

A Lamp to Dispel Darkness

An Instruction that Points Directly to the Very Essence of Mind
In the Tradition of ‘the Old Realized Ones’

by Mipham Jampal Dorje

The Homage

Homage to the Lama, inseparable from Mañjuśrī, the embodiment of wisdom!

*Without having to study, contemplate, or train to any great degree,
Simply by maintaining recognition of the very nature of mind according to the approach
of the pith instructions,
Any ordinary village yogi can, without too much difficulty,
Reach the level of a vidyādhara: such is the power of this profound path.*

The Instruction that Cracks Open the Egg-shell of Ignorance

When you leave your mind in a state of natural rest, without thinking any particular thought, and at the same time maintain some kind of mindfulness, you can experience a state of vacant, neutral, apathetic indifference, called “*lungmaten*”, (a ‘no-man’s land’), where your consciousness is dull and blank.

In this, there is not any of the clear insight of *vipaśyanā*, which discerns things precisely, and so the masters call it **marigpa** (“non-recognition, ignorance, unknowing”). Since you cannot define it and say “This is what it’s like”, or “This is it!” such a state is called **lungmaten** (“undecided, indeterminate”). And since you cannot say what kind of state it is you are resting in, or what your mind is thinking, it is also called **tha mal tang nyom** (“an ordinary state of apathetic indifference”). In fact, you are stuck in an ordinary state within the *ālaya*.

You need to use such a means of resting the mind, as a stepping stone, so as to give rise to the non-conceptual state of primordial wisdom. However, if there is not the self-recognition of primordial wisdom which is our *rigpa*, then it cannot count as the main (meditation) practice of Dzogchen. As *The Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra* says:

A blank state, devoid of any thought whatsoever—
That is marigpa, the cause of delusion.

Therefore, when mind experiences this kind of dull state that lacks any thought or mental activity, by allowing your attention to turn naturally and gently towards the one who is aware of this state—the one who is not thinking—you discover the pure awareness of *rigpa*, free of any movement of thought, beyond any notion of outside

or inside, unimpeded and open, like the clear sky.

Although there is no dualistic separation here between an experience and an experiencer, still the mind is certain about its own true nature, and there is a sense that, “There is nothing whatsoever beyond this.” When this occurs, because you can not conceptualize it or express it in words, it is acceptable to apply such terms as: “free from all extremes”, “beyond description”, “the fundamental state of clear light” and “the pure awareness of rigpa.”

As the wisdom of recognizing your own true nature dawns, it clears away the blinding darkness of confusion, and, just as you can see clearly the inside of your home once the sun has risen, you gain confident certainty in the true nature of your mind.

This was ‘the instruction (mengak) for cracking open the egg-shell of ignorance (marigpa).’

The Instruction for Cutting through the Web of Saṃsāric Existence

When you gain this kind of realization, you understand that this nature of reality has always been this way, timelessly, that it is not created by any causes or conditions, and that it never undergoes any kind of transition or change in the past, present or future. At the same time, you can not find even the tiniest fraction of something called “mind” that is separate from this nature.

You could also say that the state of mental blankness we looked at earlier is indescribable, but it lacks decisiveness, since you are completely **unable** to describe it in any way. Rigpa, on the other hand, is in essence indescribable, but at the same time it has a decisive quality that cuts through any doubt about what is indescribable. So there is a huge difference between these two kinds of indescribability, like the difference between blindness and perfect vision.

This covers the crucial point of distinguishing between the ālaya and the dharmakāya.

Therefore, because terms like ‘ordinary mind’, ‘mental nondoing’, ‘inexpressible’ and so on are used in two different ways—only one of which is authentic—when you come to know the crucial point of how the same words can have a higher level of meaning, you can come to experience the true meaning of the profound Dharma.

When resting in the essence of mind, some feel that what is to be maintained is a simple clarity, a simple awareness, and so they settle in a state of ordinary mental consciousness, thinking, “This is clarity.” Some focus their attention on the awareness of an absorbing sense of emptiness, as though their minds had ‘become’ empty. But, in both cases, there is some clinging to the dualistic experience of an

aspect of ordinary mental consciousness.

When you find yourself in either of these states, look into the innate nature (*bab*) of that subtly fixated attention—the clarity and the one perceiving the clarity, the emptiness and the one perceiving the emptiness—and, by doing so, you will take away the support for the ordinary consciousness that perceives things dualistically. Then, if you can decisively recognize the innate nature of your own mind in all its nakedness—clear and open, without any limit or centre—and a state of lucid clarity arises, **that** is what is called, ‘the very essence of rigpa.’ With this, as rigpa sheds the covering layer of experiences involving clinging, its pure and pristine wisdom is laid bare.

This was ‘the instruction for cutting through the web of conditioned existence.’

The Instruction for Remaining in the Equalness which is like Space

This is how you should recognize the pure awareness of rigpa once it is freed from the various layers of ordinary thinking and experience, like a grain of rice freed from its husk—by settling naturally and making use of rigpa’s own self-knowing (or self-illuminating) quality.

It is not enough, however, simply to understand the nature of rigpa; you must be able to remain in that state with some stability through developing familiarity. And so it is very important that, without becoming distracted, you sustain constant mindfulness, so as to continue resting in an utterly natural state of awareness.

When you are maintaining that state, at times you might experience a vague and dull state with no thoughts, while at other times you might experience an unobstructed state (*zang thal*) with no thoughts that has the clarity of vipaśyanā. At times, you might experience states of bliss on which you fixate, while at other times you might experience states of bliss free of such fixation. At times, you might have various experiences of clarity with grasping, while at other times you might experience a vivid clarity that is unsullied and free of grasping. At times, you might have unpleasant and disturbing experiences, while at other times you might have pleasant and soothing experiences. And at times, you might experience an extreme turbulence of thoughts which carries your mind away, causing you to lose your meditation; while at other times, you might experience unclear states of mind because of a failure to distinguish between mental dullness and vivid clarity.

These and other experiences come about unpredictably and to an extent you can not measure, like various waves produced by the winds of karma and habitual thoughts, which you have cultivated throughout beginningless time. It is as though you are on a long journey, during which you visit all sorts of different places—some of them pleasant, some fraught with danger—but whatever happens, you do not allow it to deter you, and continue on your own path.

In particular, when you are not yet familiar with this practice, and you have the experience of ‘movement,’ as all manner of thoughts stir in your mind, like a blazing fire, don’t become discouraged. Maintain the flow of your practice without letting it slip away, and find the right balance, so that you are neither too tense nor too relaxed. In this way, the more advanced meditative experiences, such as ‘attainment,’¹ will occur one after another.

At this point, investigate the distinction between the recognition and nonrecognition of rigpa, between ālaya and dharmakāya, and between ordinary awareness and wisdom. Through the master’s pith instructions, and on the basis of your own personal experience, have confidence in the direct introduction you receive. While you are maintaining this, just as water clears by itself if you do not stir it, your ordinary awareness will settle in its own nature. So you need to focus mainly on the instructions which clearly show how the true nature of this awareness is naturally arising wisdom. Don’t analyze with a view to adopting one state and abandoning another, thinking, “What is this that I am cultivating in meditation? Is it ordinary awareness or wisdom?” Nor should you entertain all kinds of speculations based on the understanding you have gained from books, because doing will only serve to obstruct both śamatha and vipaśyanā.

At some point, the aspect of familiarity or śamatha—which here means settling in an utterly natural way with stable and continuous mindfulness—and vipaśyanā—which here means the awareness that knows its own nature by itself—will merge together automatically. When this happens, and you gain some stable familiarity with it, you come to understand how the śamatha and vipaśyanā that are the primordial stillness of the natural state and the clear light of your own nature have always been inseparable, and the naturally arising wisdom that is the wisdom mind of Dzogpachenpo dawns.

That was the instruction for remaining in the equalness which is like space.

The glorious Saraha said:

Having gone beyond thinker and thinking,
Remain like a young child, free of thoughts,

This is the way to be. He also said:

Focus on the master’s words and apply great effort—

Then, if you have received the master’s instructions introducing you to your rigpa:

There is no doubt that your inherent nature will arise.

As he says, the naturally arising wisdom that is mind’s inherent nature, and which

has always accompanied your ordinary mind from time immemorial, will dawn. This is no different from the inherent nature of everything, and so it is also called the ‘genuine clear light of the fundamental nature (*nyukma dön gyi ösal*).’

Therefore, this approach of resting in a completely natural state and maintaining the recognition of your own nature, or rigpa, the very essence of mind, or the nature of phenomena, is ‘the pith instruction that brings together a hundred crucial points in one.’ This is also what you are to maintain continuously.

The true measure of your familiarity with this is the ability to maintain the state of clear light during sleep. The signs that you are on the right track can be known through your own experience: your faith, compassion and wisdom will increase automatically, so that realization will come easily, and you will experience few difficulties. You can be certain about how profound and swift this approach is if you compare the realization it brings with the realization gained only through great effort in other approaches.

As a result of cultivating your mind’s own natural clear light, the obscurations of ordinary thinking and the habits it creates will be naturally cleared away (*sang*), and the two aspects of omniscient wisdom will effortlessly unfold (*gyé*). With this, as you seize the stronghold of your own primordial nature, the three kāyas will be spontaneously accomplished.

Profound! Guhya! Samaya!

This profound instruction was written by Mipham Jampal Dorje on the twelfth day of the second month, in the Fire Horse year (1906), for the benefit of village yogis and others, who, while not able to exert themselves too much in study and contemplation, still wish to take the very essence of mind into experience through practice. It has been set out in language that is easy to understand, in accordance with the experiential guidance of a great many old realized masters. Virtue! Maṅgalam!

| Translated by Adam Pearcey, 2005.

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1. This is a reference to five successive experiences that occur during the development of meditation in general, and śamatha in particular. They are termed ‘**movement**’ (compared to a cascade of water down a rock face), ‘**attainment**’ (compared to a torrent in a deep ravine), ‘**familiarization**’ (compared to a meandering river), ‘**stability**’ (compared to an ocean free of waves), and ‘**consummation**’ (compared to a mountain). ↔



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