

Lama Lena in the Caves of Tso Pema

[Lama Lena]: The two of us can move back and put it down here, not where it is. Over here where it was. Yes, that's good. That way it won't get knocked all about by a dog. Any dog is welcome to be in here, even one who seems a bit rambunctious. Hello, pretty puppy. Settle down now. Relax. The beginning of Dzogchen is the same as the end of Dzogchen: which is that Buddha nature is inherent in you. It's already there.

You don't have to achieve it, acquire it, be good enough for it, develop it, or any of these things. It is inherently present and always has been. It is the true infinite open awareness which arises naturally as the innate luminous lucid vitality, which itself is the innate, shimmering, sparkling creativity inherent in all life. Yeah, you too. You be alive. Look at yourself. Feel it?

There are things you want and things you don't want: hope, fear, desire, and attraction. This is what separates that which is alive from that which is a simple hallucination. That which is alive is Buddha nature. And it is this Buddha nature which creatively gives birth to the myriad "thingies." Stop. Perceptions experienced through your sense organs, named as this or that by the ignorance which accompanies every moment. Each perception is then described by your thought process: "Oh, this is what happened, and this is what it meant, and this is what I now feel about it. And I feel it because it happened like this and they did that and they did that." You see how you do that? That is what you do to distort the innate and natural perception of enlightenment. If you could just relax and stop trying to make things perfect, there it would be.

But this moment is never quite good enough for you. You want it to be a little bit better, a little bit different, a little bit happier, a little bit clearer, a little bit wiser, a little bit more enlightened... a little bit *something* in the next moment. So you fix it. That's your "grab and push." It is the grab and push, and the obsession with phenomena which arises as grab and push, that keeps you stuck circling in the experience of being a singular experiencer within the boundaries of Samsara. Except that's not what you are. You are Kuntuzangpo, Kuntuzangmo, innate Buddhahood—not Gautama, not a name, but the very aliveness of eternity and infinity. And that is present in each moment: unchanging, unborn, undying. All the methods of Dzogchen are simply methods to help you stop fighting your own

natural innate enlightenment.

However, it is also important that you not take my word for this. You need to actually glimpse it—even if dimly through the smudge on your glasses, through your own obscurations and mental formations—your own Buddha nature. You actually have to see it yourself. Otherwise, you will not go to the effort of trying to relax into it. You will not believe in it, not really. Not here. You'll think, "Oh, it's a nice intellectual theory, but I'm no good. I'm not good enough to actualize this." That's more of your pride talking. "I am too good" and "I am not good enough" are both pride. Humbleness is a form of pride, just as self-aggrandizement is. "Oh, what level am I at?" That's part of it too—trying to figure out what level you're at and if you're doing it right.

First step is to recognize Tawa: your own innate Buddha nature, to get yourself a glimpse of it. Once there is that glimpse, you can develop faith born of experience, not faith born of believing somebody else's words. You can learn to take refuge in that glimpse. And we find that once we have that glimpse, it has to expand. Not that *you* have to expand it; it is naturally expansive. It is naturally everywhere and everything. You can allow your attentional focus—the focus of what you pay attention to—to expand from your usual point focus on the minutiae of the day.

Is my English too fancy for anybody here? Thank you. Okay, I know you're not all first English speakers. I'll check where I can use words like "minutiae." normally, every day—and you can notice this because look at today: What did you spend your time doing? Where was your attention focused? I'll bet it was on "stuff," what you thought of that stuff, and how you felt about the thoughts you were having about that stuff. I bet these are the three things you were focused on. Now, stuff... things... how do you experience them? Through your sense organs, is it not?

If I held up this water bottle but you were blind and I didn't slosh it, you would not know what I was holding. But if you heard it slosh, maybe you would. But that's another sense organ. You have six senses. The eyes see, but they don't see "things"; they see shape and color. The chakra back here interprets that shape and color into "that's a water bottle." If you were in a primitive culture... in fact, there's a lovely old movie called "The Gods Must Be Crazy." I would highly recommend it. It shows how you misname things that are not familiar to you.

This is why it is so important to get the glimpse yourself. Because of your usual obsessive-compulsive disorder—being compulsively obsessed with phenomena—you pay attention to the minutiae of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions all the time. Did any of you stop today for any period? You've been doing Tantra today, which works with minutiae—a different path. In meditation,

sometimes we minutely focus on a single point (Shinay with an object). We focus on not thinking. Whether it's the breath, or a pebble (we use a pebble because you can always chuck it over the fence, whereas you can't do that with your breath).

This is a slight difference in how we use tools to focus our attention. But in the end, we need to go to Shinay without an object by removing the object. Even in Shinay, often called one-pointed focus, you're still occupied compulsively with "thingies," with phenomena. So the key is going to be to expand your focus of attention—not to move it or shift it from here to here (you're good at that already), but to broaden the focus. Broaden it without making it fuzzy: relaxed, open clarity.

Usually, when we take a few glasses of whiskey, our attentional focus does open. At least mine does. Some people just get in a royal pout and pick fights. I seem to be a nice drunk, usually. (laughs) There is a story in town about me throwing a guy out of a cafe and breaking a chair once. He called my wife a racial slur. Of course I threw him out! She's timid; she's not going to fight for herself. He called a whole bunch of French people "frogs" before that and they didn't do anything. Crazy Dane. But usually, I'm a very nice drunk.

However, the lack of focus booze or other drugs gives you—as you know from your own experiences—is just a fuzzy focus. It's not a bigger focus; it's just out of focus. It's like looking through binoculars and turning the knob until it's fuzzy, but you're still looking through two tunnels. That's not what we're trying to do. We're trying to actually open the orifice of focus of our attention—not of our eyes or ears, but of our attention—without letting go of its clarity. There are some tricks to that.

To make it easy, there are the teachings of the body, the speech, and the mind. The teaching of the body is basically to sit with your back straight. Squished into this little cave, we can't always do that properly. You can try the Maitreya position: both feet flat on the floor, back straight, hands here. Find some way so you're not turned sideways. You don't have to watch me, you can just listen, but you really want your back straight. This aligns your channels.

There are certain emotional tones that occur from twisted channels. If you sit slumped or bent forward, it can lead to depression. If you lean back too far, it can lead to hyperactivity or insomnia. And if you're twisted to the side, it can lead to what the texts call "peculiar ideation"—odd belief systems, like the CIA controlling you through your feelings. (laughs)

So, this is the position of the body. Most people past the age of 60 wear out a bit and might have scoliosis. If you do, you'll need to pay more attention to how you set up your seat—maybe use a wedge or a prop to make your spine as straight as

possible. With your channels in alignment, your chin is your throttle. If your thoughts are moving too fast, move your chin down a centimeter. If you're falling asleep, move it up. It's a very subtle movement that helps regulate the speed of your thoughts.

The most important point of the body is your eyeballs. Your attention follows your eyeballs—you can't look at something without your attention being on it. So, what you're going to do is release the point focus of your gaze without it becoming totally fuzzy. Allow clarity to remain but expand it into peripheral vision. It might be a little fuzzy in the middle, but clear all the way out to the edges. When you do this with your eyes, it will make it easier for you to relax your attention. This is the teaching of the body.

Next is the teaching of the speech. It's very simple: Shut up. Stop talking to yourself. Stop that continuous under-mutter of a description of what you are doing, will do, or did. If that's not possible yet, put your thinking in "neutral gear" so that thoughts may arise but they do not connect to the next thought. Guru Rinpoche's advice was to shunt aside the sluice-gate of your water-wheel: the water is flowing, but the mill's wheel no longer turns. The motor is running, but the clutch is not engaged. Don't connect the previous thought to the next one.

Relax. Breathe in through your nose and slowly out through your mouth like a sigh. This will settle the chi in your channels. Now, as the little thought particles dance, allow your attention to relax past the focus on *what* you are thinking and focus on the infinite vast openness of *where* your thoughts arise. Shift your attention from the "what" to the "where."

Some people use visualizations, like a teapot or a freight train. Imagine a freight train right next to you: the clanking, the sighing, the sound. That whole picture is much bigger than your head; it won't fit between your ears. Don't make the mistake of finding a location inside or outside, left or right. "Where" is another direction altogether. Use your perception, not your intellect. The intellect won't work here—it's like trying to loosen a bolt with a screwdriver.

Imagine a very large green elephant with pink stripes and spiral trunks. Let your imagination extend... beyond real and unreal, beyond "is" and "is not." Infinite and open, lucid and vital. All those feelings and perceptions arise and dissolve in this infinite vast openness. This is mind: Semnyi, Big Mind. Not the cramped little personality that's always changing—Big Mind. And the vitality of this Big Mind is shared by all life. The Buddha nature inherent in all life is this infinite open awareness.

The shimmer of that clear light nature is the dance of phenomena—thoughts, feelings, and perceptions happening and unhappening in each moment. They are not made of any atomic substance; they have no duration. This is your own innate Buddha nature: infinite, open, awake, aware, lucid, and lively. Do not look at this like a "view" (Tawa) that is separate from you. We receive this experience and think, "I see that." And so we create the separation of duality, which is the "original oops." It is not a "you" seeing Buddha nature as if they were two different things.

This infinite openness is the dance of perception. Thought, feeling, and perception are no other thing than the innate vitality of this path. Notice it, but don't look at it as if there's a "you" here and it's "over there." Notice your own true nature without separating from it—that is Tawa. But because our personalities are dissatisfied and constantly changing, we forget. You might glimpse it, but then a person, a book, or some food changes your state and you re-grasp point focus. Forgetting it doesn't make it go away; it just makes you feel more dissatisfied. So you run around seeking more money, friends, lovers, or even more "blessings" and "empowerments."

What you need to do in each moment—on your cushion or making tea—is to Notice your own innate Buddha nature: Tawa. Don't grab it; you can't grab emptiness anyway. Instead, relax again and again. Use the methods to glimpse it. If you keep doing that while doing complex things, you will find after some time (months or years) that it becomes natural. It's like looking through your spread fingers: at first you focus on the fingers or the face behind them, but eventually, you can see both, or it becomes a shift in depth perception. Eventually, there is no shift at all; no difference.

In the "Three Words" of Garab Dorje, this refers to the lack of difference between a session and a session break. That won't happen at first, but it will happen if you follow the instructions. You can't "stabilize" Dzogchen because there's nothing to hold still. The moving will move; the emptiness has nothing to move. They are the same thing. Don't just take my word for it—find out for yourself.

We call it "quick glancing." My teacher's teacher, Jung-Chu Dorje, said: "While walking and talking, eating and sleeping, getting up and sitting down—Remember." Return your attention to the already familiar open awareness. Garab Dorje said: "At all times and on all occasions, notice the already noticed by remembering the already recognized Dharmakaya nature of mind." This means you have to make a lot of sessions. In the first couple of years, you need to make six to eight sessions a day. They can be just 10 minutes long—even in a bathroom at work if you have a minute of privacy.

Align your channels, get your position good, and relax into it. If you do many short seated sessions, it becomes easy in between them to continuously relax and notice Tawa. Knowing it intellectually is useless. If you know what a pizza is but are hungry, you still have to eat it. Talking about it won't satisfy you. You should also make two longer sessions: when you first wake up and before you go to bed. This will help you deepen your relaxation into *being* the view, not just seeing it. Both are necessary.

Now, some funny things are going to happen. When you begin to pay attention to the mind, you might get a greater intensity of thoughts or feelings. These are "Nyams"—meditative experiences that come and go. If you suddenly find yourself able to fly, don't fly over large bodies of water if you can't swim! (laughs) Don't trust the Nyams, don't grab them. Just let them move through. You might see bright lights or auras; that's common as your eye focus changes. Just don't get stuck there.

You can get stuck in a state where you aren't thinking and can't even force a thought to come. It feels big and empty, but it's a bit dull, lacking lucidity. It's a sign of progress, but it's not the destination. Don't pull over and sit by the road sign just because it says "Enlightenment 100km." A Buddha doesn't have "Namtog" (discursive thoughts). But they *do* have "Nam"—the little infinitesimal bits of thought. They just don't have the "tog" (the hookiness that connects them). Enlightened mind isn't stopped from thinking; it's just no longer trapped in the apparent solidity of descriptions.

If an experience arises and goes, fine. Don't try to get back an experience you had last Tuesday because you liked it. But sometimes they get stuck—bliss states, ringing in the ears, or a sensation of extreme clarity where you think you have all the answers. Seriously, you don't want to keep it. It's a divergence that can drop you into the lower "god realms." It's like spending all your savings on a Hawaii vacation and then having nothing for gas on Monday morning.

When you get stuck in a Nyam, you have to "pop" it. In Dzogchen, we use a seed syllable: PHAT! (the union of method and wisdom). It has to be done suddenly, sharply, fiercely, and quickly. A wimpy "phat" won't do anything. You have to say it hard and fast, almost sneaking up on yourself. Try it: PHAT! You have to have your attention right on that experience when you make the sound. Behind every Nyam is "no-thing-at-all." Your tricky mind wants to stay in the Nyam because it's attached to the "chocolate" of those experiences. You have to be looking right at the mind when making the sound. This is a private practice; don't do it in public or you'll just sound like microwave popcorn! (laughs)

A Nyam is just something that wasn't there before and is there now—meditative experiences that feel like realizations but are new. When you see your own mind dead center, there is no question of it coming or going. Recognizing your own nature dead center *is* enlightenment. Until then, we're like someone playing darts: we get closer to the center each time we look, but we're still slightly off.

To recognize your own nature is Tawa. To repeat that recognition again and again is Gompa. Chöpa (conduct) happens as a result of Tawa and Gompa; it's not something you "do," it's something that is. It is the absolute certainty that arises and never leaves. Don't attempt to "accomplish" Chöpa; let it arise naturally. Tawa is the key. Once it has been noticed and you keep looking (Gompa) until you transcend the perceiver and the perceived—that's it. It's so clear and obviously not a thing. If you have doubt in the beginning, it's okay. Once you've noticed it a few times and it hasn't changed, you'll know. It's always been there.

So, teaching of the body: back straight, chin as throttle, eyes open and relaxed. Teaching of the speech: shut up, or put your thinking in neutral gear. Breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth to settle the chi. Let the thoughts arise and dissolve like writing on water. Open your attention wide; mind is neither inside nor outside. It is vitalized by its innate clear light nature—luminous lucidity that is not separate from the infinite openness. This is Sambhogakaya. The sparkle of that clear light is the dance of phenomena—the play of the Dharmakaya.

Gompa is simply to relax into this again and again. It is your own true nature. It's what you've always been. In this recognition, Bodhicitta is unavoidable. The Buddha gave 84,000 teachings and yet never said a single "true thing"—they were all pointers. Don't think about Tawa; it isn't what you think it is.

This doesn't mean you stop practicing the Six Paramitas. Be generous, practice patience, practice morality to stay out of trouble. Perseverance means doing it every day even when you don't feel like it. Have patience with yourself; don't beat yourself over the head if you have a bad day. Dzogchen is the "top" of the Dharma and goes with whatever other practices you do (Chenrezig, Vajrasattva, Ngöndro).

Sutrayana may take 400 lifetimes, Tantra one life, but Dzogchen is enlightenment in this "now" and every "now." It's not a hard practice if you have joyful enthusiasm for it. Predominantly. Any questions? Cheers! This Samsara, this Nirvana—we're all in it together. So support each other.