



WISDOM ACADEMY

Restricted Dzogchen Teachings, Part 1:  
The Foolish Dharma of an Idiot Clothed in  
Mud and Feathers

B. ALAN WALLACE

Lesson 6:  
Pristine Awareness and Nonmeditation

Reading:

*Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings  
on the Six Bardos*

“Training in Quiescence without Signs,” pages 105–114

# Natural Liberation

*Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos*

*Padmasambhava*

*Commentary by*

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*Training in quiescence without signs.* Position your body as before. Then, while steadily gazing into the space in front of you, without meditating on anything, steadily concentrate your consciousness, without wavering, in the space in front of you. Increase the stability and then relax again. Occasionally check out, “What is that consciousness that is concentrating?” Steadily concentrate again, and then check it out again. Do that in an alternating fashion. Even if there are problems of laxity and lethargy, that will dispel them. In all your activities, rely upon unwavering mindfulness. Do that for one day.

In the earlier practices of quiescence with signs, there is a meditative object such as a stick or a pebble, but now there is no such object. Now you simply let your visual gaze and mental awareness rest in the space in front of you, without looking around. What is there to look at, anyway? At the same time, it’s very important, especially for novices, to maintain three qualities: mindfulness, introspection, and conscientiousness.

Increasing the stability means concentrating, or paying attention, more forcefully. Occasionally bear down in the meditation, and then relax again. Don’t try to concentrate forcefully all the time; rather, alternate between intense concentration and relaxation. There are various ways to maintain mindfulness throughout the day, one of which is constantly to sustain the awareness of

space. Another way to maintain mindfulness is the vajra-recitation. Whatever technique you follow, it's very important that between sessions you don't discard the practice altogether.

Then position your body as before. Cast your gaze downward, gently release your mind, and without having anything on which to meditate, gently release both your body and mind into their natural state. Having nothing on which to meditate, and without any modification or adulteration, place your attention simply without wavering, in its own natural state, its natural limpidity, its own character, just as it is. Remain in clarity, and rest the mind so that it is loose and free. Alternate between observing who is concentrating inwardly and who is releasing. If it is the mind, ask, "What is that very agent that releases the mind and concentrates the mind?" Steadily observe yourself, and then release again. By so doing, fine stability will arise, and you may even identify awareness. Do that, too, for one day.

What is meant by settling the mind "without any modification or adulteration"? Modifications, or adulterations of awareness, include good and bad thoughts, plans, and all kinds of judgments. You must also practice "without wavering," so if you're simply sitting there with a wandering mind, you're not doing the practice. Let your awareness rest "in its own natural state, its natural limpidity," implying that if you let your awareness become muddled during meditation, you are not practicing correctly.

Then do as before. Now, alternately concentrate your consciousness tightly, wholly concentrating it without wavering, and then gently release it, evenly resting it in openness. Again concentrate, and again release. In that way, meditate with alternating constriction and release. At times, steadily direct your gaze up into the sky. Steadily focus your awareness with the desire to be without any-

thing on which to meditate. Relax again. At times, steadily, unwaveringly, direct your awareness into the space on your right; at times, direct it to the left; and at times, direct it downward. During each session, rotate the gaze around in those directions.

In this phase of the practice, you experience a sense of space, so you shouldn't need to tell to other people that you "need space"; you'll have space. As you "direct your gaze up into the sky," you elevate your gaze, but without arching your head back. Just gently raise your gaze up into the sky. The fundamental nature of this awareness that you're bringing into this space is the buddha nature, which is like space, boundless and with no intrinsic nature of its own. This is the awareness you are gradually seeking to identify, and this is the awareness that is being so directed.

Occasionally inquire, "What is that awareness of the one who is focusing the interest?" Let the awareness itself steadily observe itself. At times, let your mind come to rest in the center of your heart, and evenly leave it there. At times, evenly focus it in the expanse of the sky and leave it there. Thus, by shifting the gaze in various, alternating ways, the mind settles in its natural state. As an indication of this, if awareness remains evenly, lucidly, and steadily wherever it is placed, quiescence has arisen.

The "expanse of sky," implies a boundless quality of awareness with no demarcations or limits. The term "release" appears in different contexts in this treatise, and it has different meanings in each context. It appears again with regard to the clear light of the transitional process of dreaming and also in the transitional process of meditative stabilization, each time with somewhat different connotations.

The evenly remaining awareness is the buddha nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, meaning the embryo, or essence, of the Tathāgata, the Buddha. This is the boundless, spacelike nature of our own awareness. However, in our present situation, it's as if

we've stuffed it into a crooked pipe that we've thrown into a trash can. This essence of the buddha nature entails the equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. It is the basis of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and it transcends the three times of the past, present, and future. So the nature of awareness is beyond the present. Some of you might wonder, "You say that awareness transcends the present, but elsewhere in this text there are references to the 'awareness of the present' or 'present awareness.' How do you reconcile these two statements?" These are different usages of the term "present." In the former case, "the present" refers to what is occurring now, as opposed to the past or future. In that sense, awareness is beyond the present. The later references to "present awareness" mean awareness that is primordially without beginning and without end. So this awareness is of the primordial present. The distinction here is between conventional and ultimate truth.

This passage concludes with the statement, "Thus, by shifting the gaze in various, alternating ways, the mind settles in its natural state. As an indication of this, if awareness remains evenly, lucidly, and steadily wherever it is placed, quiescence has arisen." Those are indications by which you can know that quiescence has arisen in your own mind-stream. When you have achieved that, you will never need to tell anybody "give me space," and you will never feel lonely. Wherever you place your attention, it will be imbued with the quality of serenity, like a candle flame that is not flickering due to wind.

In the course of your practice, you may experience any of the following three qualities: joy, clarity, and nonconceptuality. If you do not cling to them, they lead to the achievement of the three embodiments of the Buddha: the Nirmāṇakāya, the Sambhogakāya, and the Dharmakāya. If you respond to these experiences with craving, then joy will lead to rebirth in the desire realm, clarity will lead to rebirth in the form realm, and craving for nonconceptuality will lead to rebirth in the formless realm. All of those three realms are within the cycle of existence, so there's no point in practicing meditation in order to achieve any of those three states. The point is "don't grasp onto them."

If awareness becomes muddled and unmindful, that is the problem of laxity, or dimness; so clear it up, inspire it, and shift your gaze. If it becomes distracted and excited, it is important that you lower your gaze and release your awareness. If *samādhi* arises in which there is nothing of which you can say, “This is meditation,” and “This is conceptualization,” this is the problem of oblivion. So meditate with alternating concentration and release, and recognize who is meditating. Recognize the flaws of quiescence, and eliminate them right away.

As I mentioned earlier, laxity entails a sinking quality of the mind in which mental acuity is lost. This happens when you’re “spacing out” and have lost the sharpness, or vividness, of attention. When laxity increases, it turns into lethargy, which is like an overcast sky. As lethargy increases, clarity decreases; so they are inversely related. Moreover, when dimness sets in, the mind has grown dark, and clarity is gone. When the mind becomes muddled in any of those ways, it’s devoid of mindfulness, so you must take steps to enhance the clarity of the mind.

Why is the mind subject to becoming muddled, unmindful, lax, dim, and lethargic? First, and generally speaking, this is because we have been accustomed to unwholesome states of mind since beginningless time. But the dwelling in which you’re meditating may also lead to laxity and lethargy. Second, the time or season when you meditate may induce laxity and lethargy. Third, if you are meditating with companions who have allowed their tantric pledges to deteriorate, this can hinder your own practice by giving rise to laxity or lethargy. Fourth, your diet may also give rise to these problems. Fifth, if your posture is poor either during or between meditation sessions, this may also induce laxity and lethargy. Finally, if you’re meditating in an improper way, the practice itself may be inducing laxity and lethargy. So you have lots of excuses for laxity and lethargy!

In terms of your environment, to avoid laxity and lethargy, it is important that you don’t meditate in a basin-like area, such as

in a deep valley or any other low or closed-in area. Rather, meditate in a place that's open and spacious. Also avoid places that have been contaminated in various ways, for example, by people who have lived there and have broken their tantric pledges. If you find that your environment seems to be hindering your practice, purify it. You may do this by burning ritual incense, or applying other means of purification. Be careful that you yourself don't contaminate it. In terms of the time for meditating, summer can be a rather lethargic time due to the heat, and spring can give rise to a sense of laziness, which leads to laxity and lethargy. So those are not the optimal seasons to meditate. In Tibet generally there was a preference for meditating in fall and winter.

On a daily basis, the best time to meditate, generally speaking, is the early morning; and second best is in the evening. It is not so good to meditate during the heat of the day for this induces laxity and lethargy. In terms of your food, it's important that you have a proper diet that doesn't make you feel heavy, lethargic, and sleepy. You may also bless the food by reciting prayers or at least reciting OM MANI PADME HÜM. By whatever means, make sure your diet is good, and purify your food with blessings and so forth.

In terms of the posture, it is generally best not to meditate lying down if you are prone to laxity and lethargy, because lying down makes you feel like falling asleep. Sit upright and erect, without slouching over. Finally, in terms of the meditative technique itself, for beginners especially, if you try to simply sit there, staring into space, without any meditative object, the technique itself—unskillfully practiced—may lead to drowsiness and mental wandering, so that you lose all track of time. In this way, you may just get caught up in a barrage of internal chatter, or you may actually fall asleep. To counteract that, it's important that you be aware of the correct way to practice. In this particular technique, you are indeed resting your awareness in the space in front; but your awareness must be imbued with the three qualities of mindfulness, introspection, and conscientiousness. If you practice in that way, these problems will be averted.

Laxity, lethargy, and dimness form a degenerating sequence. There is another interrelated sequence of excitation, scatteredness, and guilt. When excitation sets in, you may recall all kinds of things from the past. Memories flood into the mind, you grasp onto them, and you're carried away by them. Not only do you recall things that have happened in the past, but you compound the problem by elaborating upon them. Then the mind leaps off to the future and thinks of all the things you need to do, and then it dwells on things happening in the present. The mind wanders around in agitation throughout the three times. When this continues, it can lead to a sense of discomfort in the heart and anxiety that may be associated with a mental imbalance. Depression may arise, which you physically feel at your heart. Those are the symptoms of excitation.

When scattering sets in, the mind is bombarded with compulsive ideation about things in the past, the present, and the future. The mind is in an uproar of conceptualization, which results in insomnia. This may also result in a feeling of tension in the shoulders or the heart, and you may feel irritable. If scattering continues unabated, this leads to remorse, self-condemnation, and guilt. For example, when you see how poor your meditation is going, you may conclude, "I'm still terrible at meditation. I'm not getting anywhere. I'll never get anywhere, and I've been wasting my time all along. What am I fooling around like this for?" That's phase three. All three of these phases of excitation, scattering, and regret consist of compulsive ideation, where the mind is simply making itself worse. In the meantime, of course, you're not accomplishing quiescence.

There are many other ways that you can create problems in your meditation. For example, when the meditation seems to be going well, you may congratulate yourself with the thought, "I'm doing really great. This practice is sure to lead to success, because I am such a good meditator." All such thoughts are expressions of attachment, clinging, and grasping, which hinder the practice. You may cling, for example, to the joy and clarity that arise in meditation. Clinging is like an odor that clings to clothing even

after its source has been removed. Just as the odor clings to the clothing, so does the mind cling to the objects of experience. Grasping occurs particularly when you do not know of higher attainments on the spiritual path. If you are not aware of them, you are bound to grasp onto and identify with your own experiences, thinking, “Well, this is all there is.” This attitude impedes further progress along the path. This may be one reason why Hīnayāna practitioners stop themselves from following the Mahāyāna. They’re clinging to their own practice, thinking, “This is all there is,” and they refuse to look at more advanced, deeper practices. Similarly, within the context of tantra, some people grasp onto the two stages of generation and completion (corresponding to Mahāyoga and Anuyoga) and think, “This is the highest. There is nothing beyond this.” Because of that attitude of grasping onto those two stages of practice, they cannot enter the practice of Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection. Thus, grasping can occur in a wide variety of contexts.

Grasping may also occur with regard to your own nationality or race; that is, you may grasp onto your own identity, thinking, “I am Chinese,” “I’m American,” or “I’m British.” All of these cases of identification are expressions of grasping and clinging. In your meditation, whenever you feel you’re a good meditator, recognize this as an expression of grasping, clinging, and attachment. Whenever there is grasping onto any of the three qualities of joy, clarity, or nonconceptuality, attachment and clinging are certainly present. This is a hindrance.

Spiritual teachers certainly may have their own flaws and limitations. For example, a teacher may hold a sectarian view, thinking, “The only teachings that are any good are Nyingmapa teachings.” Teachers of other schools of Tibetan Buddhism may think that only the Kagyüpa, Gelugpa, or Sakyapa teachings are the pure path, and all other teachings are false. Likewise, some sectarian teachings declare that only Mahāyāna teachings or Hīnayāna teachings are valid. However, it is possible that a flaw may be perceived simply due to a deficiency in the wisdom and intelligence of the students. Therefore, Padmasambhava advises

students and teachers alike to avoid the pitfalls of sectarianism and narrowmindedness. If you find that you have a problem with sectarianism, then, first of all, you should receive teachings. Then with good counsel from a genuine spiritual teacher, you should be able to rid yourself of that fault. It is also appropriate and helpful to offer prayers of supplication to your own spiritual mentor and your chosen deity. These are effective ways of clearing out problems and obstacles. In a word, all such problems arise from one source, and that is grasping.

We are all subject to the problem of grasping. It doesn't affect just one or two people; we all have to recognize it and counteract it. Use the teachings you have received to check out your own behavior and your own mind to see to what extent your mind is still subject to the three poisons of attachment, hatred, and delusion. Checking out your own mind is your business. It's not your business to be examining and judging other people. Among Dharma students, there are unfortunately a number who devote themselves to judging other people, but who never get around to examining themselves. Such students are not putting the teachings into practice, but are simply indulging in the eight mundane concerns. So, despite all the teachings they've received, they have actually become worse people. Once again, I emphasize that it's our business to observe our own behavior and to see how much our minds are still subject to attachment, hatred, and delusion. It's not your business to check other people's behavior: when they get up, what type of food they eat, when they go to sleep, how much they meditate, when they go to the bathroom, and all that. In all such matters, we should mind our own business. In one way, Americans have too much freedom, and in another way, they have no freedom. Their overabundant freedom allows them to gossip and slander in all directions. But this is not real freedom. I think you all need to free yourselves. If you want genuine freedom, devote yourselves to genuine spiritual practice.

Flawless quiescence is like an oil lamp that is unmoved by wind. Wherever the awareness is placed, it is unwaveringly

present; awareness is vividly clear, without being sullied by laxity, lethargy, or dimness; wherever the awareness is directed, it is steady and sharply pointed; unmoved by adventitious thoughts, it is straight. Thus, a flawless meditative state arises in one's mind-stream; and until this happens, it is important that the mind is settled in its natural state. Without genuine quiescence arising in one's mind-stream, even if awareness is pointed out, it becomes nothing more than an object of intellectual understanding; one is left simply giving lip-service to the view, and there is the danger that one may succumb to dogmatism. Thus, the root of all meditative states depends upon this. For this reason, do not be introduced to awareness too soon, but practice until there occurs a fine experience of stability. Up to this point, the instructions have concerned the practice of quiescence with and without signs. Samaya.

The references to awareness being “sharply pointed” and “straight” pertain to the analogy of a flame that is unmoved by any breeze. The phrase “giving lip-service to the view” literally means “having the view in your mouth,” instead of having genuine understanding of the view. “Dogmatism” occurs when you feel, “Well, I’ve got it,” and you can’t listen to anybody else. When you say, “Well, I alone have it,” what you really have is the view in your mouth, but no genuine insight. Such dogmatism is likely to occur when you receive the teachings on the nature of awareness without first having genuine quiescence.