

Lama Lena in the Caves of Tso Pema

[Lama Lena]: You have Buddha nature inherent within you. Therefore, you do not need to acquire it, create it, achieve it, or do anything else whatsoever to it. It is simply there. Usually, because of our obsessive-compulsive relationship to phenomena, we turn our face away from our own inherent perfection. We exclusively pay attention to what we experience through our sense organs, what we think about those experiences, and how we feel about those thoughts. We enjoy the flow of thoughts, emotions, and sensations—until we don't, until it hurts. And that happens pretty frequently.

It hurts because of not getting what you want, losing what you have, or being unable to escape what you fear. All of this is uncomfortable; a dissatisfaction permeates our experience of Samsara. It's never good enough. This moment as it is—which in and of itself is complete Samantabhadra—nonetheless, we think it "would be better" if we did this or that, or if we made ourselves better. Even if you achieve the wealth of a Universal King, the wisdom of the greatest sage, or the samadhi of the formless realms, these are still phenomena. They are subtle states of perception, thought, and feeling. And like all phenomena, they change. The effect wears off.

Even if it didn't wear off, you would be sitting there in perfection thinking: "Yeah, but I could make it just this little bit better if I move two inches to the right." That continuous malaise of dissatisfaction is what traps you into pursuing your desires and fleeing your fears. You know all this; I am simply recapping something well known to you. When you truly experience Tawa as Tawa, without separating from it or trying to grab it, reach for it, or make it something it isn't, then Gompa is accomplished. Tawa is simply your own mind—it's where the interpretation of your sensations occurs. It's not a place or an "it." If you follow your thoughts home into that infinite open awareness which is the natural state of all life, that is Dzogchen.

The error that arises for practitioners familiar with Tawa and the process of Gompa is that they try to make a perception, a feeling, or an idea of Tawa "hold still," and they call that stabilization. Understand that you cannot make a mote of phenomena hold still. All phenomena are impermanent. They arise in mind and dissolve in mind. Mind is Tawa (Semnyi). It arises there, dissolves there, and was never anything other than that—but it doesn't last. Semnyi itself is always there, but when

you try to stabilize the *experience* or *sensation* of Tawa, you fail because experiences and sensations are always moving.

So you have to let go. You have to recognize Tawa and return your attention to it again and again until you are absolutely certain that Tawa is always there. Let go. Stop trying to maintain something you have acquired; you can't. Stop trying to get away from what you're afraid of; you can't. Once you have become certain through your own experience—not by hearsay—of the nature of your own mind by the simple process of Gom (mind looking at mind at all times and on all occasions), you gain a certainty. Regardless of what phenomena may be arising as the play of the Dharmakaya of this moment, it is no-thing in no-where.

Whatever you're thinking right now—about what I'm saying or what you will do later—is just a manifestation of Tawa, as are all feelings and perceptions. You need to find this out experientially and then trust it. Striving, trying to "accomplish" Dzogchen, trying to improve your meditation or yourself—this is all counterproductive. It's the crap we fall into: that essential dissatisfaction with this moment as it is and the continuous attempt to fix it. It is not necessary. There are no stages, no corrections, no "doings" and no "lack of doings." All life itself is a manifestation of the innate vitality of open awareness.

All thoughts freshly arise and newly arise; you cannot make them have duration no matter how hard you try. Every single point in the space-time continuum that thinks it's a "self" limited to a "here and now"—all these belief systems are arising in your mind. They are utterly without duration or substance, dissolving in the very moment they arise, leaving no track behind, like the path of a bird through the sky. A bird cannot leave footprints in the sky no matter how hard it tries. You cannot stabilize an idea, a feeling, or a perception. So let go.

Allow that inherent dissatisfaction—the feeling that moments are not quite good enough for your liking—to be recognized for what it is: a feeling, a mood, a manifestation of the liveliness of awareness. Awareness is inherently open, vast, and without "thinginess." In Dzogchen, it is not a grasping for stabilization, but a letting go of hope and fear. Thoughts like "I'm not good enough," "I'll never get this," or "I am at a high stage" are all made of the same "no-thing." The great roar of the dragon of intrinsic awareness permeates all of Samsara and Nirvana—how could you possibly miss it?

The simplest instructions for Dzogchen are to recognize that it is a description of how moments arise and vanish never to come again. You get a new moment, and while you might give it the same name as the old one, it's not the same. So your practice cannot be the maintaining of a grasped thing; it can only be the recognition

of the freshness and insubstantiality of each moment, recognized freshly in each moment. Dzogchen is an "is-ness," not an accomplishment or an action for you to perform. It is not a conduct required of a yogi; it is the inherent arising and vanishing of each moment which has always occurred and always will.

You don't make it happen, and you can't make it not happen. You can't keep yesterday, and you can't make tomorrow last. You can't make it better or worse. Now, if your shirt catches on fire, put it out—this doesn't mean not acting in the normal way of aliveness. It means to stop fretting that the moment is not good enough (or that it is). Release focus. The practice of Dzogchen, stripped of little preliminaries like breaking things into sessions, sees no difference between a session and the end of a session. In session you are in one state of mind; out of session you are in another. Each state follows the one before in an ongoing process. You don't have to make a difference. Relax.

Let go of hope and fear; they are only feelings that arise and dissolve in the mind. Let go of your interpretations of sensory input. You see a friend and have thoughts about them; those thoughts depend on anything from your digestion to your mood. You don't have to believe them or get rid of them; simply see them for what they are. Tawa is the key: mind seeing mind. Self-seeing (Rangrig). The seer of Rangrig is the mind itself. It's not "my" mind; "mind" is just a word. What are you looking at me for? I don't have it; you have it.

As a text on the completion stage says: in the nature of the variety of phenomena, everything is non-dual. This very moment, since thoughts are no-thing at all, is inherently and naturally thought-free. You are free of your thoughts when you see them for what they are. You change nothing; you simply are no longer fooled. Like my cat who eventually stops chasing the laser pointer and grabs my hand, you suddenly figure it out—not by thinking it, but by recognizing it.

In this innate and natural thought-free inherentness, it shines out as all forms—always Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra means "all good," the innate perfection of everything. It is already perfect, so the sickness of striving is easily avoided. Stop trying. Relax, let go, and leave it be as it is. If you have recognized Tawa, stop trying to fix it. There's nothing to fix and no one to fix it. When we say "mind looking at mind," the mind which perceives itself is no mind at all; it is infinite open awareness—vast, vital, lucid, and aware, but not a "thing."

Follow the pointing out to the direct perception of mind by mind. It's not a "looking" mind; it is self-seeing, self-arising, self-perfective (Rangrig Rangshar). Look at mind with mind. There is no "at"—it's not mind looking *at* mind, but mind resting *as* mind in awareness of its own infinite vast openness, vitally aware and lively with

projections. Not a single projection has substance or duration. It's just the sparkle of the self-seeing, self-luminous reality. It's who you've always been, what you've always been, and what you are in this moment.

It doesn't require your effort to be that way; your effort is just part of its sparkle—the shimmer of the luminosity of infinite openness. Your lack of effort is equally part of that sparkle. So relax and stop fighting your own true nature. If this teaching is insufficient for you, then go back to Gom and break your practice into sessions. It's still exactly the same, but because you cannot abandon the ignorance of striving, you might as well try to improve your meditation and your Dharma.

In Gom, you make sessions but you don't separate them. "Now I will sit for half an hour," "Now I will do the dishes"—your meditation doesn't change between the two. Don't change it. You may want to, but that is just your natural resistance to enlightenment caused by your own personal demons. You don't really want to step off the edge. Are there questions?

[Student]: There aren't many words about the completion stage. You mentioned watching thoughts is part of Gom. Are there different instructions? Some people say we should follow algorithms—do this, do that, and achieve.

[Lama Lena]: Yeah, that's what I taught yesterday. Follow that if you want to follow something.

[Student]: But are quick glances essentially the same thing as the practice of watching thoughts, or is it all just one thing with different names?

[Lama Lena]: No. Quick glances is a method of Gom. Watching thoughts is an inner mind Ngöndro where you watch to see where they are happening. If you focus only on the thoughts, it's pointless. Some find that by looking at thoughts, they see through them since they are transparent, thus noticing Tawa. But that's a Ngöndro, not the actual "cutting through" (Trekchö). Quick glances is a method to build up until you are able to constantly notice the already known Tawa. Trekchö involve resting in Tawa at all times. Quick glances help stabilize that, but they aren't Trekchö themselves.

[Student]: I encountered three methods while studying with you: watching thoughts, then these quick glances...

[Lama Lena]: Yeah, first you watch thoughts to find out where they're happening. Once you find that out, you don't watch the thoughts; you look *through* them at Tawa. Tawa is the "where" the thoughts are happening—your mind. If you haven't

received Tawa, you can't do Gompa; you have to go back to the Ngöndros. You have to go past perceiving Tawa to *being* Tawa. That is done first by quick glances, then allowing them to merge together. It's a progression.

You have come to teachings of the beginning, middle, and end, pidiendo (requesting) them. You really have to figure out where you are until you understand that you aren't anywhere. Does that make sense? Figure out your level—whether it's the path of accumulation (involving doing) or the path of completion (not doing). In Mahamudra, it's broken down even more: first you do Shiné (resting in stillness), then Lhaktong (noticing the difference between stillness and moving phenomena). Once you are clear on what's what, you do the "yoga of dancing stillness" where phenomena and stillness are recognized as the same thing. That's where Trekchö starts.

When you can see phenomena as open awareness and vice-versa—and you can learn to see that freshly in each moment—you develop a certainty. That certainty is the heart of Dzogchen: phenomena arising and dissolving in open awareness without duration or substance. That is the spontaneous action without an actor. It's not a conduct; it's what is always the case. All phenomena taste the same because it's made of the same "no-thing." The perceiver and the perceived have no difference whatsoever. There's nobody in there, and nothing out there. So what are you going to fix?

Dzogchen is a complete relaxation. But because of our long-standing patterns of grabbing and fixing, it's really hard to let go. That's why we have methods. The highest and fastest method is simply to relax and let go. If you can't do that, there are other things—Sutra, Tantra, Ngöndro—that bring you to the point where you can. But those aren't pure Trekchö. Pure Trekchö is resting without making anything out of it. Once the final part makes perfect sense and you relax the malaise of striving, you may feel you no longer need sessions. But every day, without fail, take some time just to sit there. Don't stop. It's easy to be fooled in the beginning by a subtle perception, and like all phenomena, that perception can wear off. Then you'll be like, "Fuck, I can't even find the view." And your Lama is going to do exactly what mine did: laugh and say, "Next session! You're an idiot."

[Student]: Where does Thögal fit into this?

[Lama Lena]: Once you are comfortable with Trekchö and aren't trying to stabilize things, there is a process of allowing the display to unravel. This normally takes time, but Thögal accelerates that process. If you are ready to let go of improving things—especially if the end of your life is near—Thögal assists in accelerating the release of those annoying little quirks that are still there even though you rest in

Trekchö. You have to maintain the looseness for a while for all the "tsa" to relax and unravel, and Thögal helps that. It's a series of physical positions and eye gazes.

[Student]: And dark retreat?

[Lama Lena]: I believe it may be related, but I haven't done dark retreat myself, so I can't say exactly. Different lineages may have different methods.

[Student]: If one wants to see not only "Tick-Tock" (Trekchö) but also Guru Yoga... how do we do Guru Yoga as a Dzogchen practitioner?

[Lama Lena]: Didn't I say that yesterday? Guru Yoga is inherent in it. Guru Yoga and Bodhicitta are aspects of the same thing: the innate liveliness of the Sambhogakaya. The infinite open awareness is not a big dead nothing; it's vital and alive. That vitality (clear light, luminosity, lucidity) is the Sambhogakaya nature of mind. This is where all the Yidams and the vitality of all life arise. This is where Kuntuzangpo arises as form and open awareness takes on the dream forms of rainbows. All beings are simply a manifestation of that aliveness. Since all sentient beings share that Buddha nature, all your gurus and Buddhas arise from the completion of all beings. When sentient beings recognize their own nature, they are called Buddhas.

Look out there—don't look at me. Look how much life there is. Listen to the bugs and birds. Life is everywhere. This is how open awareness manifests its vitality as living beings. You can't love your teacher and lineage without loving all sentient beings; it's all wound together. The "multiplicity" of it is Nirmanakaya—where things seem separate—but it all arises in mind as mind. There's no separation. Does it make sense yet?

[Student]: It all makes sense now. So for Guru Yoga, we don't do anything special during the day?

[Lama Lena]: You do Guru Yoga in Ngöndro and Tantra. In pure Dzogchen, it should already have permeated you; it should be a "given" by now. If it hasn't, then yes, you should do something special. But if it's already a given—that innate recognition and love for the vitality of the universe—then that's it. If not, please generate Bodhicitta by some method.

[Student]: Well, I have these experiences here...

[Lama Lena]: But it has to be always, not just as an "experience." Experiences come and go (Nyams). Mind has always recognized itself; only you haven't, as long as you think you are a "you." You are separating yourself from the mind that recognizes mind. So you have to relax and keep practicing until there is nothing that comes and goes, yet everything is fresh, moving, and spontaneously arising.

[Student]: I observe that everything arises and vanishes, including lights and deities. But once I felt a very bright light in the heart that felt like it had no beginning and end...

[Lama Lena]: That's a Tantric thing—the Light Force Essence (Thigle) expanding. That's Tantra, working with symbols. The "not changing" aspect is Dzogchen, but the light itself is a Tantric vision. Don't grab the symbol; look where it's pointing: the Sambhogakaya nature of mind manifesting as Nirmanakaya. If sometimes all manifestations disappear, let it happen. Don't fight or fix. Just sit there and find the experiencer of these experiences. Knowing is not enough. When you find the experiencer, the separation between the experiencer and the experience dissolves. It is experiencing itself. If this starts to happen, relax into it. But keep sitting. Sometimes just sit there without trying to meditate.

[Student]: I just want to thank you. You really clarified why I have an inkling for Dzogchen. I've always found it impossible to cultivate certain great behaviors in other paths. I thought you said that for those of us who love a certain path, we should practice that one because we are incapable of the others.

[Lama Lena]: (laughs) A nodding acquaintance with Vajrayana and Mahayana is very helpful for Dzogchen. It's not that you *can't* practice the others; it's that you *won't* if you don't like them. And if you won't practice them, they won't work. So yes, practice the one you love. However, attempting to practice Dzogchen without a clear basis of Bodhicitta will get you stuck in the void. It's cold out there! The warmth of Bodhicitta must be recognized as part of the practice of emptiness. Do we have any other questions?

[Student]: Is Dzogchen something the teacher judges, or do you say "okay" for yourself?

[Lama Lena]: It is not the teacher's job to judge your practice, nor is it yours. You keep practicing, the teachers keep teaching, and things mature. Judgment is not useful. Sometimes a teacher will notice you missed something, like a friend telling you that you have spinach between your teeth. It's not a judgment; it's letting you know you missed something. Are we complete?

Thank you. Next time, just go to a nice place and sit in it. Don't bring a book; leave your cell phone in your purse. Just sit there for a while. Don't try to meditate, but don't try not to, either. Just relax. This is in every tantric sadhana—don't jump over the part where everything absorbs into the "seed syllable" and goes "poof." Spend time there; it's just as important as how you got there. You are doing better than you think you are. But a knot needs to continue to relax. Keep relaxing.