

A Calm Mind in Turbulent Times

Dharma roadside dialogue series

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This year was, I guess like for all of you, an open year. There was no way to plan anything, and sometimes it could be a source of anxiety, like: “*when are we going to be able to travel?*” and for some of us, able to work, because as you know, we live in a relative reality where we need to buy some food, pay the rent and whatnot, so I understand, there is an anxiety that might come up to the surface. But I think also all in all it was a very good year for me. It was full of opportunity and creativity. If it was not for this year’s shambles, we would not be doing this.

At first, I was a bit reluctant to communicate via Zoom, you know how much I like to see people, feel your presence. It's really hard for me not to see, 90% of my creativity comes from you. And so if I don't have the feedback, I'm just like dry, I don't know what to say. Well, maybe it's hard to imagine, so let say: it's more difficult;~}

I thought that the present situation is a very interesting reflection on relative reality and the nature of illusion, that constitute our experience of this world, because, you see, we are in the same place but we are not, we are in the same time but we are not. Some are on European time and East Coast time, and some probably also joined from California, very early, or elsewhere, and we are not at the same time in the same place yet we are.

What makes the gathering possible? It is the intention. My intention is to make this available, and your individual intention is to be also available, and so as we are both available, then something happens. And we need a stage for this to happen, this is the internet. It reminds me of how the sutras were always presented. When you read the sutras they often begin by, “*Thus have I heard...*” at this place and at this time on this occasion such and such a teaching was given. So what is needed is five conditions. The presence of at least two persons to have a dialogue; we need a place, we need a time, and we need a topic, and we need to have a common ground of interest to discuss. And so we have this. The place is virtual, you and I are here at the same time, not at the same time but at the same time, and we have a common interest, and we want to have a dialogue. That's very auspicious, to use Buddhist lingo. It's very auspicious that all of these conditions are here. A couple of weeks ago I tried to live-stream the guided meditation I lead every Sunday morning here in Virginia, from my phone, but I couldn't do it. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, and so the place was missing. That is, the internet connection. Now we have everything together, all the good conditions together, and we are very fortunate, it's very good.

So, let's talk about the topic of the day: “*How to keep a calm mind in turbulent times?*”

I would like to discuss this point from four angles, four approaches:

1/ **Is there a problem?** That's the first question we should ask ourselves. Because if we are not aware that there is a problem, it's probably impossible to find where it comes from and find a resolution.

2/ **Where does it come from?** If there is a problem, which we need to assess its origin, where does it come from?

3/ **Possibility of freedom ahead of us?**

4/ **What is the process, leading to the cessation of the problem?**

So for you who understand the Buddhist system, you probably understand that about the four truths of the noble ones. I'm talking about this basic teaching of the Buddha: Suffering, origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and how we do that. And so I would like to use this classic structure, but bring it into today's problematic questions that we have. Because the teachings are wonderful, there is no doubt about it, and their value comes from how workable they are, what influence, what impact they can have on our lives. Otherwise they remain a sort of distant philosophy that we might be very interested in, we might find very deep and so on, but it doesn't really change anything in our life. The general idea of the teachings is to change our life. To be transformed by the teachings.

1/ Is there a problem?

So what are we talking about, because we are talking about a calm mind in troubled times. So what is the problem? Is it that the mind is not calm, or is it that we are in troubled times? When we are talking about a calm mind, we may approach it from two perspectives. Let's say, an insider perspective and an outsider perspective. The outsider perspective is that the world is in trouble, and everything comes to me as violence and confusion, and basically we try to blame the world, or accuse the world, for the suffering we have. This is the general attitude we all, more or less, as a sort of inherent habit that we have cultivated through beginningless time. So that's the outsider approach. The insider approach would be more of a, let's say, Buddhist approach, in the sense that we are more looking inside, in our mind, and trying to find what is really the cause of my dis-ease, or my pain, or my troubles. Trying to understand if outer circumstances were different, would that change the inner state of my mind? You see, sometimes we are dissatisfied and no matter what happens outside, we might have all the best circumstances in life that we can dream of, we're still unsatisfied. And then sometimes we may have difficulty and we are not satisfied. So, if we really look at the way we react to situations, we can see that yes, the outer events have a certain impact on my inner life, that means the state of my mind, the peace or the emotion I have or whatever, but it also depends on how I receive it and what I do with it. And actually it depends greatly on this. Two different people going through the same situations, having the same external experience, might react differently. For some it's going to be a catastrophe, and for some it will be a challenging opportunity to learn something. So, Gendun Rinpoche was always telling us to turn our gaze inward. He said, like, "*You guys look outside too much, and therefore you miss the point.*" Because if you want to look outside and find a culprit, someone who is responsible for your dis-ease, this is endless. It lasts forever. You

can not cover the earth with leather, as Shantideva explained, because there are thorns on the ground. Shantideva said, "*Wear a pair of shoes.*" So, the pair of shoes is your mind. And Gendun Rinpoche was really inviting us to do this, to always come back to the inside and look at our mind, and not try to be so preoccupied by the outside. So that would be really the first resolution, movement towards a resolution. We look for the state of our mind, and we try to understand what is a problem in our mind; basically what type of reaction we have. So, I'd like to shortcut the outer circumstances because, you know, I'm not into changing the world, of course I'll do what I can when I can, like everybody, but my main concern is not to create a better society, my main concern is to help individuals to find inside the resources for their own freedom. In that sense I follow the footsteps of the Buddha.

The Buddha was born in a ruling family, he could have been a great politician in his time, maybe, and make some substantial amelioration in the life of his people, but he decided not to go this route. He decided to go inside. So I was very inspired by his legacy, so basically I do the same. Knowing that if I found a resolution inside, there is not a problem outside as long as I have inside the resources to work with it. If I don't have the resources, even happiness can make me sad. I mean this in the sense of good outer circumstances. Let's bypass now what the world might be and all the social aspects of the transformation of the world. That can be another topic of discussion, but for now I'd like to go back more to the source inside and try to understand what in my mind is reactive to whatever circumstances I collide with. So that's going to be the first thing, in my mind there is a form of allergy to a lot of things. And then, I react by creating dissatisfaction, by creating reactions that are of a toxic nature, just an expression of my allergy so to say. And, as everything that goes around comes around, whatever I throw out comes back at me. And amplifies the situation I am in already, which is not ideal, according to my own tastes. Yes, there is a problem, this problem is, I don't know what to do with uncertainty, change, violence, helplessness, seeing so much suffering in the world and I don't know what to do with it. All of this makes me really unhappy or unsatisfied. So, we are not trying to find a solution outwardly and try to find somebody who is responsible, guilty, punish this person, and then we'll feel good. No. We are looking inside. But as we look inside, we shouldn't also accuse oneself of being the cause of one's own misery. Saying you're too bad, you're too weak because you're not smart enough, you know, all these things of self-derision. We shouldn't go this way, it's counterproductive, it doesn't really do anything, it just actually adds to the uneasiness that you already have. We have plenty of it, so we don't need to put more of a load on our situation. So what I can see is my reactions are based on appreciation. Okay? There are things that I like, and things that I don't like. But when we look at the appreciation, the like and dislike, they're actually very subjective, very volatile in the sense that they can change very quickly. You know, we have the idea of friends and enemies, or maybe we have the idea of what we call "frenemies" here. They are partly friends, partly enemies. Or we don't know where they stand, they change, they look like they are your friend but they are your enemy. So we have all of this appreciation regarding what we come to know through our senses or what we think about, and we immediately label them as pleasant or unpleasant. And when they are pleasant we want more of them, and when they are unpleasant we want them to disappear from my life. Now, pleasant and

unpleasant is not a permanent status. Something that is pleasant now can be unpleasant next month. For example, when I had the idea that having pizza is a good idea, I like it, and then four hours later, when I have this tennis ball of cheese in my stomach, I wonder why I ate this pizza. It was a friend, and then it turned into an enemy. It's the same pizza. Things are changing all the time. What we come to see again is that friends and enemies are not solid values, they are not pleasant and unpleasant, and not reliable, in a sense. And then our feelings are equally pleasant or unpleasant. Our feelings are equally volatile. They are not trustworthy. So what we can see is that we change our mind very, very quickly, our likes and dislikes change very quickly. This is really the cause of our dissatisfaction.

The fact that we try to have what we like, even though what we like is not reliable, even though the "*likeness*" of it is not reliable. Basically we are trapped in a hunt for illusory sensations. This being said, when you're in the middle of conflict and difficulty, you lose your job, you're gonna lose your house, can't pay your bills and so on, it's very difficult to have the kind of clear mind that looks inside and try to understand what is the core of the problem. That's why it is so important to do it, this exercise, and gain some experience, mastery, before we are confronted with this big problem that we don't have the muscle to lift up and turn up. So when we become aware that we can be easily turned upside down, it's very important to also understand that there is really a need for preparation. When you have to lift a very heavy load, that's not the time for you to build up your muscles. You have to build up your muscles before, so that when the load comes, you can lift it. When you are in this situation where the situation is too much, not in terms of what comes to you, but the lack of capacity to work with it, or the unwillingness to look at it. We are like this, when a problem comes, like children often do, we'll pretend it doesn't happen, and we will hope that it will magically disappear. Well, it doesn't. We can't spend our life in denial. But at least what we can do, even if we are crushed, even if we are overwhelmed, is try to use whatever resilience, whatever inside discernment we have cultivated to try to understand what is the real source of this problem. Because that's the only condition for us to find a resolution. If we are in denial, it won't disappear. If we think that the world is responsible, and we try to change the world, again, like following Shantideva's example, it's like trying to cover the entire earth with leather in order to avoid a few thorns that are on our way. It's almost in vain. You can't produce that much leather, it's impossible.

The first thing is, is to acknowledge that there is dissatisfaction, and try to turn our gaze inward, and that's where meditation is going to be very helpful, because meditation creates a space, which is an open space, which is a welcoming space. We're not trying to do anything in particular when we meditate, we just sit. We just sit, and allow the mind to be, we allow the mind to be creative. We look at it in a non judgemental way. We look at it, we could almost say, in a factual way. We look at it as if it was not "my mind." And we see all these things, we see the conflicts between what we want and what we don't want, and the reluctance to really work with the core. The core problem. In the Buddhist classic literature, they say that there are four veils that prevent us from experiencing the natural state of our mind or to use the Sanskrit for a minute, the Dharmakaya, the natural mode of being of our mind. And these veils have to do, for some, with the mental affliction, the reaction we

have to whatever comes our way in terms of likes and dislikes. Habits. Like a rut in the road through the mud, you always fall back into it, and then your car gets stuck. Then there are also the consequences of our actions that always come back at us, and as we are not ready to work with them, we try to push them away, and in doing so we create actually more problems than solutions. Finally, the real cause of all of this is a cognitive dissonance. Whenever we look at something, there's always this pattern of duality. Someone, who is perceived to be an individual substantial entity, is looking at something, which is also seen as a substantial, independent entity.

I call this cognizant dissonance because there is a twist in the way we cognize, in the way we know things. Our awareness is always afflicted by this sort of dualistic pattern. So that creates a field between the knower and the known, and in this field all the afflictions, likes and dislikes can arise. And that's the real cause of our suffering. But this cognitive dissonance can not be removed by simply deciding it. We can't decide that from now on I won't be in duality. Because who is saying what? So even the nice statement that I don't want to be in duality is just an affirmation of duality. So we can't work with it like this. We have to start with the problems we have. We have to begin with the problems we have, in ourselves, not the cause so much, or the circumstances or the conditions through which the problem arose. What is the real problem in ourself? And for that we have to look at it. This willingness to look at it requires a certain amount of courage. So that's the key question in this first angle. There is a problem. Is it their problem? Are you in denial? Do you have the courage to look at it, or do you want to find somebody who is responsible, or something and try to get rid of this external element so that you can enjoy peace again? Or are you trying to look inside to find the real cause of the problem? Which is in the end the ignorance that creates duality, but in our experience it's the fact that, "*I don't want to work with this, I want it easy. I want this suffering to go away.*" It's kind of a magical thought, like shazam, disappear. The path of the Buddha, the path inside, requires courage that translates into a willingness to look at things directly. It's only from this starting point that there is a chance of liberation, a chance of the cessation of suffering.

Otherwise we just build up on what exists and we just proliferate more and more and more of this, and it becomes more and more complex. If we look at our society now, even though where I live and where you guys live is slightly different, but it's the same thing. There isn't in general a sense of ease, you know, we've been looking for comfort, we're looking for convenience. When I talk with my Mom, she says like, "Well, that's nothing, I went through the war." With nothing to eat for years, and we had to run down the roads, and as usual telling all the things that went on during the war. But she's resilient, because she saw that, whatever comes her way isn't a big deal, she can work with it. We've seen worse. We are blessed and cursed by several decades of comfort, and we take it for granted. The thing is, we come to the end of a certain cycle in terms of environment, in terms of society. We have to be aware of this and be willing to pick up the challenge. The point then is not to avoid and push it away, like here in America some people wish that we could go back to the time when America was great, which is just an illusion. It's a fantasy. You know, pick a point in time when it was great, maybe it was great for the white males, but not if you're a woman, or not if you're black, or talk about how great America was for the natives, it was great before "*you guys*" came. Not even sure. So we want to have what we like and we want to have it cheap. This created an industry

of buying cheap things, but the cheap things have a cost; there's the environmental cost, there is a social cost, all of this has a cost. We never pay the real price...we just want it cheap. The convenience, paired with laziness; there's a form of desire for satisfaction at very little cost, because we don't want to produce too much effort. So we have to look at this in our mind, like, we all agree that we have to do something for the environment, that we are slowly killing our planet, we don't know how many years we have left of possibly reversing the thing, but when I look at myself I say, "Yeah, yeah, but I need my car to go into town." I'm not ready to be like the Amish and just use a horse and carriage. So this kind of habit is created, on the basis of desire, to have something without much effort, and without having to pay the consequences. It's kind of a general sickness of our mind these days. So you create a universe around this. And then there's a moment when this doesn't work anymore, the planet says like, "*I'm done, I'm done with you!*" Or the society is not functioning for a growing number of people. I consider myself to be very privileged, I'm an old white guy. Male. So I'm kind of like the top of the crop. But if you are a woman, or if you are trans, or a person of color, or a migrant running away from war that most of the time our countries have created, it is unbearable.

And so this mass of suffering will come and disrupt our dream of a convenient and comfortable society. I've been following the news and I know in Vienna you have had your share of this, explosions, and violence. That creates a sense of closing and expelling and protecting ourselves. If we can not really courageously address the problem there will be no solution. And it can't be really a tucked down solution, it's a button up solution. It's each individual's revolution that changes the general feeling of a given society. That's what I was saying, I'm not really into outside political or whatever activity, you have to pick your battles, right, you can't be on every front. So I'm more on trying to help individuals to come to peace in their mind, by working with what in their mind disrupts the natural state, the Dharmakaya, the natural state of your mind, that is peace. If you meditate, and then you're sort of able to let go, for a while, all of the concerns, all the problems, you forget the news, you don't pay attention to the outer circumstances, you don't follow too much your fears and expectations. There is a moment of letting go.

There's one word for liberation in Sanskrit, "*moksha*." I really like this word because the sound itself is liberating. The idea of *moksha* is that the lightness that you experience when you let go of the heavy load that you have been carrying for a long, long time. If you're not good at meditation, then carry heavy bags for ten minutes, and then drop them. Feel how liberating, in the physical sense, that is. Maybe that gives you an idea of how it can be the same with the mind. And it's not all of nothing. Sometimes I hear, "*But yeah, that's too easy, if I sort of log out, leave this world then I have my peace, but there are still problems in this world so I'll be a quitter, I'm not doing my fair share.*" I understand this, but this can not be a justification for you not to do that for half an hour. Because if you can do this regularly for half an hour, and then you come to experience the uncomplicated stability, clear, and in a way extremely satisfactory. If you can experience this, then you know that it's from this experience that I must work with whatever I collide with. If I don't work from a mind at rest, spacious, clear, I can

not solve any challenges. So it's important to work on that first. But I'm already on the fourth solution, on the fourth angle, so let's try to come back to the first one.

There is a problem. It's not really coming from the outside, it's from an inner lack of capacity or balance to work with whatever comes my way. This is based on the ignorance of the real situation, or the lack of willingness to work with the real situation, or the desire to be free of problems and troubles in a very cheap manner. So own your present situation and what is very important is always to remember that we are all endowed with the Buddha nature. That's a heavy one, okay? All sentient beings are endowed with the Buddha nature that is the natural state. The natural state of our mind is not troubled by the superficial fleeting adventitious impurities and conflicts and problems. We are actually deeper than that, but we remain on the surface most of the time because we have no contact with our Buddha nature. But this Buddha nature is there. And if we can take refuge in this, refuge in the sense of standing on this, that's my ground, that's my foundation. I am deeper than the surface of my agitation. This mind has more qualities than I see. This mind, as Suzuki Roshi said, "*This very mind is the Buddha.*" Maybe we don't know it as a personal experience yet, but at least we have to know it as an understanding. If you want to know more about this, Shamar Rinpoche just published a small book about the Buddha nature. It's in English, I don't know if it exists in German, I'm not aware of this. But why I recommend this is because it's a small book, and as Shamar Rinpoche usually does, it's kind of the essence of the teachings, because of course you could read many, many books that exist also, but sometimes maybe you get lost in the details. So this book is very interesting because it helps you to understand the continuum there is in the mind, between the mind of an enlightened person and the mind of an unenlightened person there is a continuum. It's not that we become Buddhas, we become aware of our Buddha nature. We don't "*become*" that, because this quality is inherent. It is native to our mind, but because we are so busy dealing with the outer agitation, or struggling with our superficial agitation, there is not really a moment where we can be sufficiently calm and at peace to tap into this resource, the Buddha nature. When we meditate, sometimes we have glimpses of it. When we have a moment where we feel a sense of ease, comfort, both mental and physical. When we feel a sense of clarity. That means our mind is very precise, very sharp, and when we also experience the fact that we can have many thoughts, a lot of turbulence in our mind, and if we do not grasp them, this is not a problem. That's a very important experience, because when you do that in your meditation you realize that you can have a lot of thoughts, there can be a lot of noise in your mind, but it's just like wind in the trees. With the practice of shamatha meditation, calm abiding, you step back and you look at this. You look at the movement, you look at the anxiety, you look at the desires, you look at the nostalgia, you look at the past and the future, and so on, like you're just watching clouds passing through the sky. And then at times you just don't pay attention to the clouds anymore, and you just notice the sky. This experience is very important because you can keep your freedom to make the good choice, whenever you will have to do it in post meditation situations. When you will have to decide between this or that, then if you make the choice from the clear mind there is more of a chance that this is going to be an enlightened choice. If you do it from the confused mind, superficial mental rumble, then it's pretty sure this is going to be a bad choice.

So, we have the problem, and we have to really accept it, and not project it outwardly or blame somebody for that, and also you have to turn your gaze inward and look in your mind to really try to understand where it comes from. And when you do that you realize that, so that's the first angle, that there's a problem, and it comes from not looking inside, and being lost in our preferences, likes and dislikes and so on. When you begin to see a little bit more clearly after these first two observations, then you realize that, wow, there is a possibility to really end this. Because the natural state of my mind is Buddha, it's the Buddha nature. So you can say you have Buddha nature, full and perfect, that's one way of expressing it, sometimes you can express it more into a potential, like a seed, or like a basic element that you will have to take care of. Like if you have a seed, you need to place it in good soil, water it, weed the grass and the weeds from around it, so you can also see it like this, there are two ways of seeing it. As a potential that will grow with your efforts and your intentions, your love and care. Or, another way of seeing it which is more, you can say, aligned with the true reality of the mind, is that clear and perfect right now. In both cases we just cannot connect, we are locked out, we are not connected, we are not online with the Buddha nature. But when you begin to see that, then you see, wow, there is great hope. There is great hope because I am not this confused mind, inherently, it is just accidental. It is the result of causes and conditions. And so if I work on the causes, and the conditions, I can stop producing the cause, and therefore bring conditions to an end, or the fruit, the result of it. So it's kind of a retro-engineering, you know, you retro-engineer, you start from the final product, which is a problem, and then you walk back, you take it apart.

2/ What is the problem?

The problem comes from, let's say, conflict. What is the problem? The conflict comes from the fact that I reacted very, sort of, superficially, and following my preferences, my likes and dislikes, also nourished by my, kind of, laziness, or lack of courage to really look at things, trying to find an easy patch. The easy patch never works. You know? I guess some of you are married, right? You know that the easy patch never works. You really have to work it out, you have to talk it out, you really have to.....let's sit and take a minute, the work can stop, and very deeply talk about what is the cause of this dissonance, this lack of harmonious flow between the two of us. And then you have to practice what Thich Nhat Hanh called "*deep listening*." And there your practice of calm abiding will be super handy, because you know how to stay and not be like, "*Yes but..., you said...*" You just say, "*Okay, give me the download of your grievance.*" And then I listen. Then I really go into this and see what is part of my responsibility, and where my responsibility lays, and after listening then you can come up with your own expression of your "*side*" of the story, because it seems that we have one story between the two of us, but actually there's at least two stories. Your story, my story, and these two collide and make our story, so there's three stories. So, it takes a lot of courage to do that. But that's really, in my experience, now I've been married for twelve years, in my experience this is one of the recipes for harmonious interaction. That's true in a family, true in any form of dialogue. And it's not always easy. You know, because sometimes you say like, "*Abhrg, there she goes again, she wanna talk.*"

There is a problem, let's talk about it. It's usually, like, men don't really like to do that first. It's very rare that men say, "*Oh, listen darling, we have a problem.*" Most guys are like, never mind, this too shall pass. So you have to say, "*Okay, let's drop everything we're doing, nothing is more important than this,*" and then look at it. So you can have the same dialogue with your mind. Your mind says, "*I hurt.*" Listen to it. And don't try and fix it and say, "*You know what, you should do this, you should do that, it's very easy, let me fix you.*" Again, in my experience, being the fixer doesn't fix anybody. It doesn't fix anything. Be the listener first. Express your point of view, as honestly as possible, that means don't hide the part, you know, like the dirty secrets of yours.

You can have this relationship with your mind. You can really begin to have this, almost like you're in a relationship with yourself. And then you begin to see that there is a possible exit to this conflict. I mean, it's not only divorce. Instead of divorce we can find harmony. We can find a common ground. It doesn't have to be my way or the highway, doesn't have to be your way or the highway, what do we try to achieve? This is a very important question you should ask your mind. What do you want to achieve? If I really look deeply in my mind, what I want to achieve is freedom. I want to be free, not so much of the outside world, I don't care, really. Because I know that the outer freedom depends on the inner freedom. If I am free within, there is no problem in the world. I mean, there's no problem in the world that creates a binding situation for me. So that's what I really want. You know, happiness is overrated, I don't care. If freedom comes through bitter or sweet, I'll take both, because I value freedom more than happiness. So this is truly what I want, I want to achieve. And this idea of liberation or freedom has matured throughout my life. When I was seventeen, eighteen, I wanted to be free to do what I wanted to do. And now I want to be free to really respond to what has to be done in my dialogue with the world and that my own confusion and lack of clarity and so forth doesn't create sort of a filter, a barrier, so that I can truly be of help when needed. I'm not aspiring to be a savior, there is already one savior, the job has been taken.

3/ Possibility of freedom ahead of us.

I can see, when I look at the problem, that there is a possibility of freedom, because of the experience I gain, now and then, little insights into my mind, I see that this mind is limitless and free and clear. And loving, and cognizant. I love this mind! I really love this mind. It's beautiful. And when I look at the Buddha, you know, whether it's a statue or a thangka, or I think about the Buddha, that's what I see. I see my freedom. I don't see a savior, per se, I see somebody, a human being, who went through a process very similar to mine, and opened a trail for us to follow, and I'm sooo grateful. And when I'm grateful, I'm grateful to also, sort of like in the mirror effect, I'm grateful for my mind. For my mind's deep wealth and richness, and whenever I'm disconnected from this aspect of my mind, because I'm busy with trivial, superficial needs and so on and so forth, that comes from habits, I feel like I lose the preciousness of my existence. I'm wasting my time. And so that's the third aspect, that's seeing the possibility of liberation, freedom, in other terms Buddhahood, because it is the very nature of my mind.

And so, what is the fourth point then? The fourth point is how do I connect with this mind? How do I connect with this mind? First, by looking at it. And that's what Gendun Rinpoche told us, "*Turn your gaze inward.*" Whatever you do, whether you are meditating or not, whether you are in a very kind and loving mind state, or you are grumpy, angry, lustful, or jealous, whatever, look at this mind. You can see this mind without drama, and see that all these moods swinging, back and forth, have no substantial reality. Then you stop believing in them as being real, and this capacity comes from the practice of meditation. Meditation means to become familiar with what mind is, and to become very familiar with what mind is, is through looking at it in a non-judgemental way, not trying to promote this and suppress that, not trying to reach a projection of an ideal state that will be "*my*" conception of what enlightenment is, or be afraid of not reaching this. All of this is just superficial mind's usual business. Whether you dream of a new car or your version of enlightenment, it's the same thing. It's just an object that you have created, and you get high on it. That's not looking at mind. When you look at mind you see that, yeah, it's true that through causes and conditions all sorts of things come up from this mind. Like clouds in the sky. Clouds need humidity and evaporation and all sorts of phenomena. It's the same with the thoughts, it's the same with the emotions. But they never really form mind itself. Like the clouds. They don't scratch the space. They don't soil space. All these thoughts, all these emotions, only hurt us when we assume they're real and therefore, as I feel them, I exist. Therefore we create the target for our misconception to become hurtful. All of this is self-inflicted.

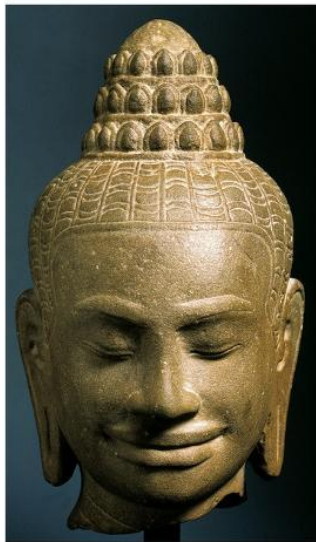
4/ Path of Liberation

The process of liberation will come from, on one side, cultivating discernment that is an insight into the true nature of mind. And this will be through the practice of calm abiding as a foundation, followed up by vipashyana, or insight, where we really come to see what is the stuff mind is made of. With progressive experiences that deepen and deepen. So that's working on the essence. And then, cultivating through the practice of the six paramitas, harmonious relation to oneself and the environment through generosity and patience and finding joy in the effort of doing this, not being afraid of the effort but enjoying the process of liberation. And cultivating a mental stability, you could say a reliable mindfulness. All of this will contribute to the soil from which wisdom can be experienced. By removing what hinders the natural state of mind. You see, when you're generous what you remove, actually it's kind of a twofer, it helps in both ways, when you're generous you help other people, obviously, when they're in need, but you also free yourself from grasping and owning and being very possessive. When you cultivate the sense of "*right livelihood*," you stop hurting yourself and others, by a lifestyle and actions that are only coming from ignorance and emotional reactions. So we cultivate a sort of a skill in being generous by being ethical. We could say ethics are the manager of generosity. And then patience. Patience is the key to the process. This is not going to happen overnight. This is going to take a long time, because these habits have been created and perpetuated and solidified since beginningless time. So we need to be patient. We need to be patient with others, when we try to be generous and ethical, and they are not reacting as we wish they would, we need to be patient with ourselves, when we are lazy, when we are cowardly, we need to

find a way to encourage ourselves, and we need to be patient with the process, which means fearless. Because there are things that are very difficult to deal with, because they're really out of our comfort zone. When we think about cause and effect, when we think about the illusory nature of all phenomena, that's scary. Like, thinking, "*Cause and effect, it's just too complicated, I don't even want to think about it.*" Emptiness, you know, like the big trap of big thinkers; "*emptiness,*" "*emptiness.*" Everything is empty. My wallet is empty. My cup is empty;~ }

As we cannot *know* what emptiness is, we come up with our own description of it, and we don't like it. Because when we describe things from our conceptual emptiness point of view, it is a no, it's zero, it's nothing, and we don't like it, because we want plenty, we want happy, we want quantity, we want quality, and so zero cannot apply to my dream. So we get all confused with these ideas. So, these are very deep topics and they require courage and perseverance, and a gentleness in the process. We don't have to accelerate artificially the way flowers grow and bloom. The flowers bloom in their own sweet time. It depends on the soil, it depends on the light, it depends on the humidity, and depends on how much you took care, on the surroundings of the plant. We cannot pull on the flower and say, "*Grow faster.*" The same goes with our mind.

We discover this beautiful process, which generates joy and energy, that we come to appreciate. When we have the joy we have the energy to go on with the process. If the process leading to the cessation of suffering, liberation from suffering, freedom of enlightenment, is felt as an obligation, is felt like we have to give up going to be very willing to do bitterness. There is no joy. joy comes from a full and what the freedom of about creating a concept of sort of like looking at our a problem and it hurts, and like not to have this problem that we do not deny acknowledge, to help us cessation of suffering. able to look at the mind in all In this moment there is it be wonderful to be like this the Buddha's smile, and representation of the Buddha, that have the most gorgeous lips, that beautiful smile tells you, "*It's gonna be okay.*" It is okay. Stop worrying.



what we hold dear, we are not it. Or we'll do it with a certain The joy is very important. And apprehension of where we are enlightenment might be. It's not what enlightenment is, but it is situation, the first angle, there is try to imagine what it would be anymore. We use the suffering anymore, and that we understand what would be the Wouldn't it be so great to be it's turbulences and smile at it. tremendous freedom. Wouldn't over time? When you look at particularly the Khmer

Look at your mind, it's all in there. The freedom is already there. And so the lips of the Buddha in the Khmer art, for me, are talking about this. They're talking about the possibility of liberation,

because we're endowed with the Buddha nature. And then the process is just to get rid of what obscures the natural state. Clarifying the natural state. Removing the fleeting impurities. And maybe you come at the point where you realize that actually even the fleeting impurities are mind. And so it's all good. But that will be for the day after tomorrow:~} For now we try to find peace by not constantly grasping and rejecting. That's the basic practice of shamatha calm abiding. And then when we find ease, when we find clarity, and we begin to let the mind be hyperactive, or calm; no matter what, that has no influence on the stability of your mind. Then you're in a good position to begin really looking at this mind. Because the fear, the judgement, the hope, the expectation only comes from a worried mind. If this mind doesn't worry, because you understand, you realize, that the trouble comes from the worried mind, not the outer conditions that trigger my worrying. This is really the key point. Outer conditions only trigger a mind that is prone to a reaction. And then this reaction creates suffering. If there's one thing you have to probably keep in mind, it would be that. You're not denying the world, and saying all of this doesn't really exist because I live in a bubble, and because I'm in a bubble I can be cool, and I'm almost enlightened. No. But you realize that whatever comes your way is kind of like teasing you.

You know, in a very trivial manner I say the world is doing it's lap dance on you. You don't have to touch. You can just see it, and why I use this trivial example is because actually that's what happened to the Buddha. You know, when he was about to reach enlightenment, obstructions appeared to him in the form of beautiful women (because he was a man, I guess, if he would have been a woman then it would have been Chippendales) trying to trigger his reaction so that he would lose the budding contact with his Buddha mind. He didn't say to these women, like, "*Oh, all you women come to disturb me, you're so bad, just go away,*" and whatever. He just looked at them for what they are. You look at the body and see it's just transient, there are like four seasons, there is spring, summer, fall and winter in the body, and that's what he saw. And there was not enough there for his trained mind to be reacting in a grasping way. The story tells that then the gorgeous women start withering and aging, and falling apart, and so on. We should really understand what this is about. It's not about the meanness or the vicious nature of these women who are disturbing this poor man who is about to reach enlightenment. That's not at all what this is about. This is about looking at reality for what it is, so that you don't project your expectations and desires on the screen of manifestation. And so if you do that then your mind remains unperturbed, non-distracted. You don't have to say good or bad, it is what it is. And you know it arises with causes and conditions, and it will disappear, but you have enough stability in your mind, and enough insight not to be perturbed by whatever the world throws at you. That's really what we should begin to work with, cultivate this capacity. We went through a long year here in the US, it was not only covid, but an election year, a surreal environment, like I don't even know what reality is at this point. And some of my friends just freaked out, the entire year, they are just like so angry, and so upset, and you could say from their point of view, yeah, there are reasons to be so angry and so upset, because logic, and common sense, and truth is disregarded, and it's just like everyday was another low, like, how low can we go? Like, man, there is no bottom to that thing. And I was looking at my mind, and, of course, now and then, I look at the news, and then I can feel that my mind suddenly gets sucked into that, and starts processing that and

generating a sense of indignation, or righteousness, or whatever, and then dividing what is good, what is bad, and it took me a lot of skill to step back and then really look at it in a dispassionate way, and see that there is suffering in this world. Most of the suffering comes from a mind that is obscured by its own ignorance. And that's what I am trying to address. I'm trying to address ignorance and the offspring of ignorance, and I work with individuals, not as a global world system. I'm not the United Nations. I'm talking to each of you, personally.

Maybe, as we have this dialogue in your mind. You can explore and true to your heart, true to Buddha nature, you A space that is crystal clear, you can look at all phenomena That's where your freedom is.



some insights, some new tracks will appear them, and find what is useful, beautiful your Buddha nature. As you tap into this progressively gain freedom, *moksha*, *Ab*. where you can look at the mind, where and not be fooled by them anymore.