Integrating Vipassana & Dzogchen

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 48:52

This evening I want to talk particularly about taking the practice home with us, and especially direct comments to Vipassana practitioners about integrating the two practices as you go home and continue with your meditation over many years.

It's interesting as people trickle in from the lobby for the talk this evening, noticing that the effect of ringing the bell did not have the same impact tonight as it did a couple of nights ago. This may bring home to us that the prospect of stabilizing in the view may be a little more formidable task than we had thought before we had a couple of hours of conversation. So welcome. This is a little taste of the world of reality that you'll be entering tomorrow and a little bit of the challenge that's involved in really integrating this practice into every moment of life.

I want to talk tonight about the way my own understanding has changed since I connected with these teachings about ten years ago. To put it in context for those of you who know the Vipassana scene, the dominant paradigm—really the only paradigm that I had to go on at that time—was the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition out of Burma, along with a little of my experience as a monk with the Thai forest tradition. But the dominant paradigm in this scene was out of Burma, this style of mental noting where one would apply a soft label to the predominant experience of every moment and connect with that object firmly with mindfulness. The path was seen as one of gradually weakening the forces of greed, aversion, and delusion through this applied mindfulness and reaching successive stages of the realization of the unconditioned. In that process, some of the elements of bondage would be permanently uprooted. That was the background I was coming from and that most of our scene was in ten years ago when we first encountered these teachings.

I realize that over that time, as my understanding has shifted, that's also been true for a lot of the other teachers in our scene, as well as the IMS community on the East Coast, our sister center. As that has happened, these teachings have been sifting down into the way we've been presenting Vipassana and Dharma practice in general. To some extent, I think we take for granted today some of the central concepts that have actually been infiltrating Vipassana from the Dzogchen view.

Just to mention one example: I was having a conversation with someone this afternoon who said one of the things they thought was pretty unusual was the instruction to turn the awareness back on itself. The comment was that they'd heard that from a Vipassana teacher about ten years ago. But my suspicion is that instruction came either from the Dzogchen teachings or from the Advaita teachings ten years ago, because it wasn't in such common parlance back then. But it is now. We often say things like that on

Vipassana retreats now—maybe not in the hall, but to individual yogis. So I think that the integration is starting to happen, and I think it has a long way to go. We will mature as a sangha and as teachers too, I hope.

One of the things that I've appreciated is that the exposure to these teachings has not weakened my faith in what we've been doing. And Rinpoche said something very similar this afternoon. He said, you don't have to change the practice that you've been doing, whether you're coming from Vipassana or Zen or any other Mahayana or aspect of Vajrayana practice—those practices are all still valid. I had some little concern that I would start to think that my practice was an inferior practice or that it wasn't quite up to par. Rather than that, it's actually strengthened my conviction that what we have been presenting through the Vipassana teachings over these years has been right on track. But what it has done is brought out some aspects that I've started to appreciate more than I had before.

Basically, I found that for myself, the two systems of the Vipassana practice and understanding and the Dzogchen practice and understanding are highly complementary. Each tends to fill in an area that the other doesn't. When we put them both together, we get a very beautiful and complete picture of a Dharma path. It's not the only Dharma path—obviously, Vajrayana has its own Dharma path that doesn't particularly rely on our style of Vipassana practice. So it's not necessary. But for me, the Dzogchen view and the Dzogchen practice completed an aspect of Vipassana that had been lacking from my understanding. I'm very, very grateful for that, and I intend to keep respecting it, honoring it, and practicing it for the rest of my life.

Very simply put, I appreciate Vipassana because it's very clear on how we get caught. It provides a really detailed view of the way that the mind can get trapped by clinging in all the different forms. And it gives us excellent tools for looking into those fixations closely enough that we really understand them. I think it's through looking closely to the body—the pain that develops in the body and the reactions of aversion that come out of that pain—that we learn how to release the quality of aversion to unpleasant experience. That's a huge step, a huge movement forward.

Most of the world, if experiencing pain, is stuck in the aversive reaction to it. Through exploring the body so thoroughly, we learn how to liberate that reaction of aversion to unpleasant bodily sensations. That's kind of Vipassana 101. Then moving more into the side of the mind, we become so familiar with all the different mind states that can come and obscure our innate clarity. We become really familiar with the movements of wanting, of grief and sadness, of fear, of self-judgment. All the different manifestations of the neurosis of our day come up and are seen so clearly. It's what we spend a lot of time talking about on Vipassana retreats.

I don't know if you remember that story of the Burmese hunter who was told that there was a rare bird that hung out in a part of the forest, and he was sent out to find the bird. Through looking for the bird, he explored the whole forest and got to know it in intimate detail.

He discovered that in the process of searching for that elusive bird, he had learned every tree, every stream, every path through the forest. Similarly, through our dedicated Vipassana practice, we really come to know the mind and its reactive possibilities so intimately that none of them can trick us anymore. We've seen all the different flowers that can bloom from the garden of craving, and we recognize each one through that careful, moment-to-moment attention to the mind.

To sustain this investigation, we need a foundation of stability. I deeply appreciate the shamatha base that most seasoned Vipassana practitioners develop, which becomes a tremendous asset when moving into Dzogchen practice. This understanding of the body, this familiarity with mental states, this knowing how not to get caught in any of them, along with the basic stability of attention—these are strengths our community has cultivated well.

What Dzogchen offers as a complement is a precise, elegant, and beautiful description of the intrinsic freedom that is right here, available in any moment. This was something that through the first twenty years of my Vipassana practice had not been clear to me. I still thought I had to keep observing objects, connecting with phenomena, slowly building mindfulness little by little. Someday, I imagined, I might have some kind of enlightenment experience and then I would know freedom.

These Dzogchen teachings opened the door to discovering where freedom actually lies—here and now. They showed me how to feel it, how to have it as part of my daily experience. This brought the goal of practice into the present moment, and my dharma practice took on a much greater flavor of contentment. I no longer felt I had to keep striving for something in the future; I could find fulfillment here and now. My practice began to embody the flavor of resting in a contented state.

I'm reminded of that poem by Sogyal Rinpoche where he says, "There's nothing else to search for. Rest in your natural place." This is a beautiful and liberating discovery along the path. When you find this, the path and the goal truly come together. You realize that resting in your natural place is also what furthers the unfolding. This is one of the dualities that resolves when you recognize this intrinsic freedom—when you rest in that freedom, it does the work of the path for you.

I find these two approaches very complementary and together quite complete and satisfying. I want to speak about integrating both the views and the practices. For me, integrating the practice came easily, but integrating the views has taken longer—about ten years.

The view in the Pali suttas is developmental. You start from delusion and defilement, work to build wholesome factors that counter unwholesome qualities of mind, and over time these wholesome factors grow strong enough that the mind gains momentum in a positive direction. All this positivity is viewed as the result of effort, beginning with mindfulness and leading to concentration and insight. The effort to move out of unwholesome states gains momentum and builds into the wholesome.

In this sutra understanding, we don't question concepts like effort, path, goal, progress over time, samsara

being different from nirvana, enlightened beings being different from ordinary people, wholesome and unwholesome states. In this way, you could say the Pali suttas present a rather dualistic view of spirituality.

The Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions present the view from the other shore—speaking mostly from the awakened state, describing how things look from having reached the far bank. There's much less emphasis on developmental aspects in their philosophy.

What I greatly appreciate in Dzogchen teachings and Tibetan Buddhism generally is how they honor both sides of these views. The developmental aspect of progress over time, the perseverance that Rinpoche spoke of, with the path as conventional truth—the evolution of spiritual practice through effort. And then the ultimate truth, which is here now, accessible to everyone in this very moment.

The image of the deity with both arms crossed, emphasizing the indivisibility of the developmental and ultimate models, represents for me the height of dharma understanding. What's beautiful is that neither view denies the other. The idea of progress over time doesn't negate the intrinsic freedom to be found here and now. And the intrinsic freedom available in this moment doesn't deny the value of stabilization and practice to realize that freedom fully in each moment.

I feel this unity of conventional and ultimate truths is the gold standard by which any spiritual system can be evaluated. The union of Vipassana and Dzogchen embodies this perfectly.

But it's also a valuable lens through which to examine other systems that claim to emerge from a non-dual perspective. When you encounter non-dual teachings outside the Dzogchen framework, observe carefully: do they genuinely embrace the conventional truth, or do you sense that these teachings use the ultimate view to dismiss, negate, belittle, or even humiliate the conventional perspective? Effort becomes part of this equation. When non-dual teachings diminish the conventional view or dismiss the reality of progress, I consider this an incomplete system—one that fails to honor the unity of conventional and ultimate truth. This integration serves as an excellent standard for evaluation.

I'd like to share more about what I personally discovered and gained from these teachings. While the unity of conventional and ultimate truth forms the heart of this understanding, I want to explore how this principle manifests in practice. Dzogchen illuminates certain crucial aspects of Vipassana understanding—not necessarily introducing entirely new concepts, but bringing forward elements that haven't been emphasized in the tradition from which most of us emerged. These teachings place these elements at the very center, revealing their importance for transforming how we perceive reality, ourselves, and our practice.

The first illumination, which several practitioners have mentioned in personal conversations, concerns the central question in Dharma practice, highlighted through Rigpa meditation: are you clinging or not clinging? This inquiry reveals itself repeatedly in Rigpa practice. When fixation—clinging or grasping—is

absent, we rest in the natural state of mind, in the nature of mind itself, in pure awareness. When fixation enters, we lose that natural ease. The entire path unfolds from moments of non-clinging, of non-grasping.

Sometimes my entire practice reduces to this single observation: Am I clinging or not? Is fixation occurring or not? This simplicity brings immediate benefit, because when grasping is present, suffering inevitably follows. This practice returns us continuously to the Four Noble Truths: Are you experiencing the second noble truth—suffering through craving—or resting in the third noble truth—freedom through letting go?

The second revelation concerned the innate quality of mindfulness. I had always understood mindfulness as the result of effort, something to be cultivated and sustained. But these teachings revealed mindfulness as an aspect of natural clarity—what Rinpoche called alertness. This knowing quality of our experience exists continuously when we simply allow it to be present. This understanding connects mindfulness to the unconditioned realm and provides profound reassurance and trust.

Another crucial insight involves how to practice when the mind becomes calm—a common dilemma for Vipassana practitioners. We encounter this situation frequently on retreat. A practitioner progresses through the usual fluctuations of practice, experiencing purification, moments of clarity, but generally finding practice quite unstable. This pattern often continues for the first several years of dedicated practice, through multiple retreats and ongoing daily practice—lots of ups and downs without much stability.

Then one day they arrive at the interview transformed: "I touched a level of peace I've never known before. The mind was simply empty, with very few thoughts arising. There was just tremendous spaciousness. I could rest there effortlessly, with objects naturally arising and passing away. What do I do now? Returning to the breath feels clunky. Continuing to note all the changing phenomena seems awkward when this vast peace fills me for the first time in my life."

We offer several instructions at this juncture: simply rest in the peace, focus on the stillness as an object of meditation, or open to sounds as a way of enhancing the spacious quality.

Continue meditating with the breath because it will deepen that sense of peace. But here we have an option that I feel really makes the most of the situation: take a look into the nature of mind and notice that its very essence is stillness or emptiness and its very nature is awareness, and rest there. This gives a very clear answer to that question.

Of all the techniques, I think that the Dzogchen view offers the best words for how to do this—how to do non-doing most skillfully. Because when you know how to do non-doing most skillfully, you can eliminate some of the unnecessary little doings, and it's easier to really stop doing. I found the instruction so precise, so helpful for really stopping the doing when the mind gets calm.

This non-doing is an important piece. I want to emphasize that Vipassana practice also leads to non-doing,

but I just don't feel that our vocabulary is as refined as the vocabulary in the Dzogchen tradition. It was never presented to me in as refined a way, I'll say that.

I'd like to read this from the Sutta Nipata, part of the Pali Suttas. This is from the Buddha, and it changes the emphasis from a lot of his other teachings: "One insight is that effort is the basis of all suffering. The other insight is that by the complete cooling and cessation of effort, no more suffering is produced. Every form of suffering grows out of effort. Eradicate effort and no more suffering is produced. When all effort has been abandoned, there is the freedom of the effortless." This is from the Sutta Nipata, stanzas 743 to 745.

So these effortless teachings are there, right at the base of our lineage, but they're not always articulated quite that clearly.

I have a friend who I mentioned at the beginning of the retreat who did basically two years of intensive practice nonstop in Burma, sleeping one hour a night. Other than that, he was sitting and walking all day except for meals and showers, in silence. Obviously his practice got very, very deep. At one point, his teacher, Sayadaw U Pandita, told him, "Okay, now what you need to do is stop doing this. Stop doing."

Up until then, the teacher had been stressing effort, effort, and more effort. He'd come in for an interview, report what was going on. Teacher would say, "That's okay, but try a little harder. Try harder." Come back the next time, report what was going on. "Okay, but try a little harder." And finally, he came in, reported, and the teacher said, "Stop doing. Stop making effort."

So it's there, but that message has been kind of hidden in our tradition.

Something else connected with this is the importance of relaxation, always stressed in the beginning of Dzogchen instructions: first relax, then open. I want to read this from a Christian contemplative perspective: "God is a pure no-thing, concealed in now and here. The less you reach for it, the more it will appear." It has that same quality of relaxation—the less you reach for the ultimate, the more it will appear. Why? Because you are the ultimate. The reaching is a movement away from that nature. So the relaxation is a key piece.

Once you realize that relaxation is moving toward the ultimate, then it also answers the question of where to look for nibbana. This is also not spelled out so clearly in the teachings, and we just hope that someday, like a rare bird in the forest, it's just going to come and land on us—that nirvana is just going to appear. But the Dzogchen teachings really point out: follow awareness to its source. That's where you're likely to find nirvana.

The point of view is that there's another alternative to going through all these different path moments, four different stages of path moments which can seem very remote. There's the possibility of stabilizing in this innate freedom—another alternative, being able to live from a place of real freedom when we can stabilize in the view.

The Importance of Devotion

In the Vajrayana tradition, the relationship to the guru and the practice of guru yoga is central to the unfolding of the heart qualities. We learn love, devotion, and surrender through that openness. In our tradition, this is brought out through the practice of loving-kindness, and particularly loving-kindness with benefactors.

If in your practice of loving-kindness, where you send loving thoughts to different individuals, you pick a benefactor who is very wise, very compassionate, very realized, something remarkable happens. As you hold that person in your heart for eighteen or twenty hours a day, which is what our practice is, you start to have a kind of mind meld with them. Their innate wisdom starts to pervade you, and you realize that this is your nature, too. So I discovered that we actually have a devotional avenue, which is the practice of loving-kindness. And this is coming more and more into our retreats.

There's also devotion to the Buddha himself, which you hear in the monastic traditions. There is a lot of devotional practice—the lighting of candles, the incense, the bowing, the chants, and as Jim said, a lot of emphasis on appreciating the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. We've stripped most of that out from the practice here at Spirit Rock, and the Mahasi tradition has also stripped that out. So the monastics have had it, and we have chosen not to import it in most of the retreats at Spirit Rock.

These are the highlights of the flavors within Vipassana that I have learned to view differently, to hold differently, to appreciate more through the influence of this practice.

Integrating the Two Practices

I'd like to also talk about how to integrate the two practices in formal practice. I really appreciate what Rinpoche said this afternoon, which is that when you go home, feel free to continue with your old practice and just add this practice to it. So you don't have to change anything that you've been doing before, whether you're coming from a Zen background, other Vajrayana practices, or Vipassana. You can add this in as another element.

He also said something interesting once. There are not very many Tibetan teachers who have a great deal of respect for the Theravada and Vipassana practices. I don't know if this is news to you all—I'm sorry if it is, but it happens to be true. And Rinpoche is one of the few who do have respect for what we do, which I think is why he spent a lot of time with us and why he comes here.

In an interview at Tara Mandala, he actually said that he thought Vipassana was the best preliminary practice for Dzogchen compared to ngöndro. He felt Vipassana was a better preliminary practice than the ngöndro. After I'd read that interview, I asked him why. And he said, "Because Vipassana practitioners know really well how to meditate, so it's really easy for them to learn how not to meditate." So again, he really does appreciate what we do.

The two practices are very complementary. I have been combining them over the last ten years and have found it very helpful. But I want to say something first about conversations I've had with people on this retreat about their Dzogchen practice.

Trust Your Experience

My main advice, coming from perhaps fifty percent of the conversations I've had, is this: trust your experience when you look. When you do the technique of looking to see mind essence, trust in what you get. Because so many conversations have been about, "I don't think anything's happening for me. I don't think this is really it. Nothing's happening when I look. I've been doing it for all these days, and I'm not getting it."

And every time I'd talk with the person, they actually were getting it. But they hadn't realized they were getting it. Because, I think, we're expecting something special—some special experience, some fireworks, maybe neon lights, or the Buddha dropping by to announce, "This is it."

And it isn't like that. It's not meant to be like that. It's not a necessary sign of it happening. Really, most of the time, it is quite ordinary. I mentioned that sometimes when people really start looking and getting it, big releases happen. That does happen for some people. I was giving a talk at IMS, our sister center...

And I just dropped in toward the end of the talk on mindfulness the words "rest in awareness." Did I tell this before? Okay, I just dropped in the words "rest in awareness" as an alternative. One of the meditators started to go into convulsions because she, for the first time, dropped her effort. And when she dropped her effort, her body relaxed so much that there was just a huge energy release, just from hearing the words "rest in awareness."

This didn't happen, fortunately, to the rest of the retreat, but it's an exceptional case. But things like that can happen, but that's like one-tenth of one percent of the time. 99.9% of the time when we look, the experience is very ordinary. The difference between it and regular experience or regular meditation is mostly one of perception. It's not that the content changes so much, but we see it differently. And there's just a subtle shift in perception.

So I think the most reliable guide is the one that Rinpoche mentioned. There's a greater sense of openness. There's just some little kind of opening up, or sometimes it could be of more space. Something else that happens, sometimes things just get a little more vivid. They light up a little more.

Someone mentioned that in looking there was a sense of stopping. And that's actually part of what's intended because the practice we've received is actually only half of the Dzogchen meditation practices. It's the beginning half called trekcho, which means cutting through. And there's another half called tögal that we're not going to learn about this retreat. I've never learned about it. Rinpoche does not teach us, so forget about it. Advanced practice.

So the style of Dzogchen that we're doing is only half of the Dzogchen practice called trekcho. Tögal is the Tibetan word for crossing over. We're doing a practice called trekcho, which means cutting through. And essentially what is being cut through is ego-clinging, conceptual thought, however you want to formulate it.

So this sense of stopping is a piece of it. And take a look and see if when you do the looking, there isn't an element of stopping of other fixations. That's part of the intention. But it may not be so dramatic. It may be subtle. You sort of realize, oh, actually in forming the intention to look, I had unhooked from the train of thought. So something had already stopped a little. But just see if there isn't some little bit of stopping connected with looking and seeing.

So that's the subtlest thing to come to, is this sense of openness that's the revealer of emptiness. It's subtle, but just if you can get that little sense, oh, things open up. I can see the space that everything's held in. That's the emptiness aspect. That's the harder of the two to connect with.

Then the other half of it is the knowing. The knowing just means appearances are still happening. This is not subtle. It just means, oh, I'm still seeing, I'm hearing, I'm feeling body sensations, thoughts are going through, I have some emotion. That's all the knowing means.

It's not looking for a state of awareness that's apart from phenomena. You're not trying to divorce yourself from your ordinary experience and find some more refined transcendent state. It's just meeting phenomena clearly, knowing them clearly. It's so ordinary that it's easy to overlook.

But anyway, if you just get that little sense of openness, and then you realize you're still experiencing phenomena, then the knowing is there. That's all. That's all. Whatever form and flavor that takes for you, who knows if this is definitely rigpa or not definitely rigpa or not. That's not actually the key at this point. The key at this point is just to trust and believe that what you've got is the closest you can get to the ground. And so that becomes your basis.

That becomes the basis for your practice. And then you just trust that if you keep doing that, more and more of the ground will be revealed. That's really the heart of it.

And it's so ordinary that we may tend to overlook it. But as you do it again and again, you start to pick out what I'd call the common denominator of the experience. You start to see that there's a flavor that comes in over and over. Regardless of what your phenomenal world experience is, regardless of what emotions are there, or what you're looking at, or what sounds are there, or whether you're moving fast or whether you're moving slow, there's this kind of common thread of openness and awareness that you just start to become more familiar with.

And then you start to gain more conviction—oh yeah, this is what they're talking about. And all you have to do then is rest in that as long as it stays.

It's a little bit like you're walking down the street and you smell a bakery. You're not at the bakery yet, but you've picked up the scent of it. So you just keep following the scent, and you know that if you just follow the scent, it leads you right to the bakery. And that's enough. So just keep following the scent, over and over and over.

The main obstacle that I've seen from the people I've talked to is doubt—just lack of certainty if this is it. And so the antidote is trust. Just trust that what you get when you look is your path. And follow it.

In integrating the two approaches, I'll talk about how I work in retreat and with my practice, how I work in daily life.

In retreat practice, I still spend the first period of time on a shamatha practice with support. What I'm doing these days is either loving-kindness practice, the practice of metta, or meditation on the breath—one or the other. I just finished a month-long retreat in April, a period of silent practice, and I actually spent the first two weeks doing shamatha with support. And then in the last two weeks, I opened up more to choiceless awareness and the Dzogchen practice.

One of the things that was very apparent when I put in that foundation of shamatha is that by the time I opened up to the Dzogchen, the mind was very stable and the response from looking was very strong. As the shamatha collects the mind energy, the response from looking and seeing becomes even more vivid, because the mind has become more powerful. But it's not necessary. Rinpoche said that a number of times—you don't have to have that base of shamatha. You can just start from looking and seeing. So this is not what everybody has to do. It's just what I like to do.

Another question that came up in talking with people was: what's the difference between shamatha without support and Rigpa? So I just wanted to touch on that briefly.

The key thing is that in shamatha without support, we're really focusing, connecting and sustaining with the objects that are arising. That's the point. We're really looking at the object part of the experience in each new moment. In the Rigpa practice, there's a knowing of appearances, but there's also an attention to the knowing, so that there's an understanding that the knowing is taking place and the knowing is empty. So we don't fasten on objects out of any intention—although we will connect, the attention will move to different objects. But what we're mainly tuning into is the emptiness aspect and the knowing aspect.

In daily life, then, you can follow some combination of these two in a similar way. I often follow a similar process. If I don't have a lot of mental stability, I'll do some focus practice first and then I'll open up to the Dzogchen practice. So I might do my breath for the first thirty minutes of a sitting and open up to Dzogchen practice for the last thirty. If I feel I have a bit of mental stability when I sit down, I might go straight away into the Dzogchen practice. And if I really have no mental stability at all, I might just stay with awareness of the breath for the whole time, or whatever shamatha practice you choose.

But again, if you particularly feel drawn to go straight to the Dzogchen practice, that's okay too, whether

you have mental stability or not. It's okay anytime. It will build its own stability of mind.

As you move into the more open kinds of attention, there's kind of a continuum—shamatha without support or what we'd call choiceless awareness. And I want to mention one other practice I've worked with that I like a lot. It is shamatha either with support or without support, but instead of focusing on the object, you focus on the consciousness of the object. So when we talked last night about the hearing of the sound, we mentioned that there are two aspects to it. There's the sound, which is physical. There's the consciousness of it, which is mental.

What if in your meditation practice you started to tune into the consciousness side of that unified experience? That becomes very interesting. There is knowing taking place. Can you intuit the knowing as you hear this sound? You know it's not happening to a corpse—you're knowing it. The sound is easy to pick up. Can you intuit the knowing that's going on?

A student shared that when she was eighteen, she was doing a lot of drawing. Instead of drawing objects, she started drawing the space around the objects. This reminded her of the instruction about not focusing on the object, but looking at what holds it, which is the knowing or the consciousness.

This approach is different from the Rigpa practice in that you're actually moving to and focusing on an aspect of your experience. You're making that the focus for the meditation, looking at the knowing in relation to one thing. You're definitely making the intention to connect and sustain with that one thing, but it moves in the direction of more open awareness.

You can do it with samatha with support—focusing on the breath for a whole hour. You can do it samatha without support. The emptiness doesn't come in right away, but the more you practice this way, the more you see that everything's an appearance in consciousness. The emptiness of phenomena really starts to show through, and it becomes a very light practice.

You can do it all day, in walking, in sitting, in work meditation, in eating. Whatever you're experiencing, you look at the knowing side in relation to that particular phenomenon. There's a samatha with support quality there—you're focusing. But you're looking from the knowing side. The emptiness starts to pervade more and more, and it brings about a lot of lightness in the practice.

Finally, there's the last step: having the attention be on the empty nature of mind, the empty knowing. If focusing on the consciousness of objects is a lightness, this is kind of a champagne practice. It's light and bubbly. It's delightful.

The last thing I wanted to say is that, as Rinpoche did, I encourage everyone to give plenty of opportunity for the formal practice to work its magic. This means putting ourselves in the situation—whether it's an hour a day or one retreat a year or a number of retreats a year—to really allow the path the time to do its work of transformation.

I think we're well set up in the Vipassana community for those kinds of retreats. We have a two-month retreat here every February that had over eighty people, either for one month or two months. This year, there's the three-month course at IMS in the fall. We have many opportunities for long practice.

One of the structural problems perhaps with Vajrayana practice right now is that there aren't so many opportunities for those intermediate-length retreats. Many seven-day retreats go on in the Tibetan community, and then there are people who go and do three-year retreats. In between those lengths, the options are more limited, though places like Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center do offer extended retreats.

But if those opportunities start to fill in within the Tibetan community, that would be very beneficial. I believe there are some emerging possibilities, and hopefully there will be more and more as time goes by.

I'd like to close with a quotation from Patrul Rinpoche that beautifully encapsulates this intersection point I believe is valuable for both Vipassana and Dzogchen practitioners. These are the pith instructions from Patrul Rinpoche:

Don't dwell on the past.
Don't invite the future.
Don't alter the innate wakefulness.
Don't fear phenomena.
Apart from that, there's not a damn thing.

Let me repeat these essential teachings:

Don't dwell on the past.
Don't invite the future.
Don't alter the innate wakefulness.
Don't fear phenomena.
Apart from that, there's not a damn thing.

These simple yet profound instructions point directly to the heart of practice, whether we approach it through the methodical awareness of Vipassana or the immediate recognition of Dzogchen. They remind us that our essential nature is already present, already awake, requiring neither addition nor subtraction—only the courage to rest in what is naturally here.

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