

(excerpt from Volume One: The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Chapter 43, pages 329 to 331)

VIPASHYANA: THE PRACTICE OF AWARENESS

The Freshness of Unconditional Mind

Vipashyana refers to the sense of precision that could arise from the sitting practice of meditation and slowly infiltrate our everyday life. There are two different schools of vipashyana: the analytical contemplative way, and the nonanalytical experiential way. The analytical school talks about the possibility of becoming more aware if you ask more questions and examine the nature of reality and your own state of mind. In our tradition, in accordance with Jamgon Kongtrul, we talk mainly in terms of the nonanalytical, or experiential, approach. Because of that emphasis, the Kagyu tradition is known as the practice lineage.

Shamatha provides the ground, but too much emphasis on shamatha practice could be a problem. It is said that one should not be attached to the pond of shamatha, but let the flower of vipashyana bloom, like a pond beautified by a lotus flower. Taking shelter in shamatha is a perversion of shamatha discipline, so it is very important to convert the relaxation of shamatha meditation into the postmeditation activity of vipashyana. Traditionally, it is said that you should try to achieve a fifty-fifty balance between shamatha and vipashyana. Having properly regrouped your state of mind and linked it with sanity, the postmeditation experience could be a tremendous expansion toward awareness.

Vipashyana is entirely different from shamatha. Shamatha practice could be regarded as a way of quieting and pacifying the mind. It is a paring-down process that leaves us very little reference point and very little to work on except the technique itself. Shamatha is a way to quiet oneself. It is the development of peace. Having already become quiet, having practiced and achieved that basic ground of shamatha, we could expand out and extend ourselves. With vipashyana, rather than cutting down our mental perceptions, we sharpen our awareness.

Vipashyana is referred to as insight, or the seed of prajna, in that we are preparing ourselves to become worthy of listening to the teachings. Through vipashyana we can hear the teachings properly. We are able to perceive the subtlety and the depth of the teachings. That is precisely why vipashyana is an important practice: it begins to open the gate of wisdom. Vipashyana practice includes the contemplative approach of pondering the dharma intellectually, as well as the meditative practice of the development of awareness.

In the contemplative practice of vipashyana, speculative mind is used as a way of looking beyond oneself. You have certain ideas and conclusions, and through philosophical speculation you try to create further ideas and conclusions in order to transcend yourself. In Buddhist philosophy, you are venturing out into different ground than the ground that you find secure. When you find it very confusing to understand things, then rather than formulating new ideas to

make sure you have some ground to stand on, the Buddhist approach is to take a further leap and create your own nest in space. That is the philosophical approach in Buddhism. It is precisely the approach of vipashyana, if not prajna.

Vipashyana awareness arises from several different conditions, but fundamentally it comes from being without aggression. The definition of dharma altogether is the absence of aggression. It is a way of dealing with aggression, and shamatha is the starting point. Shamatha brings clear thinking and slows you down, because the only thing you have to work on is your breathing. Because aggression or anger is based on speed and confusion, shamatha leads to the absence of aggression. So shamatha is the development of peace.

In order to perceive or to understand the dharma, you have to develop a state of mind without aggression, a mind based on non-ego and non-speed. Dharma being without aggression means the materials of our experience are workable and could be woven into the pattern of the path. It may seem like a tall order to be without aggression, and it may seem impossible for beginners to develop such perfection. However, even for beginners, momentary states of mind occur that have elements of nonaggression and non-ego.