Practicing Rigpa - Part 1

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 54:26

This evening I'd like to talk about specifics of the practice that we were introduced to today. Today was quite a special day in the retreat and perhaps in the history of some of your relationship to the Dzogchen lineage because today Rinpoche gave what are called the pointing out instructions.

I'm just curious, for how many people here was this the first time that you've received the pointing out instructions in Dzogchen? Quite a number. This marks a real turning point in your relationship to the practice and the tradition because it is your formal introduction to the view. And until there's a formal introduction to the view, there's not necessarily a clear understanding of the path, because the path and the view are closely related. I'll come back to that a little later. But this really gives you the experiential basis for all your future practice in this technique, in this part of the Dzogchen instructions.

Just one thing to clarify here. Some people who don't know the Dzogchen practice well might assume that the practice we learned today of rigpa is synonymous with Dzogchen practice. But actually it's just half of Dzogchen practice. What we learned today is a technique called trekchö, which literally means cutting through. The idea is that by recognizing the nature of mind one cuts through conceptual proliferation or grasping.

But there's another whole half to Dzogchen practice overall called tögal, which Rinpoche is not going to teach on this retreat, which is very esoteric, and he won't even answer questions about. So just be aware that the practice that we're doing here is the half of Dzogchen practice called trekchö.

It's actually not easy to get these instructions. Rinpoche will not give them except in a week-long retreat. Many other Dzogchen masters will not give them except in a retreat setting and to practitioners who have completed some degree of preliminary practice, perhaps the ngöndro, perhaps other practices. In Tibet, it used to take years of preliminary practice before a teacher would offer the instructions that Rinpoche gave us today. So we're really fortunate to be able to receive them without such a high prerequisite requirement.

Rinpoche's father, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, was kind of a pioneer in this style. When one would meet with Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, he would basically ask, are you Buddhist and are you committed? And if you met those two requirements, then he would offer you the pointing out. It was considered very generous. But it helped a lot of people. So I think that through the family lineage, Tsoknyi Rinpoche is also inspired to offer them in that way. We're very fortunate to be able to receive them now.

In a way, there's an initiation aspect to what happened for you today. It allows you access to information,

teachings, and texts that you might not have had before. This is one text that a number of you are very familiar with, called The Flight of the Garuda. It's from a Dzogchen master from the 1800s named Lama Shabkar. This is from the very first page of the book, from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: "It is the opinion of myself and Dudjom Rinpoche that texts such as these should only be shared with people who have received the pointing out transmission from a qualified master."

You have now received the pointing out instruction from a qualified master in the Nyingma lineage. So this opens the possibility for you to receive teachings and read texts that weren't previously available to you. It's a good day.

I want to talk about some of the specifics of doing this practice, but before I do, I just want to say, in my opinion, it is a hard practice because it's such a subtle practice. The more subtle the objects get in meditation, the more difficult it is to know if we're doing it properly or not.

I have a good friend who's also a vipassana teacher named Steve Armstrong. In the 1980s, he spent five years in Burma as a monk and practiced very diligently. I actually don't know of any practitioners in our tradition—Westerners who practiced more diligently than Steve did. At one point, I think he did almost two straight years of intensive practice, quite rigorous intensive practice. So at the peak of his effort, he was sleeping just one hour a night. The rest of the day was sitting and walking, sitting and walking. He said of this time in his practice that he would fall asleep at night, or probably early in the morning, truth to tell, with a thought in his mind. And when he woke up in the morning, the thought would complete itself. That's how little his mind had wandered away during the hour of sleep that he got.

Well, when he was in this cycle of deep practice, he went through a series of concentration shamatha practices that led to the absorptions. And after his teacher had trained him in that through a preliminary means, his teacher recommended that he learn that access through what are called the kasinas.

Kasinas are traditional meditation objects found in the Pali suttas and the Visuddhimagga—essentially representations of elements or colored discs. One might meditate on white kasina or red kasina, yellow kasina, earth kasina. Steve was instructed to meditate on blue kasina, but he didn't have a physical disc to generate the image. His instruction was simply: meditate on blue. That was it. Twenty hours a day, meditate on blue.

This is a subtle object, because you don't necessarily have anything in your field of experience to call up that image. When you close your eyes, you're supposed to see blue, fix it in your mind, and develop one-pointed concentration on that color. That's a hard practice. But in my opinion, the nature of mind is more subtle than the color blue. I say this not to discourage you—I don't want to discourage you—but to give you an appreciation for the challenge that this kind of practice represents. It's not an easy thing to get one's arms around in the beginning. But as Rinpoche says, as we continue to connect again and again, it becomes very, very easy and simple. It's something that really grows over time. It's also, as Rinpoche mentioned, very, very natural.

This is a quote from Suzuki Roshi, who was a great master in the lineage of Soto Zen. Soto Zen is a different practice than Dzogchen, but I think the understanding is somewhat similar. Suzuki Roshi said: "Strictly speaking, for a human being, there is no other practice than this. There is really no other practice than this." This can apply to a range of practices, but I feel that our Dzogchen practice, as we're learning it here, has that quality too.

Remember that Rinpoche mentioned a day or two ago that Dzogchen doesn't just mean a meditation technique. Fundamentally, it is more than that. The term Dzogchenpo means the great completion, or it's sometimes translated as the great perfection. This is a statement about the nature of things—a pointing to the perfect way that things already are. Every spiritual tradition has this pointing to the perfection in the order of everything, but I feel that the Dzogchenpa way of explaining it is a particularly elegant way to describe it.

So why is this important? It means that all we need to do in meditation is rest in the way things are, because the way things are is fundamentally complete, perfect, and all right already. It's not about changing anything about the way things are. It's recognizing that intrinsic perfection, connecting, and then resting there.

This is the deepest part of each of our minds. It is not missing from the mind of any human being, or in fact, any sentient being. There was a great quote from Huang Po, a Zen master from long ago, who said that even frogs and all wriggling things are possessed of this Buddha nature. Naturally, each one of us is possessed of this nature of perfection.

The meditation practice is just an encouragement to drop any other activity and rest in that dimension—that dimension which is really the foundation of everything. This is a quote from a Tibetan teacher named Dudjom Lingpa, in a book whose title I appreciate as much as anything about it: Buddhahood Without Meditation. Isn't that appealing? Wouldn't you love to reach Buddhahood without meditation?

This is just a portion of the quote. He said that this practice "takes the fundamental nature of reality as the unsurpassable ultimate refuge." Let me read that again: Our practice takes the fundamental nature of reality as the unsurpassable ultimate refuge. What could be safer? What could be more reliable? What could we better put our trust in? Or our faith?

This word faith in Pali is saddha. In Sanskrit, it's shraddha.

So in Pali, it's saddha, and in Sanskrit, it's shraddha. The etymological origin of that word is "to place one's heart upon." The source of our faith is what we can really place our heart upon. So this practice is a direct pointing to that which we can really place our heart upon, really rest in—something that will always hold us and always be there for us.

Of course, it's important to understand the meaning of the word "reality" in a Buddhist context, because

it's different than the Western scientific context. If you ask somebody on the street, "What is reality?" they'll point to physical reality—the earth, the trees, the sky. That's physical reality, and in the Western view, that's the ultimate reality.

If you think about it, this is true. This is what Westerners assume is the ultimate truth of things: that matter came first in the universe out of the Big Bang, and then matter did different things, and eventually some of it collected, and then some water formed, and then chemicals got struck by lightning, and then there was conscious life. That's the Western view. And the Western view is that we take birth in this physical world and only then do we exist. So it's here and enduring. We come into it and we're part of the reality for a while, but when we die, we're out of it. And really, we don't necessarily continue. That's kind of the Western scientific worldview. So it takes the physical world as reality and ultimate reality.

But what's missing, of course, is the element of consciousness. The physical world is only an appearance in our consciousness. So in Buddhism, reality means our human experience. That's what we're looking at. That's the field we're looking at—our human experience.

So I think that this is largely a practice of faith and trust. Ajahn Sumedho is a great teacher in the Theravadan tradition. He's an American monk who lives in England. He was teaching here a few years ago, and he said, "I think the main problem with Western meditators is not that they don't try hard enough. They try plenty hard. The problem is they don't trust enough." He said, "We don't trust ourselves enough. We don't trust our experience in meditation and in life." The sense of self-doubt or self-judgment is so strong that we don't validate our experience. We criticize it too easily. And then in that way, we kind of pull the rug out from under our own faith and trust.

So this path that was unfolded today is a profound path. Of it, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche said, "The way to be enlightened is to train in recognizing mind essence and stabilize in the recognition. This is the very way to be enlightened—to train in recognizing mind essence and stabilize in the recognition."

This is very different from the Theravadan model that underlies Vipassana, where you're supposed to have four different moments of enlightenment, where the mind comes into nibbana at different depths, and each time different fetters are uprooted. And when all the fetters are uprooted, then the mind has become purified. So there are clearly different experiences along the way.

But Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche is saying that we can become enlightened through recognizing mind essence and learning to stabilize in it. Now think about that. That's a very appealing prospect. It means that the way is pretty clear for us. It means that there don't necessarily have to be these very unusual kinds of altered experiences, although some of them undoubtedly would come. But it's another model of a way to be free.

And in this model, the freedom comes at the start of the journey. When we connect with mind essence, nature of mind, rigpa, we're connecting with something in us that's already free. And then we're learning

to be there more and more of the time.

In fact, this is a quote from Reginald Ray, who's a Western teacher of Tibetan Buddhism. He said, "The tantras in general, the Vajrayana path, takes awakened mind as the vehicle for the path." That's a beautiful concept.

As I mentioned the other day, in the Theravadan we start off looking at the defilements and mustering as many wholesome forces as we can to transform them. But in the tantras of the Vajrayana, the very basis for the path is the awakened mind. Now, what do you do when you're not awakened yet? You imitate it as best you can.

In my opinion, that's essentially what our practice of Rigpa is—our attempt to discover the awakened mind right now and then rest in it.

I want to share some of my own experiences and perceptions in the development of this practice. But before I do, I must offer a significant disclaimer. I'm not a Dzogchen teacher. I'm a Vipassana teacher. I'm not qualified to be a Dzogchen teacher, nor am I authorized to be one. I don't ever plan to become a Dzogchen teacher. However, from early on, when I would sit these retreats with Rinpoche, he encouraged me to share from my experience during the evening sessions when I was a yogi.

So please take this not as any authoritative pronouncement, but simply as sharing from a fellow practitioner. If you find it helpful, wonderful. If you don't find it helpful, you're welcome to discard it. If I say something incorrect, I hope you'll forgive me, because this is not my area of authority or expertise. I'm simply trying to clarify some of the things I've learned along the way.

What I heard Rinpoche say today is that he was introducing to us a new technique for practice that goes beyond shamatha, beyond shamatha without support, and beyond vipassana—the practice of look, see, rest, and liberate. Of these four, the practice of "look," he explained, is clearly a technique. It's clearly fabricated. It involves effort, will, and concept—all those elements that Rigpa ultimately transcends are present in this first step of looking.

What's particularly interesting—and I think he mentioned this as well—is that "look, see, rest, liberate" is about as far as technique goes in this practice. Vipassana yogis, how many breath practices have you received over the years? Twelve? Twenty? Two dozen? That's not even including practices with the body, sounds, and so many other techniques within vipassana. Within this approach, there's essentially one. So you'll be hearing a great deal about it.

Some friends and I went to see Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche in Kathmandu a little over ten years ago, toward the end of his life. I'm very glad we made that journey because he was such a special teacher. We met him at his monastery at that time, Nagi Gompa, outside of Kathmandu. He gave us the Dzogchen teachings and pointing-out instructions over several days of visits—meeting with him for a few hours at a time.

At some point during our time together, he said, "When you come to me for teachings, I'm going to be like a field mouse. You know, when a field mouse runs across the field and makes a sound, it only knows one sound to make, and that is 'squeak.' Every time you see the field mouse, it's always 'squeak, squeak.' So when you come to me, I'm only going to be making one sound." His "squeak" was: recognize mind essence. That was the sole instruction, given over and over again.

You encounter long Dzogchen texts, and they're a bit like the Prajnaparamita Sutras—they find many, many creative ways to say the same thing and point you back to the same direction. But it's this central direction, again and again.

So the "look" is fabricated. Rinpoche offered three ways today to practice the look, and as I remind you of what those were, I'm going to turn off the microphone because this should not be recorded. I'll simply project my voice a bit more. If anyone is listening to the recording, know that there will be some moments of silence.

[Brief pause for unrecorded instruction]

The first pointing-out instruction involved recognition of what's gone. Another was the sense of dropping, letting go and dropping while exhaling. And the third was the hand disappearing up the sleeve. These are all somewhat evocative approaches.

Tomorrow evening I'm going to offer many more different ways to practice "look." You can be creative in how you approach the looking. I'll go through that comprehensive list tomorrow night rather than getting into it now, as it's quite extensive.

But I feel that the more different ways you have to look, the greater potential you'll have to find one that suits you. I find that I'll use one technique for a while and it'll be very evocative, very juicy. I'll apply it and the seeing will be strong - the result of the looking will be strong. But as I keep using it over and over, I use up its magic power a little bit. Then I look again and nothing happens, and I think, "Oh, I'll try another one."

So I'll try another technique and use that for a while, and then it gets juicy again. I'll use that, but then I'll use it up. Then I'll probably go back to the first one, or if I want, I'll go to another one. I usually have about three different ways to do the looking, and I'll just vary them depending on which one is most effective.

One of the things I heard in the group interview today, and I think in here also, is that different individuals found different techniques useful for themselves. For some people, the dropping was useful. For other people, Tsoknyi Rinpoche's method was useful. For others, the third approach was useful. So it's good to have a range so that you can try different things and see what's working for you.

We do this bit of looking in whatever technique we want to use, and the next step is to see. Somewhere in between the look and the see, something has to happen - the effort has to fall away. This doesn't always

happen so naturally. As Rinpoche mentioned, if there's hope and fear around it, that'll constitute a form of effort that will block the clear seeing. He used that analogy of trying to create some space by putting something in between the fingers, but then you have to get rid of the something that was in between. That's the effort or the fabrication.

In other retreats, what he said is that between look and see, we need to have a little miracle - the dropping of effort. There's no way to make that happen. But what really helps that little miracle to happen is relaxation and trust. So every time you approach the looking, check that there's that sense of relaxation, and look and see if you're willing to trust. Trust in this case basically means once you look, take what you get. Take what you get as being what you see.

It's very easy in the early stages of doing this practice to get really worried: "Did I get it? Didn't I get it? Did I get the real thing? Did I get the fake thing? Is this an ordinary experience or is this something really extraordinary that I'm looking for? I just don't know what this rigpa stuff is all about." These questions are natural when we start a new meditation practice. I found them when I started vipassana. I found them when I started metta practice. I found them when I started this practice.

But there's a word in our tradition for these kinds of questions when they really bind us up - doubt. It's one of the five hindrances that the Buddha pointed to. The antidote to doubt is faith. When doubt is uppermost in your mind, dominating your mind, it blocks you from actually putting your full conviction into your effort, because you don't know that it will lead anywhere. But you need to proceed as though you are sure it's going to lead somewhere.

Sharon Salzberg went to practice loving-kindness meditation intensively for the first time with Sayadaw U Pandita, a Burmese master in Rangoon. At the start of her session, in one of the early interviews, he asked her, "Are you confident you can do this practice?" What do you say to your teacher at that point? If you say yes, you risk looking a little arrogant, don't you? But if you say no, that indicates some vacillation. I think Sharon said something like, "I think so." And U Pandita said, "You should always be really confident. When you start a new practice, you should always be extremely confident."

That gives you the best chance of success with the practice.

Please recognize that when these kinds of questions arise, if they undermine your confidence, this is the hindrance of doubt. Try to recognize it as doubt. Try to let it go. Try to reestablish your trust and reapply the technique.

Sometimes doubt comes from really good questions. Someone mentioned today in a group interview: "This cognizant quality that is being talked about as the ground—ongoing and unborn and unceasing—I was taught that consciousness is impermanent. It's one of the five aggregates, and all the aggregates are impermanent. So how can this knowing be a lasting quality?"

This is a really good question. This is the question that drove me crazy for a few years until I resolved it to

my satisfaction. I'm going to explain that in a few more nights, but I don't want to do it tonight. It's good to let this question challenge you for a while, because it's when we investigate these questions that really mean something to us that we gain our own conviction in our practice. You arrive at your own truth to answer and resolve these kinds of questions. So this is a very good question, and it's an important one to contemplate.

But I want to give a temporary answer to this. Ajahn Sumedho was teaching here a few years ago, and he teaches a Theravadan practice which puts the emphasis on this same quality of awareness as the undying—the empty awareness as the undying. So I raised the same question to Ajahn Sumedho. I said, "You're talking about awareness as the undying, but in the texts, it always talks about consciousness as impermanent. How do you reconcile those two?"

He said, "I don't know." He said, "What I know is that this really worked for me." And that's what I would encourage you to try—this concept that you can always tune into the quality of awareness, that the quality of awareness is ever-present.

That feels true, doesn't it? Because it takes a very subtle awareness in order to see the appearing and disappearing of consciousness. It takes a lot of concentration and a lot of mindfulness to be able to see that. So our ordinary experience is, yes, it really feels like awareness is ongoing. So let yourself connect with that feeling.

We're not saying it's the ultimate truth right now. We'll clarify that maybe in a few days. But we're saying there's a real benefit to trusting in this feeling. Because if nothing else, it gives us a refuge from all the flux of impermanence that's going on around us. Phenomena are coming and going. Thoughts are coming and going. Emotions are coming and going. Grasping is coming and going. Here's something that's not touched by that. Awareness is always present. So at least use that as a temporary refuge while we clarify the philosophy in a few more days and see if it's not helpful as a skillful means.

When you look, the next step is to see, and then it's important to trust what comes when you see. This is a very important point. Rinpoche was demonstrating this today with the palm pilot and the napkin. You won't find these in the ancient texts, but it's a great analogy. So I want to review again these two aspects because he covered it a couple of days ago.

The palm pilot represents the ground. Recall that the ground has three components which are inseparable: the essence, which is empty; the nature, which is cognizance; and the capacity, which is said to be unconfined.

Now this third one he hasn't talked about much. There's more description of all these in *Carefree Dignity*, which is a transcript of talks from a retreat several years earlier. In those retreats, because the sangha was newer, Rinpoche was giving more detailed descriptions of these basic components of the teachings. So this is a wonderful reference book to have. It has a lot of the material that he will cover in this retreat,

explained in a little bit more detail.

If you read about capacity in *Carefree Dignity*, it basically explains it as the mind's ability to flower with beautiful qualities. Sometimes it's talked about as the mind's ability to be ceaselessly responsive. It's sometimes described as unceasing compassionate activity. This means that when we are

resting in the union of essence and nature, which is emptiness and cognizance, that frees the heart in such a way that compassion or wisdom or loving kindness or patience, any of the beautiful qualities can easily flower.

So the capacity when we know the nature and the essence combined is unlimited, this capacity of the mind. That's the way it's described in Carefree Dignity. The capacity is something that is a little more subtle, I think, to intuit. So what I'm going to suggest is that as you play around with the aspects of ground, you look particularly for the first two. Look particularly and make sure you understand clearly the essence, which is empty, and the nature, which is cognizance. Once you have a really good intuitive sense of these two, I think the capacity will be more obvious.

When I first started looking in this way, I would look, and then I was supposed to see, let's just take it as a simple form, emptiness and awareness conjoined, inseparable, indivisible. I hadn't really done the reflection on emptiness that Rinpoche has talked about as being the Vipassana piece of their training. So I got to this quality of emptiness and I was kind of lost. What am I supposed to see when I see emptiness? I didn't get it. Awareness I could get, right? I'm not a bump on a log. Things are happening. I'm not asleep. Right, I got the awareness part. But I didn't get the emptiness for a while.

So I had to do lots of reflection. When I would turn and see, I had to examine, what does emptiness mean? Now as soon as you start examining and reflecting, you're not in rigpa. So I had to give it up at times while I clarified these questions. And you may need to also. If you look and you're not sure what emptiness means in your experience, even though then it's not doing rigpa, I encourage you to investigate until you find out. Maybe it means we do a little vipassana practice on the way to doing true rigpa practice. But until each of us has a real clear sense of what emptiness is and what cognizance is, in a very familiar way, we won't really recognize mind essence.

We need to get to the stage where we've touched these things with our understanding, our intellectual understanding, enough times that when it's there in our experience, we recognize it like an old friend. When you're getting to know somebody for the first time, say somebody's name is Linda. And the first time you meet, you're introduced, this is Linda. And the next time you see Linda, that name may not pop immediately to mind. And you don't know her very well. So you have to remind yourself, oh, that's Linda. I met her a week ago. She works at such and such a place. And the third time you meet her, maybe her name pops to mind immediately, but you don't quite remember all the personality. And then little by little, after seeing Linda a lot of times, when she walks into view, your heart kind of comes out with a recognition and you don't have to say anything. You don't have to say her name or where you met her or

all the things you've done together or any of that. It's just you know her.

This is the kind of familiarity we need to get with the union of emptiness and cognizance. We need to touch it enough times and know it intellectually so that soon when we start touching it, we don't have to think at all. We just recognize, oh, that's it. Then the concepts can really go out of C. C doesn't then have to be conceptual.

So, what does emptiness mean in our experience? I would suggest three avenues of investigation if you find you need to investigate to find out what this means for you. One is the analogy that's often used in Dzogchen practice, which is that analogy of awareness or cognizance or the nature of mind as being like vast space. So in that analogy, you get the sense that the vastness of space includes everything. It includes the sun and the moon and the stars and the planet Earth and people and frogs and raindrops. That's all within the vastness of space. Yet it doesn't make space any smaller. It doesn't take away from the nature of space that it has those contents.

So in the same way, our awareness contains all those things. Just as space is empty, and that's the only way it could contain all those things, our awareness is similarly empty. Or it couldn't contain all the arisings of the phenomenal world. So there's a sense that within our awareness, nothing is stuck. Nothing is kind of there from the beginning that never goes out. No thing, no solid thing is there from the beginning. This analogy with space is a good way to get a sense of emptiness.

Now, within that emptiness, there are two other avenues to explore. As I mentioned, I think, in the talk, maybe it was the Mahayana talk,

The understanding of emptiness needs to include two essential aspects. The first is the emptiness of self—what we call anatta in the Theravada teachings or anatman in Sanskrit. This is the absence of any enduring center within this stream of mental and physical phenomena. The second aspect is the emptiness of objects, which points to the insubstantial nature of the phenomenal world. Even though things appear solid, like this wood, they're not truly solid in the way we imagine.

If you haven't explored the emptiness of objects extensively, let me suggest that sounds and body sensations are usually the easiest gateways to first glimpse this emptiness, due to their obviously transitory nature. You can directly perceive that the body is merely a flux of vibrations, and sounds pass through awareness very quickly. The most challenging sense doors through which to recognize emptiness are sight and touch.

Just to offer one small pointer about sight: recall that your visual experience of this room occurs because light particles—photons—strike the retina at the back of your eye. This triggers nerve impulses through the optic nerve that travel to the brain and stimulate certain regions there. That brain activity generates the visual image we perceive before us. We're not actually seeing the wall or the thangka directly. We're seeing a representation our brain has created from the light reflected off those objects. Who knows what's

really there? I don't.

This entire world that we inhabit, move through, and feel so familiar with—to which we've assigned countless names—is merely a generation of our nervous system, our sense doors, and our human consciousness. And yet we take it as solid and real. That's the fundamental illusion.

You can explore the sense of touch in a similar way. This table is not truly solid. It is only the experience—the touch sensation of hardness. That's all it is. But even this touch sensation of hardness comes and goes.

You need to become familiar with these pathways to emptiness through all three aspects: recognizing that the nature of mind is like an empty sky, understanding that there is no abiding self within the mind-body process, and seeing that all phenomenal appearances are insubstantial.

Once you've explored these dimensions, what you want to recognize is that awareness and this emptiness are not two separate things. This is one unity. Rinpoche used to ask in his retreats, "What do we mean by mind?" And he would answer, "Mind is that which knows." He meant knowing first at the bare level of sense data. Knowing becomes more sophisticated, but at its foundation it's simply the capacity to register light, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

This mind—this knowing capacity—is what is like empty space, like an empty sky. But unlike space, it possesses this quality of cognizance. Space doesn't have this quality. The space right here is not connected to a nervous system and brain that generate sense impressions. This mind somehow is.

So it's crucial to see that this is one thing. Mind is one thing—or we could say the nature of mind is one thing—but it's not an ordinary kind of thing. It's not the sort of thing that can be grasped or located anywhere in space, because it creates space and time. It's the very context within which space and time arise.

It cannot be grasped in the way ordinary objects are grasped, but what Rinpoche has been pointing to is that it can know itself. Because of its cognizant nature, it is self-knowing. It knows itself as cognizance and emptiness. These are the two aspects we want to recognize clearly.

But remain aware that it's just one thing, not two separate things. It's like this bowl—is it round or is it gold? The answer is yes. It's one thing with two aspects that can be distinguished.

The nature of mind is like that. It's just one thing. There aren't two minds running around, one of which is empty and the other of which is knowing. There's only one mind, and it has these two aspects. That's what we need to become familiar with.

Remember that really it has three aspects. If we say two, that's just shorthand as we're learning. Really, it has three, but in the near term, just focus on the first two. This is the ground—the union of empty essence, natural clarity, and compassionate capacity.

When we drop effort and look toward the nature of mind, toward awareness itself, what comes back, if we're clear, is the view. There's the conceptual view and the non-conceptual view. The conceptual view is the understanding that the nature of mind is these three aspects. The non-conceptual view is your direct experience of this unity. When you look and see that nature, that's the view.

Now, we're not fully enlightened, so we don't see the whole ground. This is the napkin covering the palm pilot. We all have napkins over our palm pilots right now. So even when we try hard to look, we don't see the whole ground. We just see that first edge of it. That edge of the ground is our own experience of the view. That's as much of the view as we get today when we do the looking as best we can. Given our background, our temperament, our paramis, our unfolding up to this point, we get this little bit of the ground. That is the view for us. And that's okay. Just trust in that.

Whatever experience you had when you were told to look, when Rinpoche guided you in the looking, go with that. Trust in that. Put your chips on that. Because that's what's going to take you further into the ground.

The beautiful thing about the practice is that the view develops over time. It's not that the view you reach today is the view that will be with you forever. More and more of the ground gets exposed as the obscurations thin. So the view is an evolving element in practice. Even though non-conceptually it's these three things, the degree to which we actually see it and feel it and know it opens up over the course of our practice.

So don't worry if it seems weak today or if you're not quite sure you see all three aspects or you're not even sure if that's it. Take what you get. Trust in that and it will evolve. It will evolve. This meditation works just like gravity works. When the apple is ripe, it falls from the tree. That's a natural law. As you turn to the ground, whatever bit of it you can see, it purifies the obscurations. And that means the view opens up more and more as you practice.

The last thing I want to say, really practical tip, is about eyes open versus eyes closed. This is a good time for all practitioners, especially Vipassana practitioners, to start working more with opening the eyes. I know this is risky business. Because when we open our eyes as Vipassana practitioners, we risk losing our inner peace. But really, we don't want inner peace to be tied to closed eyes, do we? Because when we go back into the world, we want to be able to have inner peace with eyes open. So this is a good laboratory for exploring inner peace with eyes open.

In doing the Rigpa practice, Rinpoche recommended today to do it with eyes open. What happened for me when I started opening my eyes in doing this practice was I got a big jolt of energy. With my eyes closed, I was much calmer. I felt so good. Then I'd open my eyes and my body would tense up and I'd feel like I was overwhelmed by too much energy.

Rinpoche is not dogmatic on this point. If you feel that you need to calm down a little bit, that the energy is

too much, it's okay to close your eyes for a while. It's okay to go back to shamatha with support, shamatha without support, breath meditation, choiceless attention, connect with objects again.

That's perfectly fine. When you feel a little more calm, open your eyes and try the look, see, rest practice again. Feel free to go back and forth between these approaches—Rinpoche emphasized this flexibility today.

You can also experiment with where you place your gaze as you open your eyes. We discussed this in the interview group this afternoon: lowering the gaze brings the energy down a little. If you're feeling tired and want to pick up the energy, raise the gaze somewhat. Play with this as a variable in how much energy you're introducing.

There's a famous statue of Padmasambhava, the founder of the Dzogchen lineage in Tibet, which shows his gaze positioned very high—well above horizontal—with his eyes wide open, almost popping out of the statue. This is considered an excellent gaze for Dzogchen practice. But we may not be ready yet for that amount of energy, so you can approach it gradually.

The beauty of this practice lies in its adaptability. You're not locked into any rigid approach. Instead, you can skillfully work with your energy, your state of mind, and your capacity in each moment. This intelligent flexibility is itself part of the wisdom of Dzogchen—learning to read the conditions of your practice and respond appropriately, always in service of discovering and resting in the natural state of awareness itself.

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