

SHAMATHA: THE TRAINING

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER was a prelude, a warm-up. Here I will teach about shamatha, or calm abiding, in detail. First, I want to address the issue of conceptual mind—the state of mind in which experience is divided into or held as having two parts, subject and object. This holding of duality is what fuels the whole play, the whole drama. (Conceptual mind in Tibetan is called *lo*; dualistic thinking mind is *sem*.)

The view held during shamatha practice is a conceptual view. There are a few types of shamatha. One I call “stupidity training,” a training in being dull and absentminded. It is actually not a formal meditation practice, but people do use it, so it needs to be mentioned. As a matter of fact, many people mistake their stupidity training for real shamatha. The genuine training is traditionally described as being of two types: one is supported shamatha with object, while the other is unsupported shamatha without object.

The idea of meditation started to become popular in the West in the sixties. People began to associate a certain mental state with that word. Sometimes it is used to refer to a kind of shutting off, a process of remaining uninvolved and going into your own space, an altered state where you don't notice anything happening in the outside world. To practice in this way means to distance yourself from experiencing through the senses. You go into a state of oblivion, absentminded and totally dim, just like animals do in hibernation. This process of shutting off from anything and trying to stay like that was sometimes called deep relaxation and even meditation. Many people still do this. One can slip into this when training in shamatha, and many people are in fact fond of it. They like it because it's peaceful, and it feels like taking a break. Someone who trains like that for years and years will become progressively duller and more stupid. His eyes will become very cloudy. This

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type of "progress" is dangerous. Please watch out! There's a big risk in mistaking that state of stupidity training for the training in shamatha.

Just as an experiment, let's rest in stupidity training for five minutes. We should be familiar with it so that we can identify what it is. Close your eyes. Do not think of anything. It's just like when you lean back in the sauna after working out—there's no attempt to know anything. You may even drool. You completely close down but are somewhat relaxed. Mentally there is no activity. Do you recognize this state?

First-class stupidity training for even five minutes will surely put you to sleep. There is a strong link between this state and sleep. Falling asleep is caused by dullness, and to train in shutting down like that pulls us into the absentminded state of sleep.

Shamatha is definitely unlike that. It should have a certain brightness. During shamatha, you are well aware of what is happening all around you. Your attention is focused on nowness, and yet at the same time you are able to notice what is going on around you, both right and left.

Let's do another five minutes of stupidity training. Do not keep hold of anything; just forget all your worries. Totally shut off into a state of dullness. Don't try to figure out anything. This is not the time for realization. We are not trying to attain anything from this. Do not maintain any particular thought activity; simply withdraw inside.

Those of you who have gone to the beach know this state. Those of you who have gone trekking in the mountains know this state. It is not something new. You go to the beach, you swim around, then you lie on your back with a towel over your face and do stupidity training. You just kind of pass out there on the beach. After about twenty minutes, you think, "How relaxing!" But that sort of training does not brighten your intelligence; it brings no insight. Without insight, there is nothing to wipe out the seeds for further samsaric existence. So, right now, close your eyes. You have to close your eyes for this practice, but still sit with a straight back.

[A few minutes of stupidity training]

Enough. This is risky. You may fall asleep. The other danger is that tomorrow you might want to repeat this practice. Stupidity training is no good. It may feel cozy, but it's not Buddhist meditation practice. It is

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not shamatha and it's surely not vipashyana. It's in no way a noble practice.

Shamatha, calm abiding, is completely unlike stupidity training. It is found at many levels of Buddhist practice, as well as in many other spiritual traditions—for instance, the Hindu schools and probably other places as well—but its origin was in the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha taught meditation as shamatha and vipashyana. Buddhist shamatha has two types: one with support and one without support.

The purpose of shamatha is to improve our presence of mind. We all have an innate ability to pay attention, to know. To improve upon this presence, to make it steady instead of being scattered and distracted, we try to remain attentive in a stable way.

In stupidity training, there's no sense of nowness. The sense of nowness is allowed to fade away. Stupidity training has no sense of being present. We hold nothing in mind, but we are just about to fall asleep. We are dull, absentminded. In shamatha, we focus on nowness, on being here, right now. There is a sense of knowing, of being mindful: that I am here, that all the objects are here, that everything is taking place and I'm aware of this. There is a certain brightness in this state. The brightness is the quality of knowing what is taking place, even though it may not be a state of liberation.

You can say the brightness is liberated when there is a sense of knowing what it is in itself in the present. That happens at the time of vipashyana, or at the time of the view of the Great Perfection, of Dzogchen. Right now, during the straight and honest shamatha of dwelling in nowness, this quality of freedom is not yet there; it is missing. Nevertheless, we need to begin with the type of nowness that is mindful of the present. In order to be here now, we need a certain amount of support to not let the attention drift off or slip away to this and that.

Shamatha has three components: being mindful, alert, and settled. Imagine a shepherd at work. When the sheep are tethered, they remain settled. They have a rope tied around their necks to prevent them from walking too far away. That rope is mindfulness. But there is also the shepherd supervising the whole affair, not paying too much attention to each individual sheep, but looking to see if everything is okay, keeping an eye out in case something goes wrong. Some really stupid sheep may get tangled up in their rope, and if there's no shepherd there to undo it

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is alert, and settled. When they remain present, they prevent them from being here. There is also the quality of attention to the sheep, keeping the sheep here to undo it

immediately, they can strangle themselves. Then the shepherd walks over and undoes the rope so the sheep can again roam and graze. That is alertness.

That was the analogy; here comes the meaning. When this attention of ours, this mind, is not following the past and not planning the future but just remaining in nowness, that's a sense of settling, of staying put. Next, something extra is needed to keep the attention on the present, to prevent the attention from going astray into thinking about the past or the future. The sheep feels a tension at its throat if it walks a little too far away, so it moves back to make the rope more slack. That is the analogy for mindfulness, the method for keeping the attention tethered to the present moment, remaining settled in the present. Third and most important is the sense of alertness, the supervising quality that stays alert to whether this attention remains present or not. Without this, how would one know whether one is being distracted? How would one know whether this mind actually remains settled in nowness? Thus, the most important quality is this sense of overall alertness, the sense of being awake to the whole situation.

This alertness sees the whole picture. In midst of the entire panorama of shamatha, there is something that knows very clearly that you remain settled. You know you are settled, while at the same time you know you are not distracted. You are there together with the sense of abiding, and this knowing also is aware. This whole atmosphere is needed in shamatha practice. Slowly and gradually, the alertness will become more alert, more alert, more alert.

The correct practice of shamatha further and further strengthens this alert quality. It transforms into an increasing sense of being awake. Meanwhile, the mindful quality becomes more and more mindful, so that it requires less and less effort. You are just naturally mindful, naturally present. And the sense of being settled, of dwelling in the nowness, becomes more and more of the same identity as the alertness, until finally the alertness pulls this state into something that is no longer just shamatha: it has become vipashyana, the state of seeing clearly.

The Mahamudra teachings say that when the division between stillness and thought occurrence falls away, this is the recognition of one-pointedness. This one-pointedness is actually shamatha. At the beginning, there was a very strong division in one's mind between being quiet

and thinking. However, when this alertness, in Tibetan called *shezhin*, becomes a sense of wakefulness that grows stronger and stronger, then at a certain point there is no longer any wall between stillness and thinking—the boundary falls apart. Everything is just one continuity of being alert and awake. And this alertness or awake quality is completely settled, without your having to try to settle it.

Please understand that Buddhist meditation training from A to Z, from beginning to end, has one central quality: this sense of knowing, this sense of being awake. It comes and goes again and again, but it is always identical in essence. This quality is given many names—alertness, wakefulness, *shunyata*, insight, omniscient wisdom—but it is the same basic quality that goes all the way through. And if, at any point during Buddhist meditation training, this quality goes missing, then that is definitely not the path to complete enlightenment. Please understand this point very clearly. Even at the very beginning, in shamatha practice, this sense of knowing is that which keeps alert to the existence of subject and object, that which stays aware, although in a dualistic sense. As it becomes the vipashyana quality, it is aware of nonduality, the absence of subject and object. The knowing quality that extends all the way through these various practices is identical in essence, though the subject of its knowing may change. There are different levels of practice, but you always need this basic knowing, this sense of awareness.

Actually, stupidity training does have some purpose. It is useful when you are very agitated, when you cannot sleep, and if you want to get a stupid rebirth. Otherwise, it's not much use. Though one could mistake stupidity training for shamatha practice, most people don't. Instead, they go astray when introduced to Mahamudra and Dzogchen. In Mahamudra and Dzogchen it is said, "Do not concentrate, do not fixate, do not meditate, do not hold anything in mind, don't do anything at all." Some people might think, "All right, I don't need to do anything, so I'll just relax," and then they go into that state of stupidity. It does happen. This is why many meditators go to sleep as soon as they meditate, especially Tibetans and other Asians. Westerners are a little different.

It's also very important to have open eyes during meditation, even though many people say it's hard to sit with open eyes. It may be difficult at the beginning, but the real difficulty lies in the way of looking—in knowing how to place the eyes, how to gaze. We have the habit,

whenever our eyes are open, the eye consciousness. That feels funny; it feels like, "Where do I need to look? You don't have to focus, but anyway. Wherever you look, just at a particular spot."

I think you know the confusion, between stupidity training and withdrawing the knowing quality. The real meditation state is not just the maintenance of a stillness, but to dwell on anything at all, but to understand this? The real shamatha is to dwell on anything, but at shamatha without support.

Shamatha with support and breath and uses this focus. Shamatha without support doesn't focus on anything. Either way, however, it's the same mind. Among the possibilities, shamatha is a way of ceasing, of not doing anything, that? In shamatha practice, there is no hope and fear.

Shamatha has an object, a way of occupying oneself with attachment, anger, and aversion, with non-attachment, with non-compassion, and no object. It's just a sense of non-attachment.

It's like when you're in a room and the light is lit up. For as long as you meet the people on the other side of the plane, you won't see them. The sign: "Oh, occupied, I'm not going to have a chance to meet the Buddha." "Oh, it's occupied, I won't

whenever our eyes are open, of spearing one object after the other with the eye consciousness. Therefore, when we try to just leave the gaze free it feels funny; it feels like we can't stay that way. Many people ask, "Where do I need to look? In which direction am I supposed to look?" You don't have to focus, but that doesn't mean looking in an unfocused way. Wherever you look, just look in that way. You do not have to look at a particular spot.

I think you know the difference between these two styles of meditation, between stupidity training and shamatha with support. One is to withdraw the knowing quality, and the other is to focus outwardly. The real meditation state is not withdrawn, nor is it focused outwardly, nor is it the maintenance of a certain state in between these two. It does not dwell on anything at all, but rather is totally free and pervasive. Do you understand this? The real meditation state is like space. Space does not dwell on anything, but at the same time it is all-pervasive. This is how shamatha without support should be.

Shamatha with support focuses the attention on an object like the breath and uses this focus as a way of abiding. Shamatha without support doesn't focus on any particular object but simply abides in nowness. Either way, however, shamatha is still a way of confining your mind. Among the possibilities of arising, dwelling, and ceasing, shamatha is a way of ceasing, of confining yourself to nowness. Did you get that? In shamatha practice you are occupying yourself. In addition, it contains hope and fear.

Shamatha has an object held in mind, and the object is nowness. It's a way of occupying oneself with nowness. Instead of being occupied with attachment, anger, stupidity, jealousy, and pride, one is occupied with nowness. Unfortunately, at the same time, there is also no devotion, no compassion, and no omniscient wakefulness. None of these is present, only a sense of nowness.

It's like when you're in the toilet on an airplane, the OCCUPIED sign is lit up. For as long as you're occupying that space, you are unable to meet the people on the other side of the door. Even if the Buddha comes onto the plane, you won't meet him. The Buddha comes and sees the sign: "Oh, occupied, I'm not going to enter." So you do not have a chance to meet the Buddha. Next, an obstacle demon comes and says, "Oh, it's occupied, I won't go in." Inside the cubicle, you still have hope

and fear—especially when you are returning from Kathmandu to your own country, because your stomach is not feeling so good. You have the sincere hope to stay in there and rest and make sure everything is fine, but you also have fear because people are waiting outside, maybe knocking on the door. Shamatha is a little bit like that. You are occupied with the present moment, and thus unavailable to whatever may happen to pass by. Anger comes and you are occupied; a positive emotion comes and you are occupied. You are present, practicing correctly, having a nice time in the toilet. Shamatha with support is something like that.

Shamatha is indeed a skillful method. Without it, your attention is so wild, all over the place, like a whirlwind. If you submit to whatever this movement is and go wherever it takes you, there is the risk of going nuts. It's better to shut yourself up inside the toilet for a while and take a little rest.

Next is unsupported shamatha, in which your attention makes use of no support. Unsupported shamatha keeps no real object in mind. We're simply allowing the aware quality of mind to be as it is, without doing anything to it. It seems as if there is no support. This is true, but only relatively speaking, within the context of shamatha itself. When viewed from higher levels of practice, some support is still apparent. This support, this object that is held in mind, is the feeling of being present: "This nowness, all of this is *right now*, moment by moment; it is vividly present." Nowness is the object, and the subject is the knowing of that, acknowledging the nowness. Unsupported shamatha is simply remaining undistracted from nowness. Generally speaking, for a beginner there is the danger of mistaking stupidity training for shamatha. But for a practitioner, the real danger lies in mistaking unsupported shamatha for vipashyana. Please understand this point.

To get a taste of this teaching, let's first do a short session of shamatha with support. Right now, you should not close your eyes. Just use any support in front of you—but not the neck of the guy in front of you, because when he moves you get distracted. Just relax and remain very quietly, with your attention simply resting on something, without being distracted by anything else. At the same time, allow everything else to be present as well. Nothing is blocked out, but your attention is directed only at your support.

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Or, as an alternative to the picture of the Buddha crown on the Karmapa's front of you. Anything freely, without being closed

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[Practice session]

RINPOCHE: All right. state compared to the STUDENT: Brighter.

Don't close your eyes, because if you close your eyes now you risk falling back into stupidity training. While it is perfectly all right to use the movement of breath as the support, in our tradition we still do not close our eyes. As a matter of fact, do not close any of your sense organs. Do not close any doors. Simply pay attention. When exhaling, notice that your breathing is moving out. When inhaling, notice that your breath is coming into you; just that, nothing else.

Or, as an alternative to using the breath as the support, pay attention to the picture of the Buddha on the wall or a flower on the shrine or the crown on the Karmapa's statue. Pick something ten or fifteen feet in front of you. Anything will do. You can just let your breathing flow freely, without being concerned with it at all.

Together with that focused attention, there should be a certain feeling of being unblocked. You are not concentrating, not trying to grab hold of something tightly. That's not what is meant by focused. Rather, you're just staying with the object of your attention.

Don't do anything weird with your eyes; just leave them as they are. Look in the same way you usually look at something. Normally, when you walk around you don't stare; you just allow things to be seen. Some people may seem as if they are trying to twist their eyes around while meditating, so that one eye is up and the other is down. That is not necessary. Imagine that you have a basin of water and two glass spheres—you just put them into the water and leave them there. That is how you should leave your eyes.

Do not twist your eyes or move them in two different directions. If you do, your eyes will start hurting. You might as well be natural. When you listen to a sound, you do not have to sit like this either, in order to hear. [*Rinpoche crooks his neck*] You can just allow the sound to be heard. It's the same with any sensory input—we can be totally natural about how that sensory input is being received. So right now, let's be relaxed and comfortable. Happy mind. Choose your object.

[*Practice session*]

RINPOCHE: All right. Now, what is the difference in the feeling of this state compared to the previous one? Any difference?

STUDENT: Brighter.

RINPOCHE: How about feeling? Which one felt nicer, the first time or the second?

STUDENT: The second.

RINPOCHE: I disagree. I prefer the first one, it feels better. Now, what's the main difference?

STUDENT: More wakeful.

STUDENT 2: There's no sense of "I" in the first one.

RINPOCHE: During the session, there was somebody beating a drum over there. Did you all hear this?

STUDENT: Yes.

RINPOCHE: Very good. What else did you notice?

STUDENT: The light dimmed.

RINPOCHE: Wasn't that being distracted?

STUDENT: No.

RINPOCHE: How do you know that? How do you know the difference between being distracted and noticing that the light is dimming or that someone is beating a drum? Could it be that the moment the light dims, you switch your focus from the support of your attention over to the electric light?

STUDENT: Well, no, maybe not, because being able to perceive that object depends on the light, because it could be dark. *[Laughter]*

RINPOCHE: Is it possible to be open and yet at the same time notice that someone is beating a drum?

STUDENT: Yes.

RINPOCHE: I said open, yes. But I did not say undistracted. Wide open.

Now, what is it we call "the present"? Is it the presence of the electric light, the presence of what you were using as the support, or what? Right now, in the context of shamatha with support, you pay attention to one spot. Is it possible to pay attention to more than one thing at the same time, without being distracted from the first one and then moving over to the second?

STUDENT: I would have to be totally blocked off to not notice what took place. I acknowledged it, but quickly returned to the stillness practice.

RINPOCHE: Shamatha with support is similar to what you are saying. You pay attention to the object with 80 percent attention. Twenty percent is still allowed to register everything else. That is the best way. Otherwise,

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if we pay 100 percent attention to the object of focus, there is a risk of getting stuck in that and becoming absorbed. So what you said is actually very good.

Now, for the second type of shamatha, do not worry about the breathing, and don't worry about using an object as support. Just leave the attention as it is, right now. Let whatever happens happen, but do not get caught up in it. Do not hold any special object in mind. At some point a thought will form. When that happens, do not follow it. Just remain in the present.

Do you understand what is meant by "the present"? Not following the past, not planning the future, not holding an object in mind right now. Just leave your attention totally relaxed, and remain like that. Remain in *nowness*. Following thoughts is not good enough. Trying to stop thinking is not good enough. Shamatha without support remains in the *nowness* without getting caught up in thought.

Did you understand what I said? Is it clear? What did I say?

STUDENT: Remain in the *nowness* without getting caught up in thought.

[Laughter]

RINPOCHE: Please explain what that means.

STUDENT: When a thought comes up, you just let it go rather than following it.

RINPOCHE: But still remaining in the present. You need to stay in the *nowness*. The main focus here is presence of mind, knowing whatever *is*. Keep to that. In this context as well, you keep your eyes open. A lot of you seem to like to close your eyes. That is not a good habit. If you close your eyes today, then tomorrow you might be closing your ears. You will bring along your earplugs. Then you will want to close your nostrils too, so you don't have to smell anything. Let's not get into attitudes like that. You're allowed to notice whatever takes place. It's okay. If you train with closed eyes, then later on when you leave here and you have to carry the practice with you in daily life, how will you be able to function walking around with closed eyes? Wouldn't it be better to be capable, to have open eyes right from the start? The purpose of our present meditation training is to become capable of dealing with any emotional state that is triggered while we walk, talk, eat, or lie down, rather than being overwhelmed. When the emotions well up, do you always have time to sit down and close your eyes in order to deal with it?

Some people seem to regard meditation training as a little holiday, the equivalent to taking a break, a dietary supplement, or a vitamin pill in the hope of regaining their energy. A person with that attitude has no need for the Dzogchen teachings. He doesn't need shamatha or vipashyana either: stupidity training is perfectly fine. Just train in that. When you get up from that practice, your muscles are more relaxed, you don't have so many thoughts, and as you train further for a couple of months, you'll have even fewer thoughts. You will worry less, and you will know less. It is very nice. It is perfectly good enough.

Our present practice of shamatha is certainly unlike that. We have not come here to learn stupidity training or a practice to get peace for just ourselves, to feel good for ourselves alone. We have come here to learn how to cut through the very root of ego-oriented emotions and the very root cause of all of samsaric existence, and to discover the basic nature of emptiness that is free of ego. We are not going to remain in a peaceful state for ourselves. Rather, we will allow compassion to manifest out of emptiness for the benefit of all sentient beings. Since emptiness and compassion are not separate, this compassion is not limited in any way or in any direction. That is the purpose of Vajrayana training. It is not only to gain a little personal peace. Is that clear?

To summarize: the training in shamatha without object, without support, is to keep all your senses open and alert, without being blocked off in any way. Don't shut down your five senses at all; rather, allow whatever takes place to be present. When something takes place, do not catch on to it deliberately; don't grab it with your attention. Don't get caught up in forming thoughts about it. Just remain; be present in this nowness. Keep your attention on nowness.

Ready? Now! [*Rinpoche strikes small hand cymbals*]

Again, let go into nowness. [*He strikes the cymbals again*]

[*Practice session ends*]

RINPOCHE: Among these three types of meditation I have taught here—stupidity training and shamatha with and without support—which is the easiest, the most simple?

STUDENT: The first.

STUDENT 2: The second.

STUDENT 3: The first two are easier.

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RINPOCHE: Very good. Well said; it is true. The first two are easier. Most people think the third is easier, because there is nothing to do, nothing to hold in mind, no object, but it is actually more difficult. Tomorrow and the day after, something even more difficult will be presented. When you hear it, at first it sounds extremely easy. But honestly, when you get down to it, it is much more difficult than the third type here. So here's a question: What is the difference between the first and the third?

STUDENT: The third feels like there's more of a focus on the present, like I can feel the nowness, while in the first I am almost asleep.

RINPOCHE: The third type, unsupported shamatha, requires some effort to keep our attention in the present. In the first type, stupidity training, you have no care about anything, no need for effort. You merely let yourself get swept away. If there is daydreaming, let there be daydreaming. If you're dull, just feel dull—there is no need to do anything about it. What you said is good; you understood. Most of you are quite clever—until now. How clever you will be as the days go by, we will just have to see. Until now it's been okay! Next, during the third type of meditation, which we just did, we're supposed to be aware of whatever is taking place—a dog barking or any other kind of occurrence. But were you aware of that? Did it happen?

STUDENT: Sometimes you get caught up in that awareness and you start attaching labels; then your mind starts running around.

RINPOCHE: I wanted to bring that up myself, but now you've said it. When something happens—either a thought just comes, or there is some sound or occurrence that triggers a thought—it's best if we don't get involved in following that thought in the second moment, the third moment, the fourth moment, and so forth. Immediately return to being present, unoccupied. However, if we do start to get caught up in what we are thinking of and form a second thought about it and then a third thought and a fourth and a fifth and a sixth and a seventh, then we are definitely already distracted. We've wandered off from unsupported shamatha. Are you clear about when you are distracted and when you are not? In this context of shamatha, just the hearing of the sound, the noticing of something, is not called distraction. In fact, from the Dzogchen point of view, shamatha itself is already a state of being distracted. Then there is not much to say, is there? It means the whole shamatha setup is deluded when seen from the Dzogchen perspective. But we will get to

that in the coming days. Right now, we are proceeding very nicely. We must know this difference very clearly, so that later when we progress we will know what is what. If we make the mistake from the beginning of accepting shamatha as the ultimate training, then after five or six years of having trained in a deluded state, we find there is no progress. Then what?

We'd just be fooling ourselves. "I came all the way up to Nagi Gompa—boy, was it cold, sleeping in a tiny tent. When the wind blew at night it felt like we were being blown down the hill, but still I stayed on." All that effort will be wasted if we are not really clear about the difference between the ultimately right and wrong meditation.

STUDENT: When training in shamatha without focus, without support, how do we maintain mindfulness?

RINPOCHE: During the third type of practice, are you aware of when you get distracted? Do you notice it?

STUDENT: Yes.

RINPOCHE: After you become distracted, or during it?

STUDENT: I find it very hard to pinpoint the starting point; I just know I am distracted now.

RINPOCHE: During the shamatha practice without support, is it that you're already aware of it just when you're about to be distracted, or is it that after five minutes of daydreaming, you look back and say "Oh, I was distracted." Which of the two is it?

STUDENT: Of those two, it's closer to the first one. I do not get to thought number twenty-two before I realize I am there. I think I realize it a little before that.

TRANSLATOR: So it does not take five minutes?

RINPOCHE: Maybe ten minutes? *[Laughter]* Actually, both of these things happen to you. You may not notice, but actually they both happen. There is an alternation. Sometimes one notices being distracted right away, and sometimes it takes a while before regaining one's senses and returning to the practice. Both can happen.

What exactly makes the third practice superior to the other two? It is two qualities: one is the sense of being settled, of remaining, and the other is the sense of being *aware* of being settled, of being undistracted. Both of these are necessary aspects of unsupported shamatha. When the

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settled steadiness weakens and is only aware, then it turns into thinking. At that point one has begun to think, and that is distraction. Similarly, when there is only steadiness and the awake quality of knowing gets lost, you are back in the absentmindedness of stupidity training. At this point you're either dull, daydreaming, or falling asleep. When the awareness itself is lost, then it is supported shamatha. Unsupported shamatha distinguishes itself by having the two qualities of steadiness and an awareness of being steady.

The moment you notice that you got distracted, you're supposed to return to the practice. In other words, return to acknowledging a state of just remaining. There is a certain strength in that; there is some sturdiness or steadiness in simply being that way. It is your acknowledging this steadiness that naturally cuts off or interrupts the distraction. The practice of unsupported shamatha definitely is dualistic mind. It is an artificial and not a natural way of being, a constant attempt to keep a particular state from slipping into old habit. This training maintains a sense of steadiness instead of distraction, and an aware presence rather than dullness. When everything gets a little too loose, when there is too much slipping away, we bring our attention back. We start to slide, and we bring ourselves back.

All of this is very contrived. Subject and object are being constantly maintained, so this practice is dualistic. In the next few days, we will be introduced to a way of practicing that is not based on dualistic mind at all. If at that time we sit and train in constantly trying to create an altered state of "settled presence," then it is totally artificial, and it's not the right way. You should be clear about this.

Right now, unsupported shamatha is dualistic, but among all kinds of dualistic states, it is one of the best. There is a certain relationship going on between unsupported shamatha, which is a dualistic state of mind, and the true vipashyana, which will be introduced later. You could say that if vipashyana has a friend in dualistic mind, then the state of unsupported shamatha is its best friend. Anger is not the friend of vipashyana; attachment is not the friend of vipashyana; but unsupported shamatha is a close friend, and from time to time the two do have a conversation. In the context of Dzogchen practice, however, you can sometimes say that even angry, attached, or dull states can be a friend of the Dzogchen training. We'll get to that point later.

I'd like to hear a question from someone who has not yet asked any questions. Those of you who are staying quietly not saying anything, here is your chance.

STUDENT: Could you please explain a bit more about shamatha without focus?

RINPOCHE: The terms that we use are "shamatha with support" and "shamatha without support." In both of these cases, there is a focus. To quickly review what I have said, mind is supposed to be itself, naturally abiding in itself without clinging to objects, totally open. This is how our mind is supposed to be. Unfortunately, mind has this nasty habit that goes way back of clinging to whatever comes along. Because of our previous investments in the concept bank, the interest keeps accumulating. Objects keep appearing. Due to this habit, the moment an object arrives there is immediately a thought. The thinking mind instantly connects with the object and holds on to it. The next moment, there is a thought about how that feels, and that gets added to the previous investment to receive further interest. This process goes on and on, endlessly. This is samsara.

Since it is unlikely that dualistic mind will spontaneously be able to let be and be free, at the beginning a substitute is used as a support. It is a weaning process, so to speak. That is why shamatha is first practiced with support—for instance, paying attention to the movement of the breath and remaining with that. This is the first of the three aspects: settling the attention so that it remains. The second is to keep mindful of the breathing. The third aspect is being alert to whatever else happens. Sometimes one may become distracted, but still, one is able to notice that. This alertness is more like an overall supervisory awareness. These three aspects of being settled, mindful, and alert are necessary at the beginning.

In shamatha without support, there is no specific object held in mind, neither the breath nor a visual image like a *tangka* or statue. However, something is still held in mind: there is still a focus on the present moment. Unsupported shamatha is to be in the nowness, to be continuously aware and mindful and remaining in that. While there is no concrete support, there is still a focus, and one settles in that.

You could say that practicing shamatha is like being a doorman. When you go into a five-star hotel, there's someone who opens the door

for you, says "mindful present doorman, simply mind. You should try not to follow the only says, "If you're neither paying anything. The moment, undisturbed something in the desire, no anger no compassion merely one object

In the case of opening the door and he misses something but sometimes such a beautiful very ugly, sometimes he runs to toilet. And so strong guy comes tattoos on his doorman does you go, I'll let you letting go emotions or he because you're losing it. Shan shyana—in the meditating on

Our mind arriving. You allowing anything shamatha. Just when too much support in order

for you, says "Welcome!" and lets you through. That is his job. The mindful presence during unsupported shamatha needs to be like this doorman, simply opening up and allowing everything to come into your mind. You should be aware of whatever happens inside your mind, but try not to follow it. The doorman does not hug people when they arrive; he only says, "Namaste!" Nor does he follow people in or out. Similarly you're neither particularly trying to keep something nor trying to reject anything. The main point is to be aware and to stay with the present moment, undistracted. Shamatha with support would be like placing something in the door to keep it closed. The door is shut, so there is no desire, no anger, no stupidity. Nobody can go in or out, but there is also no compassion, no sense of trust, no bodhichitta, nothing. There is merely one object alone, no other distraction.

In the case of shamatha without support, the doorman is busy opening the door and saying hello. He doesn't block the door, but sometimes he misses some people coming in or going out. He tries to be very alert, but sometimes he dozes off or becomes dull or gets carried away because such a beautiful object goes by that he wants to go after it. Sometimes very ugly, smelly people show up and he wants to close the door. Sometimes he runs after someone and ends up following him or her into the toilet. And sometimes very strange people arrive—let's say a huge, strong guy comes along, thick-necked, his head half-shaven, with dragon tattoos on his bulging, muscled arms. In this kind of situation, the doorman does not have the power to block him! He tries to say, "I'll let you go, I'll let you go." But the other guy does not let *him* go. Sometimes you letting go is not enough. You need vipashyana to let go of strong emotions or habits. The strong guy, the strong thought, can grab you because you're meditating. If you keep hold of something, you also risk losing it. Shamatha is an act of meditating, so it can be lost, while vipashyana—in the sense of Mahamudra or Dzogchen—is *not* an act of meditating on something, so there is no risk of it getting lost.

Our mind always has open doors, so sense impressions are constantly arriving. You can close the door with stupidity training and lock it, not allowing anything in. You could also block the door with supported shamatha. Just as in the example of controlling the door with a doorman when too many visitors come in, you next train in shamatha without support in order to be capable of remaining firm. The sights we see, the

sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and thoughts are now like the guests arriving at the hotel. There is a noticing that they are happening. This mindful presence, which is our mind knowing, can stay put, be mindful, and have the panoramic overview of alertness. A well-trained, skilled doorman has these three qualities: to be alert, mindful, and settled.

Practicing shamatha, first with and then without support, is like training a doorman to be excellent. Whoever comes and goes, he is on full alert. All the details are noticed, but he neither follows any particular guest nor closes the door on anyone. Deep relaxation could be like closing the door in that it can be very uptight, a training in dullness. Eyes are closed, everything is closed, mouth wide open—the face also looks unintelligent, if not downright stupid. If you have a Polaroid camera and manage to take pictures of yourself when meditating, afterward when you look at your photos you can see: "That's stupid meditation. That is shamatha with support. That is without support. Oh, this is loving-kindness, compassion, juicy meditation, moisturized, very open, all smiling, happy, no tension, relaxed but not drunk, nor sinking into the juice because alertness is there also, very alert." We should check the photo for all these qualities.

The doorman I just mentioned can be simple-minded during the practice of shamatha with support. It's fine to be a little stupid, because it's merely a matter of staying put with the object. You don't have to understand much, and you don't have to be distracted. You just keep in mind whatever you are supposed to keep in mind, keep your attention on it. However, in shamatha without support more presence is required because you need to notice when something is coming so that you can open the door while still staying put. The always-open door is not so good, as it's very noisy in Kathmandu. Nothing comes, door closed; something comes, not necessary to close. It is not good to always leave the door open and space out.

After shamatha comes the practice of vipashyana. This is where Mahamudra and Dzogchen come in: they belong under vipashyana. At this point, the doorman is no longer needed because the automatic laser sensor is there. It senses when someone is present and the doors open automatically. Likewise, when you go out, the door closes. It does not matter how many people are going in or out—the door automatically opens and closes. When someone has mastered the training of Maha-

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mudra and Dzogchen—like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Tulku Urgyen, Nyoshul Khen, or Chatral Rinpoche—there is no longer any busy meditator there, keeping hold of being present, mindful, and undistracted. Anything can take place: it does not matter how many guests come in or out. It is not at all overwhelming because there is no mediator to be overwhelmed.

The inexperienced doorman, meaning shamatha with support, sometimes gets into trouble. Let's say sixty Indian tourists come to the door. Indians can be very big, very tall. The doorman is Nepali and very short. Many things can happen in this situation. Maybe he is overwhelmed by all the Indian tourists, and he can no longer function as a doorman. It's like when we have rush-hour thoughts: so much is happening in our minds at the same time that our mindfulness and alertness is overwhelmed. When that happens, we need to upgrade the practice. Sometimes a thought comes onto the scene that's particularly big and tough, like a strong fighter. One big thought comes up to the doorman, with his muscles rippling and glistening. Half his hair is spiked up like a knife blade, and he's coming up to you at the door and trying to catch you. But you are alert: "Oh my, the distraction is back, I must meditate." You try to pray, you try to watch your breathing, you do shamatha, and you remember all those things, but you still cannot cope because the emotion is too assertive. Sometimes, due to the force of habit, we get so involved, so engrossed in a forceful thought that even if we try to just follow the breath or remember to try to be present and mindful and pray to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, no matter what we do it just doesn't help and we get carried away.

I feel that shamatha with and without support can probably solve 60 or 70 percent of our problems, but that means there is still 30 or 40 percent left. In order to address this, we must remove the doorman and still function as if he were there. This is the state of nonmeditation. But that is not the topic for right now. It belongs under the main course, and I will get to it later. †