4. Instructions on the Fourfold Application of Mindfulness by Kunzig Shamarpa

After the general introduction to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, the contextualizing information on mindfulness, and the various quotes from the vast array of Buddhist discourses and well-known ancient Buddhist masters, it is time to let a contemporary instruction on the fourfold application of mindfulness speak to us. I myself had the great fortune to receive spiritual guidance from Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche (1952–2014) for decades. In all those years, the main point was always how to apply the Buddha's teachings in a way that allows us to make the best of our life and to eventually follow in the Buddha's footsteps, that is, to walk on the path of awakening, the bodhi path. Shamar Rinpoche even called the organization of Buddhist centers that he established "Bodhi Path." This bodhi path is a path of practicing along the lines of what was described earlier, training our mind grounded in a proper understanding of the principles of dharma practice. I chose Kunzig Shamarpa's instructions on this topic as a concrete guideline for such a possible course of practice because he contextualizes the fourfold application of mindfulness and explains the practice so clearly and comprehensively that we can actually engage in it.

Introduction

In Tibetan Buddhism, the title Shamarpa or the "Red Hat Lama" designates the second oldest reincarnate lineage after that of the Karmapa, the "Black Hat Lama." They are both lineage holders of the Karma Kagyu tradition and are together often referred to as "Red and Black Hat Karmapas." Shamar

Mipham Chökyi Lodrö was the fourteenth of these Shamarpas and also called Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche.

Born in Derge, East Tibet, he received a comprehensive education from the Sixteenth Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (1924–1981), and many other Buddhist teachers. Shamar Rinpoche was an accomplished Buddhist master and teacher, respected and cherished by numerous students of Buddhism the world over. His special concern was to convey Buddhist practice free from sectarian tendencies. Moreover, he emphasized that meditation should be practiced based on sound understanding, that is, the right view, and that a truly liberating type of meditation requires the stabilization as achieved by the training in calm abiding. His special focus was on the practice of mahāmudrā, embedded in calm abiding, deep insight, Lojong, and Chenresig meditation. He left a number of books and texts on these subjects.[1]

The teachings on the fourfold application of mindfulness that are presented here as an edited transcript were given by Shamar Rinpoche in Dhagpo Kagyu Ling in France, the main European seat of the Karma Kagyu tradition. The event took place in May 2014, just a few days prior to his death. Shamar Rinpoche taught almost invariably in Tibetan; the interpreter into French was Trinley Tulku Rinpoche. My translation from Tibetan into English presented here was based on the audio and video recording of the teachings.[2] In my translation I tried to remain faithful to Shamar Rinpoche's lively presentation in Tibetan. I did not emend a number of repetitions, since they occur naturally in oral teachings. I left out some brief passages that were not directly connected with the topic; these omissions are marked with ellipses. To facilitate recognition of the teaching structure, I have inserted a number of headings. Sometimes, the Tibetan can be very succinct; in such cases I have added the requisite information in English. Such additional insertions appear in square brackets. In the course of the teachings there were also a few question and answer sequences that I did not include in my transcript. However, I reproduce two of them now:

One question concerned the function of mindfulness and clear knowing in the practice of calm abiding. Shamar Rinpoche answered as follows:

> When practicing calm-abiding meditation, clear knowing means to be aware of what is going on in our mind; it detects distraction as soon as it occurs. With mindfulness we are then able to handle this obstacle right away, by applying the appropriate remedy or key instruction. On the spot, we have to remember the right remedy and apply the right method. Just to be irritated or annoyed by disruptive thoughts doesn't help us. There are precise instructions as to how we should deal with the challenges in the practice. In this context, mindfulness thus also means to employ a remedy against the distraction.

Another question was whether people living their busy working and family lives in the West were able to practice this path and attain the fruition aspired for. To this he answered:

> If you intend to accomplish the different *dhyāna-levels*, that is, states of deep meditative absorption, you need to spend enough time in a meditation retreat. In the Mahāyāna, however, they are not usually emphasized. I advise you to develop a degree of stable calm abiding and then to dedicate yourself to the practice of *lhagthong*, vipaśyanā, on this basis; this is how it is done in the practice of mahāmudrā too. Of course, it is good to spend some years in retreat. But even if you are not in retreat, you can still continue to meditate. There are many people who practice meditation successfully while continuing to work. Where meditation is concerned: you should first clearly understand how to meditate and how to deal with obstacles. The most important thing to know about meditation is how to maintain it constantly. So first you should learn this. Then, as you engage in the practice, meditate just like grazing horses: whenever you have time, you do it. Then the practice will bear fruit!

Shamar Rinpoche starts out by teaching the fourfold application of mindfulness from a common Buddhist perspective. However, from the second topic on, the contemplation with regard to feelings, he teaches more and more from the point of view of the practice of Dakpo Mahāmudrā. The excerpts from *The Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines* quoted on page 63 and 144 made the point that the specific Mahāyāna take on the fourfold application of mindfulness is a non-reifying approach with regard to the body, feelings, the mind, and the dharmas/phenomena; or phrased differently, non[dual] mindfulness. Shamar Rinpoche's explanations go precisely in this direction. He describes a type of meditation practice that—not

contaminated by dualistic clinging—aims at an immediate knowing of mind's nature and of the nature of all phenomena. This directly abiding in the insight of the nature of phenomena, exactly as they are, is the practice of Dakpo Mahāmudrā.

As mentioned earlier, Shamar Rinpoche emphasized that meditation is a matter of familiarizing oneself with the right view. His teachings below can almost be considered a commentary on what Gampopa, the founding father of Dakpo Mahāmudrā, wrote in the twelfth century in this connection:

> The king of mindfulness is meditation on the view without distraction. Apply yourself to this without being distracted by circumstances of any kind. Seek nothing apart from the stream of unwavering mindfulness.[3]

Shamar Rinpoche repeatedly points out, though, that this practice can yield the desired results only when based on the solid ground of a stable state of mind. He speaks at length about this topic in the beginning.

Instructions

I'm extremely happy that we have gathered here to deepen our understanding of the Buddha Dharma. I rejoice that, for my part, I can share my modest knowledge of the Buddha Dharma with you, and that, for your part, you have come here wishing to enhance your knowledge of it. This is a very fortunate situation. . . . Our topic is the fourfold application of mindfulness. This practice is of the utmost importance for all Buddhist approaches, whether for the path of śrāvakas or that of bodhisattvas, or in the Buddhist Tantras.[4]. . .

These teachings are meant as a support for your own practice, whether you are simply a Dharma practitioner or also a Dharma teacher. So I advise you not to listen with the attitude that you are learning something just so that you can teach it to others. Learning the Buddha Dharma does not resemble studying you might be familiar with from university, for example, where you learn a particular subject and then teach it to others in order to make your living and pursue your career. Where the Buddha Dharma is concerned, what is most important is that you practice and that you do so on a daily basis! This applies to everyone, whether you lead the life of a monastic or of a layperson, whether you teach or not. So I would like to

encourage you to listen to these teachings with the intention that you put them into practice.

A Short Definition of the Fourfold Application of Mindfulness

The fourfold application of mindfulness concerns the body, feelings, the mind, and the dharmas/phenomena. "Application of mindfulness" means: "Contemplation of precisely the characteristics of the body, feelings, the mind, and the dharmas/phenomena. By understanding their true nature, you settle the mind in this deep insight without forgetting it again."

We cling to the body, [to feelings, to the mind, and to the dharmas/phenomena] as something pure, pleasant, permanent, and as something constituting an identity. These notions are the source of samsaric existence because we take something to be what it is not: the body, which is impure, is taken to be pure. We take what is suffering [that is, feelings,] to be pleasant; we take what is fleeting [that is, the mind,] as something permanent; and we take what doesn't [truly] exist [that is, the dharmas/phenomena,] to be truly existent, having an identity in their own right. These are mistaken notions. If you understand these mistaken notions as errors, you comprehend the opposite in each case, and thus come to understand reality as it truly is. With these contemplations you pave the way for relinquishing all delusion. Yet, [this process of training in deep insight or vipaśyanā requires a proper basis], as Śāntideva said: "Knowing that deep insight that is perfectly imbued with calm abiding will fully vanquish all the defilements, you should firstly seek calm abiding, which in turn will be accomplished by delighting in freedom from worldly attachments."[5]

Accordingly, you should first accomplish calm abiding (śamatha) by training in methods to pacify the agitation and wildness of the untamed mind. As you meditate, agitations as well as dullness recede and the mind becomes stable. When you are able to abide in a calm state of mind, you develop insight [through the fourfold mindful presence aiming at] understanding that both perceived objects and the perceiving mind are empty [of an independent self-nature]. You develop this knowledge and then with precisely this insight examine all the emotional defilements of your own mental continuum, such as the clinging to a self. In this way you come to see directly that defilements are all fundamentally empty in and of themselves. This process will enable you to awaken. The fourfold application of mindfulness serves this purpose.

Preparation: The Practice of Calm Abiding

The requisite basis for this practice of deep insight is a calm and stable mind. The most profound and well-proven method to calm the agitated mind is to take the breath as a support for the training. The Buddha taught this method to his disciples, and all of them, śrāvakas, arhats, and bodhisattvas, engaged in this practice and continued to teach it to others. It is best to start with counting the breathing cycles and then progress with the additional techniques such as following the breath and settling on the breath.... These methods are simply meant to stabilize the attention. While you engage in them, you do not analyze. You do not, for example, ask yourself where the breath comes from, what its nature is, and so on. You also do not wonder about the biological function of the breath, how it enters the lungs, streams through the body, and so on. You merely focus your attention on the breath as it naturally enters the body, is in the body, and leaves the body again. Furthermore, the breath is not the meditation subject, you do not meditate *on* the breath: the practice consists in remaining undistracted, supported by the breath as an anchor, as a reference point to attach the attention. In this sense you settle the mind on the breath and maintain undistracted awareness. Sometimes this technique is misunderstood in that the breath is taken as an object in itself. However, meditating on the breath—that is, cultivating the breath—is not the point of the method; this happens naturally anyway, as the body knows how to breathe by itself. It is awareness that you cultivate. By focusing on the breath, you help your mind to remain settled in the present.

First, focus your attention while counting to twenty-one breathing cycles. Then take a rest and start again. In this way you perform many short sessions. If you do this regularly, you cultivate and stabilize a calm, peaceful mind. Practicing meditation just once in a while will not achieve this aim. To accomplish a stable state of calm abiding, repeated and regular intensive training is required. For countless lifetimes now our consciousness has been accustomed to being distracted and agitated. This is why it is not easy to train the mind. As long as you acquire effective methods for doing so, though, taming the mind ceases to be difficult. The Buddhist teachings provide excellent methods that the Buddha's disciples showed to be effective.

Make sure that your meditation is nourished by the twofold quality of mindfulness and clear knowing. As you remain mindfully aware while focusing on and counting the breathing cycles, you also cultivate clear knowing.

Clear knowing means that you are aware of your state of mind, whether it is focused or distracted, that you identify a distracting thought the moment it arises and that you let go of it without pursuing it. Mindfulness helps you to remember to apply the appropriate remedy to counteract the hindrances concerned and then to return to the breath with your focused attention.

With mindfulness and clear knowing, the training in calm-abiding meditation will enable you to extend the periods of meditative concentration to, let's say, one hundred breathing cycles. Gradually this capacity will be strengthened so that you become able to sustain undistracted awareness while counting two or three hundred breathing cycles and more. You will thoroughly enjoy the experience. The mind becomes very peaceful and stable and, naturally, the associated experiences will occur. Feelings of well-being and happiness manifest spontaneously. This in turn inspires you and strengthens your determination to continue with the meditation. It will prove more and more satisfying.

The experiences will be very individual. Generally speaking, though, you might at first have the impression that your thoughts become more and more wild, much worse than before. This experience is, however, not a bad thing at all. In fact, it is a good sign, because it shows that you are starting to notice all the thoughts that are constantly rushing through the mind. As you continue with meditation, the mind will eventually become calmer, and you will be able to recognize thoughts simply as arising and vanishing concepts. And, as mentioned above, gradually you will experience great inner calm. The associated pleasant feelings that may arise can become very deep and vast. Yet at this point it is important that you do not become attached to these feelings, do not develop pride, and so on. In short, there are many things to be heedful of. For your meditation to yield the desired results, you should be aware of all of these aspects when training your mind. It is therefore essential first to acquire a sound knowledge of the meditation methods. Then you are well equipped and know how and when to implement the required remedies with respect to the different challenges that may occur in your meditation. For example, you must know how to handle a situation in which the mind becomes agitated and distracted. Or in which dullness and tiredness take over. You must therefore be prepared and learn how to eliminate the obstacles that occur.... Let us take a brief look at the two main obstacles, agitation and dullness.

Agitation and distraction can be caused by an inner tension that builds up as a result of overexertion in concentrating. In this case, you should relax

more. A relaxed mind is less agitated. Agitation and distraction can also be caused by other factors like worries and problems in the family, by your job, and by practical matters relating to daily life. You tend to think about such problems again and again. In this case you should bear in mind that in fact all these occurrences in life are devoid of an enduring essence or substance; then you will find it easier to relax. In calm-abiding meditation the goal is to develop a mind at peace. A mind that is truly at peace with itself no longer depends on external circumstances to find happiness. Having embarked on this journey, having found peace within, all external things become unimportant. For a mind that is truly at peace with itself, all these problems in life—which we only classify as problems as long as we do not have a mind at peace—cease to be problems. . . . Agitation and distraction can also be caused by wrong physical postures. To avoid these you should first learn how to sit properly and how to assume the so-called seven-point posture.[6]

Dullness and torpor can be the result of an ongoing inner subtle chattering, of an undercurrent of subtle distraction that you are not aware of. If this goes on for a while, dullness sets in. You then tend to feel bored, and your mind lacks clarity. To counteract this you should exert more effort and bring more attention to the meditation; you should focus with greater energy. To make the mind clearer and more present, you need an inner sense resembling a panoramic view, as if you were looking at a vast landscape. It might also be helpful to sit in a place with a wide view in front of you; it might wake you up. . . . Another reason for dullness may have to do with physical factors such as diet, sleeping patterns, and the like. In this regard we live in very good times; there should be no problems because you know very well how to take care of your body, by eating healthy balanced food, and so on. . . . Furthermore, you must know how to position the eyes while meditating, because if you make a mistake here, it might also cause torpor. Lower the gaze in a relaxed way. Don't close the eyes; this may make you feel sleepy. Keep the backbone straight, draw the stomach slightly in. Press the breath very gently down in the belly, just a little bit, and hold it below the navel. Eat less. The best is of course to skip dinner. Serious meditators should not eat after lunch. During summer retreats, where we don't eat after lunch, the mind is much clearer.

When you are able to reduce the two hindrances, agitation/distraction and dullness/torpor, and constantly train in calm-abiding meditation, it will not take long to accomplish a stable mind. Once you reach this point, you won't need the techniques of counting the breathing cycles, following

the breath, and settling on the breath any longer.[7] The mind simply abides peacefully in itself, and this is what you continue to cultivate. Nevertheless, you will not attain awakening right away. . . . But don't feel discouraged by this remark. Simply allow your mind to become happy with calm-abiding meditation.

People often have many problems with anxiety, depression, and the like. Contending with such states of mind, how should you achieve awakening quickly? It's not that simple. So first, if you wish to develop a happy state of mind, there is no better method than calm-abiding meditation. It will resolve the above problems. The happiness that unfolds in you through a stable, peaceful mind remains with you. It will not disappear because of changing outer conditions. Of course, you must beware of becoming attached to the experiences of joy and happiness. . . . If you do so, it will distract you from the path to awakening and lead you toward rebirths in form and formless realms.

Practicing calm abiding is in fact the easiest aspect of the path because it can be accomplished within the framework of the samsaric mind; here and now, you can train the mind to become peaceful. Compared to that, it is very difficult to find access to our buddha-nature, our inherent wisdom. This will only be possible on the basis of the peacefulness developed through the practice of calm abiding. This is why śamatha meditation is a fundamental prerequisite.

The Fourfold Application of Mindfulness

The Application of Mindfulness with Regard to the Body

Practicing mindfulness with regard to the body means looking at the body's characteristics. Insight into the body's characteristics enables you, on the one hand, to let go of clinging to the body as something attractive in itself and as a permanent thing; so seeing that the body as such is neither attractive nor permanent reduces attachment to the body. On the other hand, this insight into the body's characteristics enables you to overcome the notion that the body is one whole, a single entity, something real, and thus to understand that the body is, in fact, essenceless, insubstantial, and empty of an inherent nature.

Regarding the first viewpoint that helps to reduce attachment to the body, there are two possible meditative approaches. One is a somewhat

artificial one in that you generate a given visualization; the other is a more natural one. The artificial approach is that you focus on the unattractiveness of the body by visualizing it as a skeleton. You start by imagining that between your eyebrows there is a small lesion that is beginning to fester. This festering spreads until the whole body gradually falls apart. This is a powerful method, but it is based purely on visualization.[8]

The more natural method is to simply contemplate the unattractiveness of the body by closely examining its impurities.[9] You could refer to Śāntideva's descriptions in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Practice*,[10] in which he lists all the individual features that make up the human body: first the outer aspects, such as the skin, then the inner constituents, such as nerves, blood, urine, lymph, marrow, pus, flesh, and so on. This latter method is that usually applied in the context of the fourfold application of mindfulness. . . . If you mentally dissect all of these parts of your body, you will understand that your body is not one whole, one single entity, but rather a conglomerate of many individual parts. . . . This is the body's reality.

If you deconstruct the head, the skin, the bones, what is left? When you mentally separate the flesh from the rest of the body, what remains? Look at the nerves independently from the rest: can the nerves function on their own? Can they function without the skin, the flesh, the bones, and so on? Can the nerves by themselves function as "I"? No, they can't! Explore the question whether there could be some kind of "human reality" with nerves only, independently from the rest of the body. . . . The contemplation reveals that there is, in fact, nothing based upon which the clinging to "my body as one whole" would be justified, because the body itself is devoid of any such inherent, independent existence.

You should also look at the question of whether there is a need to cling to the body as one whole, as a single entity, and as something real. The basis of our existence evidently is our body. But does it benefit me if I'm excessively attached to the body? While the mind lives in the body, it is only natural that the mind is attached to it. But is it necessary to cling to it as something special? Is there a need for or benefit to be had from identifying with the body so strongly? For example, if you look at the Buddha's family, his father and his relatives, it appears that they were very proud of who they were and were strongly attached to their bodies as something outstanding and special. The Buddha was different; he was not attached to his body and did not cling to it as outstanding and special. Who was wiser? You can look at yourself and contemplate your own attitude. Is it important to be attached

to my body and to my position in life? Was the Buddha right to relinquish his attachments in order to attain awakening? Which attitude is better?

When there is strong attachment and clinging to the body, it would be good if what you hope for in terms of your body actually transpired. But this will not happen. Why? Simply because the body ages, falls ill, and dies. Sometimes your body, your physical existence, causes jealousy or envy in others, which may result in their harming you. For some, you are an enemy, for others a friend with all kinds of associated problems. Being overly identified with the body might even lead you to harm others. Looking at the body from these angles, then, makes it clear that it is a very bad idea to be too attached to it, to strongly identify and be overly concerned with it.

Taking good care of your body in order to be of benefit to others is something else. This is a way to make the body truly beneficial. And the most important consideration is that you make use of the body as a basis for advancing toward the state of awakening. In this respect the body becomes extremely important.

If you pursue short-term aims and are focused on temporary pleasures alone, you might even choose to act in negative ways in order to avoid physical problems or pain right now. Or you might go hunting or fishing just for pleasure and the enjoyment of eating the catch. Are such benefits long-lasting? The body is bound to grow old and to die. There are no lasting benefits to be derived from gratifying the senses. Rather, every unwholesome deed that you have engaged in for temporary pleasure will accompany you even after you leave this bodily existence. In fact, being excessively concerned with the body will never produce a true and lasting benefit. . . .

Some great meditators in the past applied themselves to practices through which they were able to accomplish the siddhi of long life. They did this not because of attachment to their body, but for the sake of practicing the dharma. They lived long lives, and by using this time span for practicing, they were able to become fully awakened buddhas in a single lifetime. This way of making use of the body is of great benefit!

Using the body for dharma practice without being attached to it transforms the body into something that is outstanding. Dharma practice based on the body paves the way for liberation and awakening. So with the view to use the body as a vehicle for dharma practice, it makes real sense to take good care of your body. In this case the body is employed for attaining awakening, and you should do precisely this. In the course of your practice, you should also use this bodily existence in order to accumulate merit, for example, by

making gifts on all three levels: material gifts, the gift of protection, and the gift of Dharma. Only humans can do this; animals, for example, cannot. In our human existence we thus have this unique ability to generate merit. When you use your life for this purpose, you counteract attachment and clinging to the body and use it instead for accumulating merit. But all the while, when you appreciate and use your body in this way, there is no need to be attached to the body, clinging to it as something special. Appreciating the possibilities that the body offers you for dharma practice means appreciating your life and the possibilities you have to do good and benefit others. This is wise. Then you know how to live a wholesome life. Viewing the body as an excellent basis for dharma practice, you become able to make use of your precious life for the sake of approaching the awakened state. These are different aspects of engaging in the application of mindfulness with respect to the body. . . .

The Application of Mindfulness with Regard to Feelings

Generally speaking, feeling pertains both to physical and to mental feelings. However, any physical feeling, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is actually a mental feeling. But not all mental feelings are felt physically. There are, in fact, pure mental feelings that are not felt in the body.

The Analytical Mindful Presence with Regard to Feelings

We will begin this meditation by turning mindful attention to a physical feeling and employ analytical thoughts. For example, something itches; you have a slight headache, or a comfortable feeling. Whether the feeling is pleasant or unpleasant, you should start by deliberately directing your attention to it. You detect a feeling. Let's take the example of a slight headache; a strong headache might be too overwhelming. Direct the attention toward this feeling of the slight headache and analyze, "What is this feeling"? Look and analyze it precisely. Where is it located? Is this feeling on the right or the left, at the front or the back of my head? What is its intensity? What does it look like? Try to identify the feeling. Where did this feeling come from? Where does it abide? Where does it go to? Is it fleeting? . . . If there is a real feeling that exists in its own right, it must be possible to clearly identify it for what it is. If it is physical, where is it located exactly? Can you find it in the

body, outside the body, or in between the two? Is it only physical? If the feeling is exclusively physical, the mind would have nothing to do with it and therefore could not possibly sense it. If it were just a bodily event, a corpse would also have feelings, because a mind wouldn't be required to know it. If it is only mental, how is this? Apply this kind of analytical meditation and investigate feelings by asking yourself such questions.

The Direct Mindful Presence with Regard to Feelings Used in the Practice of Mahāmudrā

While you are experiencing a feeling, you can also look more directly at it by turning your attention to the very experience of the feeling. The moment you experience the feeling, look directly at its nature. Explore how this particular feeling exists as a feeling. How, what, and where is it precisely? As long as you don't inquire, there is simply the feeling. When you explore it directly, though, you can't detect its existence. Thereby you come to know its essence, which leads to a shift. While you are feeling and are trying to identify the feeling, you experience, at the same time, that the feeling is impalpable, that it is nothing in and of itself. There is nothing there as such to cling to. On the basis of this experience it becomes clear to you that it does not make sense to cling to feelings.

When you explore and identify feelings using this experienced-based approach, you become naturally able to distinguish between the feeling itself and grasping at the feeling. As a result, your grasping at it will naturally diminish, and you will become equanimous with regard to pleasant and unpleasant feelings. You will neither hold on to them nor reject them. Whether it is a pleasant, an unpleasant, or a neutral feeling, you recognize it to be empty in and of itself, and so you come to realize this equal nature of all feelings. When you look directly at the essence of your feelings, this understanding of their equally empty nature will spontaneously grow. Meditating in this way, in other words, familiarizing yourself with this understanding with regard to feelings, will reveal that pleasure, pain, and indifference are of the "same taste," the taste of emptiness.

The point here is to distinguish between the mind and the feeling by looking at the mind that feels the feeling. Through that you come to realize that the mind is not the feeling and that the feeling is not the mind. You can distinguish between the two because they are not identical. This experience-

based meditation introduces you to the nature of feelings as follows: when you are looking at what feelings essentially are, you do not find a sensing mind, a truly existing mind, which would actually experience the feeling.

How to Combine the Analytical with the Direct Method

We now return to the example of a feeling of itching and first make use of the more analytical method once again. There is a feeling. The mind that clings to the feeling is something different from the feelings as such. . . . The mind that feels a feeling does not exist in the essence of that particular feeling. In other words, you do not find a feeling that is identical with the mind. If the feeling was identical with the mind experiencing it, then the mind would always be experiencing the feeling, a headache, for example. Yet, if the feeling was entirely independent from the mind and exclusively physical, then the feeling would experience itself. As no mind would be needed for the experience, a corpse would also have feelings. The feeling would be a feeling in and of itself, independent of anything else. In fact, a feeling has neither inherent existence nor autonomy. It is not something that exists substantially, that exists in and of itself. Now, this is a philosophical, logical manner of discussing the issue. Yet, as long as you remain in this realm of purely intellectual thinking, you won't be able to reduce your attachments.

When you look directly at the nature of feelings, the meditation is not about applying logic and reasoning. Here, the practice should be experience-based, not philosophical. Directly seeing and experiencing that feelings—while you are feeling them—do not have a substance will naturally untie the knots of grasping, of clinging to pleasure and rejecting pain.

Prior to this direct encounter with the nature of feelings, you can first analytically explore feelings, inquire into them by asking what kind of color, shape, and so on, they have, asking the various questions that were given above. Then, once you understand their insubstantial nature, you should look directly at the nature of feelings free of any grasping. This is the mahāmudrā approach of this practice. It is straightforward, immediate. Once you have truly understood that a feeling does not exist in and of itself, you do not need to repeat the analytical process. Rather, as soon as you become aware of a feeling, you look directly at its nature. . . .

Once you are aware of the feeling, the practice consists in exploring its essence. Let's take a look at a mental feeling: Does it exist in the first instant of our becoming aware of it, in the second or third instant? In a future

instant? This inquiry, which explores the very essence of a feeling, will show you that feelings are unreal, empty, and insubstantial, that you can find no reality within them, that they are devoid of essence. Looking at feelings in this way affords insight into their ultimate nature. Of course, on a general, relative level, feelings are felt and can be defined as physical and mental, and in both cases as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Ultimately, however, you cannot locate them.

Feelings and Their Nature as Suffering

In fact, any feeling is a constant process. Certain feelings are unpleasant in themselves. In Buddhism this is labeled "the suffering of suffering." Other feelings are pleasant. But however pleasant they may be, they change and dissipate. So pleasant feelings contain suffering as well, what is known as the "suffering of change." This basically means that in our world of experience nothing is reliable because everything will change. There is a third perspective, called "existential suffering," which pertains to an underlying tension caused by a subtle grasping that accompanies every moment of samsaric existence, also the very pleasant ones. A feeling is only ever one of these three; which simply means that any feeling is suffering. You find these explanations in connection with the four noble truths.

We will now take a more detailed look at these three types of suffering. We begin with the third, the very subtle "existential suffering," and we will use an example. If you are lying on a comfortable waterbed, you will generally feel fine. However, you may not be aware of it, but despite the physically pleasant circumstances, you will not enjoy true well-being. This is because the mind, even though the situation feels comfortable, still experiences an underlying subtle tension; there is always a subtle form of grasping at the experience. In fact, if this existential suffering wasn't continuously present, you would not experience the grosser levels of suffering: that of change and that of pain, that is, the "suffering of suffering." You would not sense any of it. The "suffering of change" in this example is rather obvious: even if for a certain period it feels good to lie on a waterbed, this pleasant feeling does not stay forever; sooner or later it comes to an end. That is the suffering of change, rooted again in the existential suffering. The "suffering of suffering" is the pain in all its shapes and forms that repeatedly occurs in life, for example, if you suffer from a serious illness. You usually assume that once the sickness is cured, the suffering will be gone. However, because existential

suffering on a subtle level continues, suffering and pain in whatever shape and form will recur. So there is actually never a time that is completely without suffering. Maybe we can call the existential suffering a "persisting subtle suffering" being kept alive by our innate and instinctive self-clinging.

Feelings, Clinging, and the Notion of "I"

Superficially, you associate the notion of "I" with your body, your physical existence. But this clinging occurs in your mind, which completely identifies itself with the body, taking it to be "I." This is different from clinging to your possessions or things that you experience as "mine" because you are not completely identified with them; the mind does not completely reside in them the way it does in the body. The mind abides in the body, is almost inseparable from it, and therefore totally identifies with it. Because of this identification with the body, physical pain is felt so strongly, whereas the suffering that you undergo in connection with things that you consider to be "mine" is less intense. The actual cause that makes you experience all your physical pain as suffering is your intense clinging to and identification with the body. This has the effect that you experience feelings of hot or cold, of fatigue, and so on, as unpleasant. Of course, you may also experience pleasant feelings of physical well-being and neutral feelings. Yet as described earlier, these are not free from suffering either. That the mental grasping at the body is the main cause for experiencing all these feelings is obvious from the fact that a body that is no longer inhabited by a mind does not feel any pain. If there were a total separation between mind and body, you would not feel feelings. This type of inseparability of body and mind—the fact that the mind identifies completely with the body—thus causes the experience of all these feelings. As long as this identification continues, the associated feelings will continue, preventing true happiness from manifesting.

You constantly experience feelings. . . . This gives you the opportunity constantly to examine and explore your feelings. You should ask yourself whether there is an accompanying quality in whatever you feel, be this comfort, heaviness, discomfort, or suchlike. Explore this. By inquiring you will come to realize that there is always a very subtle underlying unease. At this point you start to understand the nature of feelings. It may be that there is pleasure. Does it last? No, it will disappear again and you will sense a subtle discomfort. It might be that a bad pain has subsided, so you think you will be fine now. Is this so? Even if the pain has subsided and there might be

a neutral feeling, isn't there a hidden subtle unease or grasping? . . . Your mind always clings at experiences in a subtle way. So what you experience is inevitably accompanied by a subtle tension and unease. Thus, because of your constant clinging and the associated tensions, samsaric life—like a continuous highway—is always dissatisfactory.

Steps to Move Forward on the Basis of Training in Calm Abiding

The ongoing and subtle clinging detailed above is characterized by agitation and unrest. You never find real peace in yourself. That is the inherent or existential suffering that is always present as long as you harbor any form of clinging or identification of the mind with feelings. In order to reduce this clinging, this identification of the self with a sensing self, you first engage in the training in śamatha or calm abiding. By cultivating a calm and peaceful mind, you pacify the coarse clinging or agitation. Progressively you become able to sustain a steady state of calm. This brings with it a sense of profound well-being, simply because you have calmed the inner agitation. This process can be refined, by going further in pacifying the mind and increasing its stability. As your training of calm abiding deepens, the initial peace and well-being that you experienced seems in retrospect somewhat coarse. At this point you will know that you are able to deepen your calm state. When you increasingly strengthen your stability, the training in calm abiding develops into the actual attainment of calm abiding. It is in this respect that different levels of true quietude, the four levels of dhyāna or meditative absorption, are distinguished; they are more and more subtle. They are also explained in terms of leading to rebirths in the different form realms. However, the distinction is not really about these different types of existence. The distinction rather relates to the levels of mental quietude. When you have accomplished the first level of meditative absorption or dhyāna, this is a very, very quiet state of mind, but only by comparison with the agitated, untamed state of mind of an untrained person. While you abide on this first level of meditative absorption, the existential suffering of the untrained mind is clearly evident, and the associated experience of quietude on the first level is very satisfying. Nevertheless, as you progress to the second level of meditative absorption, the state of mind of the first level will again be recognized retrospectively as a state of subtle existential suffering. The second level provides you with even greater satisfaction. In this way practitioners can go deeper and deeper until they reach the third

and fourth dhyānas. They eventually perfect the skill of true mental calm. When they have reached the highest level of calm abiding, the state is called the "peak of samsaric existence." Incidentally, the Tibetan term for samsaric existence literally translates as "possibility," because it is possible to experience all these states. The "peak of samsaric existence" is the maximum of peace and happiness that the unawakened, that is, samsaric mind can attain. Unfortunately, there is still the subliminal grasping at an "I." To go beyond that, in other words to transcend saṃsāra, you have to let go of all clinging and identifications. Only then, that is, by accomplishing the perfection of wisdom, will you be able to awaken to Buddhahood. . . .

If you do not learn and apply the instructions on overcoming clinging and self-identification and just abide in these states of mental quietude, this can continue for millions of years. . . . Of course, the mind is in a state of great satisfaction, great happiness. However, because you have not overcome the subtle inner clinging to a self, . . . there will come a point when this state ends. This is because it is conditional on the skill of meditative absorption, and everything that is conditional comes to an end. If you lose the state of peace, the underlying clinging again becomes evident; habitual confusion sets in again. Sadly!

So you should practice deep insight. It is *the* prerequisite to overcoming clinging. Of the four levels of meditative absorption mentioned above, the first three are states in which you can engage in a type of samādhi that allows for deep insight without grasping. On the fourth level, that is, on the "peak of existence," the mind is too absorbed. It is almost like a very subtle sleeping state and therefore not suited for the practice of vipaśyanā. . . .

As you proceed on the bodhisattva path, you will attain the second path, the one of unification.[11] On this level, the samādhi that has the power to liberate you from self-clinging comes to fruition. The path of unification consists of a number of levels that are successively called "warmth," "peak," "acceptance," and "highest dharma." On this last level of development you are capable of abiding in that kind of pure meditative absorption that realizes selflessness and thus accomplishes the uncontaminated samādhi of emptiness. In this state of mind, you overcome the clinging to a self, and samsaric suffering comes to an end. From the perspective of bodhisattvas who have accomplished this highest level of the path of unification and are deeply absorbed in their calm and wise state of mind, the quietude of the abovementioned "peak of samsaric existence" again appears coarse, a

state without peace, a state with inherent unease, because of the existential suffering involved.

Ordinary sentient beings are feeling existential suffering. We experience it constantly; in fact, we are overwhelmed by it. However, we are not aware of it in the sense that we do not understand it for what it is. Consider the following: there are times when you are not in pain; so there is no suffering of suffering. Moreover, a particular pleasure is not over yet; so there is no suffering of change either. Nevertheless, there is a very subtle unease or tension that you feel, but you do not recognize it for what it is. Another example: many people like to visit the coast or other beautiful landscapes in order to enjoy themselves. There is a well-being that goes along with that. Why do you do this? When you look closely into your state of mind, you might notice that there is a subtle unrest or unease—something you do not recognize as such as long as you do not pay attention to it. But even so, you still feel it. So in order to get rid of this constantly underlying unease you try, in one way or another, to create a sense of well-being and therefore engage in various activities. Maybe you decide to build a house by the sea or to do something else that presumably will bring real and lasting happiness. But whatever you do, it cannot provide you with true happiness because there is always this underlying existential suffering. At one point or another, it will erupt and turn into other forms of more obvious suffering. . . .

However peaceful the meditative absorptions described above may feel, from the viewpoint of pure samādhi uncontaminated by emotional defilements [that is, without dualistic clinging,] they are all considered as coarse mental states because of the subtle unease of existential suffering that is always present. Meditation that involves the contamination of defilements can never be pure, can never be complete in the sense of truly liberating you from samsaric existence. . . .

By now it is apparent that, if you are to proceed on the spiritual path toward awakening, you need a quality of samādhi that is not contaminated by dualistic clinging. You approach it through the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind and with regard to the dharmas/mental phenomena. So let us now examine these two applications, that are mutually dependent. The application of mindfulness with regard to the mind is developed progressively. This leads to the uncontaminated samādhi as described above. This paves the way for mindfulness with regard to the mind and the dharmas/mental phenomena.

The Application of Mindfulness with Regard to the Mind

You engage in the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind in order to understand the true nature of the clinging or perceiving mind. On this basis you will also understand the true nature of phenomena, that is, of what is perceived. When you understand the perceiving mind, the problems of the mind are resolved. When the problems connected with the perceiving mind are resolved, problems connected with seemingly external objects and everything that is perceived dissipate of their own accord.

Again, I would like to draw your attention to the need to steady the mind and accomplish calm abiding. On this basis, focus your attention on the mind, on mind's continuum, that is, the successive moments of awareness. When you look at the mind, you will notice that the mind is never—not for a single moment—without mental activity and experiencing. The mind is always vivid, in each and every moment. Of course, how and what the mind experiences differ. Sometimes the mind perceives a particular internal or external object, and sometimes it does not perceive it. But even when the mind does not perceive a particular object, the mind is still alive, it is still cognizing. The mind doesn't die, it doesn't stop. . . . The dualistic mind is an ongoing chain of thoughts that follow one after the other. As there is the notion of self, there is also the notion of the other, and your mind is constantly operating in this matrix of self and other.

Again, you begin the practice by inquiring. Here, you focus your attention on this stream of dualistic mind moments and explore: past moments of experience or thoughts are gone. Future moments of experience or thoughts have yet to occur. What about the present moment of cognizing? Look at its nature—what do you see? Meditation instructions often tell you to investigate whether the present moment possesses any concrete features such as color, shape, and so on. However, you do not need to apply this system; you can look at the present moment of consciousness in any way you want. At all events you have to explore your mind: How does the present moment of consciousness exist? Is it autonomous? Does it have a substance? What is this present instant of consciousness like? Is there a perception of white, red, or yellow? If you perceive white, in this moment of awareness, you—at precisely this very moment—will not perceive red. If you then think of red, what happens to white? The moment where you think or observe red, in this moment the white is not present anymore. Moreover, the mind that perceives a color is not the color itself. Red is not the mind, but the object

perceived by the mind. So what is the perceiving mind itself like? When you look at your perceiving mind, a mind that perceives a certain color, for example, what do you see? This moment of consciousness has awareness, knowing; it cognizes. Is there also a knowing of itself? Yes, it can also know itself. It can be aware of itself. If there were no knowing of mind by itself, how could you say anything about it? How could you experience any of it?

In a similar way you should explore every thought that arises. Where does it come from? Where does it go to? What is it like? Does it have a substance? What happens when the thought is gone? What about the mind that is looking at the thought? Is it identical with the thought or different from it?

When you look at the essence of any arising thought, there is nothing that will remain perceptible in the inquiring light of your investigation. You will come to understand that mind-itself does not have any substance, no form or color, and so on. The thought does not exist as something autonomous; it does not exist as anything. Yet, we cannot say that the thought is nothing either; it is not as though you were in an empty room. You cannot say that there is no thought. You are aware, aware of thoughts and aware that you are aware. Knowing this, the mind does not become unconscious or comatose but is self-luminous self-awareness.

The teachings tell us that the mind is empty and self-luminous self-awareness. However, when you engage in the application of mindfulness, you should not take these descriptions and superimpose them on your mind. Do not use them to explain the mind to yourself. It is not like a label that you attach to the mind as if you were saying: "the mind is this." The point is to look directly at the mind. Observe it. See what it truly is. Seeing it, you will truly understand. It is possible for you to realize the true nature of mind. Regarding thoughts and ideas that arise, you will understand that while they do not exist as such, they are not completely devoid of any characteristics. The nature of thoughts will reveal itself to you, and this will be a direct experience.

In this way, the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind means looking at the mind. It means that you should immediately notice and examine all thoughts that occur. Explore their nature. Do this as long, as often, and as much as possible. The practice consists in this observing.

There is no mind that is outside of thoughts or concepts. There are no thoughts that are not mind. If thoughts were different from mind, these thoughts would be matter, and that is not the case. A thought is the mind as it manifests. Thoughts, concepts, are thus mental representations or images

that appear in the dualistic mind and are known by it. This holds true of all sense perceptions, whether you see something, hear, smell, taste, feel, or think and remember, and so on. It is the mind that appears as an image or idea of the visual object, the sound, the smell, the touchable thing, the memory. When you look at the essence of these thoughts, concepts, or ideas, you actually arrive at mind-itself that cannot be grasped. The mind cannot be identified as a concrete object, having a shape or color. But when you look at it, you will understand what mind-itself is. Again, it is difficult to phrase it like this, because saying "I understand" might already superimpose another idea on something that cannot be defined. So we cannot really say "it is like that." We can merely describe the way in which we observe the mind and how the mind works. The mind's nature, however, cannot be described with precision. In any case, when you look at the mind in the way that has been described above, you can recognize its nature.

As you continue to cultivate this meditation, that is, looking at the mind's nature in this way, you do not need to search for the mind in all kinds of ways. See to it that you notice all the thoughts, all the concepts that arise. Try to look at their nature, to see that they do not truly exist. Just abide in exactly this nature of the thoughts—obviously this requires the inner stability as described above. On this basis you can use this method effectively. You will become familiar with it. The stronger your familiarity with the mind's nature is, the clearer the mind's nature will become to you.

The Application of Mindfulness with Regard to Phenomena

The term *dharma*, or *phenomenon*, pertains to everything you can know. Having trained for a longer period of time in the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind, you will develop a very special insight into the nature of your mind. Right now, you are not able to practice without concepts. In other words, you cannot experience the mind's true nature directly. However, you can develop a correct conceptual understanding of mind and its nature. In this regard, be aware of the following process:

The mind grasps the image or representation of any object it cognizes and takes this to be the object, whether it is a visible form, sound, smell, taste, something touchable, or a thought. As a result, you then perceive and label white, red, and so on, and take it to be something real. However, when you learn to look at the nature of the perceiving mind, you become able to distinguish between the object perceived and the clinging to this mental image or

concept of it. In this way, the object becomes, as it were, free from the concepts through which you cling to it and from all the attributes you assign to it.

Let us take the example of a cup: the moment at which your mind relates to the cup, the visual perception of it, the name "cup," and the concept or inner representation of the cup are all taken to be one and the same thing. You simply experience "my cup," which you believe to be something real in and of itself. When in the course of this practice you learn to look at this concept "cup" and understand its nature, you realize that "cup" is neither the name you attach to it, nor is it the concept you have of it. What happens at this point? When you examine the nature of the concept "cup," can the object as such still be there, with its own real nature, independently of the concept? Can the sound "cup," this name, still exist in itself, independently? You therefore come to understand that what initially appears to be a concrete object that you truly perceive and interact with does not in fact exist independently of the perceiving mind.

Let us take another example: a pleasant sound. "Melodious" does not exist in the sound, right? It is just attached by the perceiving or conceptual consciousness that hears the sound. All attributed qualities, whether this is "pleasant," "unpleasant," "good," "bad," "this is the voice of a cat, a bird, a dog," and so on, are not inherent in the sound, but are merely attributed by the perceiving, conceptual mind. Thus "pleasant sound" depends on the individual mind. . . . So the way things are perceived and taken as real always depends on the consciousness of the individual perceiving and attributing. This is how you come to label a perception of a bird's voice as "this is the beautiful sound of a bird." When you become able to distinguish between the sound that reaches your ear and your grasping at and labeling it as something, then "good" or "bad" no longer tie you down, because "good" or "bad" do not exist in their own right!

The same applies to everything else, to whatever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think. The attributions no longer tie you down, because you realize that they don't exist in their own right, independently of the labeling mind. Things are, so to speak, freed from your attributions. You also realize that the object itself, which appears to be a real perceived phenomenon, does not exist in its own right, with an independent self-nature. All phenomena are like that! If you cultivate that understanding, you will understand the reality of phenomena.

Having cultivated the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind, you gain insight into the nature of the perceiving mind. This gives

rise to the understanding that everything you perceive, any object—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchable things, and mental phenomena—is liberated from your labeling, from the names and attributes you attach to it. You understand that phenomena cannot exist by themselves, independently of the mind, autonomously. As a consequence, you understand that all phenomena resemble a dream or an illusion. Thus, by virtue of the application of mindfulness with regard to the mind, you will naturally come to experience the true nature of all phenomena. Milarepa says in this connection: "when phenomena arise, they arise in the mind. When they dissipate, they dissipate in the mind."

Concluding Remarks

When you practice mindfulness in these ways, as I pointed out earlier, your joyful effort should be like a grazing horse, which always grazes as soon as it has a moment. This is of great importance. Then the fruit of the practice will soon emerge. But do not hope for the fruit to manifest and do not fear that it will not manifest. Just practice; your practice will bear fruit.

There is a danger in connection with the practice of mindfulness: that you listen to the teachings with the aim of teaching it to others and that you do not practice it yourself, but merely acquire an intellectual knowledge, concepts, and ideas about the practice of mindfulness. This might create obstacles for your own practice and development, which should not happen.