dzogchen, vi, 141

E

emotions, 14, 23, 54, 106,
107, 117, 121
like optical illusions, 23
physical effect of, 118
power of, 121

that flavour our mood,
123

evam, 66, 91, 127

F

feelings, 114
flash fantasies, 81
friendliness, 13
frozen ice, 86

G

garuda, 75
generosity, 28
gesture, 47
guilt, 72

H

hatred, 29
Heart wish, 96
Hinayana, 75

I

impermanence, 80, 92, 104,
128
indriya, 75
interest, 75, 115
awareness is, 104

L

language, 41
limitations of, 40
Longchenpa, 48
lordly judgement, 71, 72,
73, 92, 93, 123
love, 22

OPENNESS CLARITY SENSITIVITY

M

Mahayana, vii, 41

mandala, 104

principle, 113

meditation, 20

mental chatter, 110

mindfulness, 95, 113

of body, 113

of *chitta*, 123

of *dharma*s, 124

of feeling, 114

mudra, 47

relaxation *mudra*, 48

N

nyams, 27, 35, 62

Nyingma, 141

O

offering, 121

one-pointedness, 85

P

placidity, 79

power, 33

of confidence, 106

or faculty, 92

to let go, 94

prajna, 75, 91

R

retreats, 58

S

samadhi, 75

samaya, 19, 104

shamata, 53, 54

Shantideva, 83

shraddha, 75, 92

simplicity, 101

sleepiness, 79

smriti, 75

stupidity, 30

suffering, 105

T

time

& space, vii, 73, 123

and awareness, 12

conceptual notions

about, 62

V

vipashyana, 53, 61

virya, 75

W

walking meditation, 58

watching yourself, 133

well-being, 12

wisdom, 91

Openness Clarity Sensitivity

Compiled from talks by

Michael Hookham

This book stresses the importance of having confidence in the nature of mind – the indestructible heart essence of our being. It is what, at heart, we essentially are – it is that aspect of our being that can never be destroyed. It cannot be destroyed because it was never created – it is beyond creation and destruction, beyond time and space. It is mysterious and yet so familiar, indestructible and yet so simple...

Michael has found a way of talking us through our self – doubt and hesitations, opening the way for us to relate properly to the teachings of the great Gurus of the Dzogchen Tibetan Buddhist tradition, to which he belongs.

He has himself practiced Buddhism for 40 years in the midst of a conventional modern life as a mathematician, physicist and computer consultant. He is the principal teacher and director of the Longchen Foundation – a Buddhist educational charity founded by Trungpa Rinpoche and H.H. Khyentse Rinpoche. For the last three years Michael has been in retreat in his home in Oxford completing his yogic training.

