



## Water Moon

*Lama Tsony*

*This morning you mentioned starting with an object, letting your mind rest on an object. I haven't done that, and I wanted to ask you about that?*

This is called: cultivating one-pointed attention, with the help of an outer support. The support doesn't really matter, yet some basic characteristics are needed. One is that it fits within your field of vision. It cannot be too big; otherwise your eyes will need to move to see it. It cannot be too small, because then there would be a tension when you try to see it. You have to define something that will be within your field of vision, slightly below, so that your gaze can be slightly directed downward. Your reference point during your session will be this visual object. When your mind is drifting, in a train of thoughts and comments about whatever pops up, as soon as you see that you are distracted or drifting, you simply let go and come back to the object. It requires a little training, because while you may think that you are looking at the object your mind is drifting. Your eye is looking at the object, but not your visual consciousness. Sometimes we are staring at something, it looks like we are looking at something, though we are not really seeing it. The eyes of our mind are seeing some other landscapes and some other stories. The idea, here, is that we have a reference point, which is purely artificial. Eventually we won't need a reference point. Because the mind is not really going anywhere, it is just being distracted; an artificial yet useful reference point to come back to is needed.

Among the outer support, here are two types of objects you can use. One type is called ordinary. That could be a stone, a crystal, a tree, a mountain in the distance.... anything that is stable enough for you to rest upon. There is a second category of objects; these are outer objects inducing a blessing. This refers mainly to a Buddha statue, or a photographic image of the Buddha. The Buddha representation must be inspiring, because you create a mirror-like relationship with it. You should choose an object with very good features, beautiful and inspiring. If the object has imperfections, for instance crooked or not well finished, you could get imprints in your mind that contain this imperfection. Fortunately there are many really good images available that are authentic art, beautiful thangkas and statues, for instance from the store at the

Rubin Museum collection in NYC, or their website called [Himalayanart.org](http://Himalayanart.org) which has appropriate images that you can easily enlarge and download.

When you meditate on this Buddha statue, you place it in front of you, slightly below, so that your gaze goes downward, following the tip of your nose, you let your attention rest on the heart, the central section of the torso of the Buddha. You try to free your mind from any material grasping, such as: “*oh it is a beautiful Buddha, it is probably an antique, I got it for a good price...*”, a sort of materialist approach of the statue. But rather try to use this as a support to develop a connection with your Buddha nature. It is merely a statue, maybe made of copper, silver, brass or whatever, or a photograph, but it conjures beauty, inspiration. It should be regarded as a rainbow, a hologram. The ideal would be a hologram of a Buddha statue that would be really good. There would be a presence yet obviously empty, like the union of form and emptiness, which you could begin to relate to.

The Buddha is radiating light; it spreads beyond the statue, beyond the photograph. It is more like the presence of awakening, with its radiant nature, yet insubstantial, ungraspable, as your mind truly is. This has a revealing effect, like when we look in the mirror to see the reflection of our face and come to figure out what our face may look like. We use the Buddha statue as a mirror of enlightenment. For that reason this support is inducing a blessing, inducing something beyond the simple object that helps you to be focused. This is using for your meditation: an outer object, ordinary or inducing some sort of awakening experience or blessing.

You can also use a support within you. This refers basically to visualization. The visualization can be a sphere of light in the center of your body. Your body is perceived as an insubstantial luminous form. Tibetans, who are nomads, like to live in tents, so they used to describe this as a “silk tent”. You perceive the outer form of your body, but the center, is hollow. Translucent like silk, the light can shine through. That was the metaphor they used, to describe form and emptiness in their culture. But we can use a hologram. Your body is like a hologram. It feels like your body, but you are not trapped by this projected image of your body being made of flesh and bone, by heavy and substantial matter. Contemplate the silk tent, or hologram, of your body. At the very center of your body, inside, at the level the solar plexus area, imagine a tiny little sphere, that is the size of a green pea, very very small, of pure energy, that is white in color, and very vibrant, vibrant but not buzzing...it is not restless. If you place your attention on that, your mind might become buzzing and restless. It is a drop of insubstantial radiant energy. This is the very essence of your mind. You can let your attention rest on that.

Some visualization will use a seed syllable (*Bija*), the union of form and sound. This *Bija*, can be your specific wavelength, the wavelength of your energy, of your mind. As an example, when you say “T”, you have essentially described yourself. You can write it, you can have a letter that says “T”, and “T” is the sound that describes you and your dreams and everything. Everything is contained in this quintessential sound.

Some *Bija* are generic, such as: *HUNG*, or *HRI*, a sound-letter that is the beginning of an elaborate ritual that belongs to the tantric approach, with visualizations and mantras. At the beginning there is always this sound-letter. Some form of support being offered by this letter, you can visualize it to help quieting your mind.

To become familiar with this you have to be properly instructed. In the Bodhi Path centers we will progressively introduce the practice of Avalokiteshvara who is the embodiment of the mind of awakening (*Bodhicitta*), compassion and loving-kindness. The quintessential sound of this energy of loving kindness and wisdom is *HRI*, which you can write in English H.R.I, but it has a beautiful form in Sanskrit श्री, and

also in Tibetan རྩོམ་ . The shape of the letter is not randomly drawn; it is the movement of the sound. When you visualize the form, and you associate it with the sound, it is the union of form, sound and emptiness. You can let your mind rest on this. This is the use of mantras. The word mantra, in Sanskrit, comes from the noun *manas* (*mind*) and the verbal root *tra* (to protect).

It is a sound and a form that guards your mind. Therefore it is an appropriate reference point.

You can use either a sound or visualization. It can be a sphere of energy, or a letter, which is a little more elaborate. From this you can develop a very elaborate visualization, with many deities and so on. This is more complex because one has to really understand the symbolic representation of every aspect of the iconography, the way the divinities are drawn and designed, and so on. There is a little bit of work involved.

That is why usually we advise people to use something like a crystal or a piece of rock. My teacher Gendun Rinpoche's preference was a cup of water. A very nice, simple crystal bowl or glass, plain, nothing elaborate, so that you can see through it, filled up to the brim with water, placed in front of you so you can let your attention, rest on the surface of the water. He said it is an ordinary object, but it also induces a blessing, because you see here transparency and therefore emptiness, still, you can see also that the surface of this very still water reflects everything, so there is form.

In Asian poetry, they often mention, to describe illusion, the water-moon. I don't know if you have ever read Basho, or other Japanese poets, but they talk often about the water-moon. Here is my rendition of their inspiration:

Moon-like shiny illusion  
On the pond of my mind  
My busy head cannot look up  
Reality eludes me

The water-moon is the reflection of the moon on the surface of a stretch of water, and this is often used as a metaphor for us to understand the union of form and emptiness, without denigration or exaggeration. Exaggeration would be, the moon is in the water. Denigration would be there is no moon in the water. As I can see the moon in the water, denigration is not tenable. If you assert that there is a moon in the water, when you shake the water, there is no moon anymore to be seen, therefore this extreme position is also not tenable. We are invited to reflect on the union of form and emptiness beyond the extremes of exaggeration or denigration. Alternatively, the moon in the water is not either some sort of combo of exaggeration and denigration. The moon is kind of the water, in the water, but yet not in the water. This is a contradiction. You cannot assert this either. Yet something is happening. When you see the water-moon, you are left with this experience that your mental consciousness cannot compute. The mental consciousness is very very binary, one-zero, Yes-no. As you meditate on this, there is a moment where you go beyond. The experience you have of this, we cannot even call it an experience of integration, because integration will be a little bit of both. It is beyond even "*a little bit of both*". That is not something that you can either, assert as real. If you say: "*it is beyond the integration, beyond a little bit of both*", you are back to your first assertion: "*IT IS*". We already saw that this position was not tenable. With the help of this support, beyond the simple calm abiding, you progressively have a glimpse of what could be the union of form and emptiness. Which is very important, because once you have this experience of the water-moon, you can extend it to any of the senses experiences you may have, what you hear, what you taste, what you smell. That means... the world, as well as myself, arises as a water-moon. And the water-moon doesn't exist as an autonomous, inherent, permanent reality or self, but it displays a "mere" existence we are aware of through this play of

interdependent cause and effect. There is space, there is water, there is reflection, there is moon, there is radiance, there is an observer, therefore there is moon in the water, and yet there is no moon in the water.

Poets are looking quite seriously at things that we consider as totally trifle in our very active, constructive, materialist approach. Why would we spend hours looking at the water-moon? It is extremely important because that is the basis of all manifestation. How can you pretend to control your world when you don't even know its nature? It is a statement of arrogance and ignorance. We are busy controlling, creating, developing and so on, but we don't have the leisure to look at the water-moon, and therefore understand form and emptiness. What do we know about the world? Nothing! So we are living in a world, which is fantasy. It is a world of imputation. We think: "*it is like this or that*", but it's pure speculation. When you look at the water-moon you come to the experience that most of the time you are engaging the world based on speculation. Nothing really stable can be built on this absence of certainty. Seriously, nothing can be built on such a delusional relation to the world. Therefore it is very important to watch the water-moon, spend a long time looking at the water-moon.

When there is a beautiful full moon night, as you have ponds here, you should go on this little pier, sit there, and look at the water-moon, and contemplate this. Let your mind rest there, beyond thinking. Thinking, you will always come up with "*there is a moon, no there is no moon, ah, maybe a little bit of both, nah, neither, nor.*" You'll spend your whole night thinking about it. That is not looking at the water-moon. That is thinking about what might be the water-moon, which is very, very different. It is like the difference between having a dinner, and reading the menu. It is two different things. You can be an expert at menus, and die of starvation. So, spend some time looking at the water-moon.

The water-moon can also be my body, perceived as a hologram. It could be the thoughts as they arise and fall. It could be the little sphere of radiant energy at the very center of my heart. It could be the hologram of the Buddha statue in front of me. All these objects offer you a support, until you come to the point where you don't need it anymore. This is when your mind is known as a water-moon. Your mind is the water that is the essence of emptiness. It is also the moon because it is radiant; it is cognitive, and creative. Mind is the water-moon. To know the water-moon is to have non-dual experience of your mind. This is *rigpa*, non-dual awareness, spaciousness, and the ungraspable insubstantial essence of mind. The only thing that is left to do is just get used to it! Acquainted, this is what meditation means. You're not trying to drag the moon into the water, or throw the water up to the moon. This would a mind made meditation. It will never produce what a genuine observation of the water-moon will.

As you can see, there are many ways of using the supports. You offer a reference point to come back to when you get distracted. Breath can be one. It is an inside-outside support. Outside when you breathe out, inside when you breathe in. It is like a bridge. Other methods for achieving *one-pointedness* are: The outer object, ordinary or inducing blessing, the inner object with a visualization, a sound-shape visualization, or the sound itself, as you recite mantras. With time comes a moment when you won't need a support. Your mind will be able rest in itself. At this point, you have reached the capacity to move on to the next phase of the discovery of the true nature of mind. The next phase of meditation is to look at the water-moon. First you have to rest one pointedly on the moon in the water, when you can do that very relaxed you change your perspective. At this point you don't have to work hard to be one-pointedly resting anymore, this has been acquired.

The new challenge is to contemplate the water-moon. There is a little know-how, a little trick that you have to discover by yourself about the water-moon contemplation. It cannot be discovered simply through logical reasoning, or relying on scriptures. Direct experience is required.

If I say, "*Ask yourself what is the nature of the mind before the moon arises, what is the nature of the mind once the moon has arisen, what is the nature of the mind when the moon disappears, where was the moon before it arose, where is it now that*

*it has disappeared?*” it might lead you in a wrong direction, which is to *think* about your contemplation. You risk developing only an analytical meditation. Even if it is useful, to begin with, to *understand* the process of contemplation, it is only through a long silent observation that the habit of proper contemplation is formed.

When we try to cultivate calm abiding, we need, first, some support. We need counting our breath; we need an object of reference. But as soon as we can do without, we should. It is a temporary support. We shouldn't feel attached and forced in anyway to stay there. As soon as you feel that mind can rest in itself, you should let it rest, uncontrived.

The next phase of meditation is to look at the water-moon of your thoughts, the water-moon of your body, the water-moon of the sense perceptions. To begin with, you should direct your observation, asking yourself in a very light way: *“What is the nature of mind at rest?”* It should be asked very lightly. Like a simple, silent, question mark. Avoid any heaviness in the questioning that would disturb the observation. It is really very fragile. You come to the sweet point of balance of your body, your breath-energy and your mind. You totally relax. Then something surfaces. It becomes obvious. If you would be asked to translate it into words, you couldn't even find the words. Like when, sometimes, you remain speechless, in a state of surprise, in a state of awe. This is really very subtle. As soon as you label it too *“noisily”*: *“Okay, it is like this”*, splash...you made so much noise that the water-moon disappeared. The frog of conceptual thinking splashed the water. Then you have to stand back, and let go. But of course then you are slightly annoyed: *“Darn! I almost got the moon!”*

You badly want to get the moon, and it wakes up all the bullfrogs in your pond. You have to keep watching the moon, and then maybe a thought arises, not like a frog, maybe more like a *Koi*. It agitates a slightly the surface of the water, but not as badly as a big frog. You can still see the moon, even through the wavelets. Whether there is movement or not you can still connect with the moon. This is not an analytical meditation anymore. It was induced by analytical meditation. It doesn't have always to be so. In the Kagyu tradition, in our lineage, we emphasize the entrance in this observation of the water-moon, not systematically by analytical meditation, but by devotion. Devotion is surrender. Devotion is clarity, confidence. It arises from truly understanding what is the way to discover the nature of mind. You don't have doubts in your mind that there might be another method that would be better. The urge to find another tool that would work better than this one. You're fully satisfied with this. You know it works. You just have to give time to the process. There is a sense of faith, but also a sense of surrender, letting go of all other possibilities. We could translate this as renunciation. We are renouncing trying to find a better way, for a better, bigger, faster result. We let go of that. We have a total confidence in the process.

We simply enter there. We make it possible by first working on calm abiding, one pointedness. Later, we drop the crutches, let the mind rest without the help of support, and look at the water-moon. Waxing moon, full moon, waning moon, new moon, waxing moon, full moon... You keep watching the cycle of the waxing and waning moon, all your thoughts, arising and ceasing, arising and ceasing. This movement does not disturb you. Arising, ceasing. You're not disturbed either by the coarse movement of *“yesterday, tomorrow, I want, I don't want.”* This has been pacified. It is like if you were holding your breath while watching. Clarity will come. You begin to see really what water-moon is. Still, there are no words to describe your experience. Nobody can.

The 3rd Karmapa says in the *Mahamudra Prayer*:

*“Not existent; even the Victorious ones do not see it.*

*Not absent; the basis of both Samsara and Nirvana.*

*Not a paradox; integration, the middle path.*

*May I actualize mind's Dharmata, released from partiality."*

There is no object to be seen. But you cannot say it is non-existent, because this is the very basis of confusion and liberation. You are aware of this mystery in a way that cannot be described. This is really the way of contemplating mind. The more time you spend observing the water-moon, the better. Ceasing to observe the water-moon as an outer witness. Entering fully the water-moon experience. The observer, the water-moon and the water are not seen anymore as three separate entities, but as an interdependent arising of the experience of the water-moon.

Once you know how to enter this experience, everything becomes easier. To sustain this experience is also very natural. Once you know you don't have to do anything particular to sustain it, no more artificial meditation. You simply cease to feed what disturbs the natural establishment of mind in its own contemplation. You don't do something for it. You merely give up what goes against it. You let go the ambitions such as: *"I want to see the water-moon!"* This desire posits that there is out there a water-moon, an object of consumption that I have to own. Old, die-hard, habit!

Longchenpa, the great Dzogchen master said: *"One has to spend long hours in non-doing."* Non-doing means entering the experience of the water-moon. That is the best we can say about it. Still it doesn't really describe the experience.

But you know what? It doesn't matter for you then. Because once you have the experience, any word will, somewhat, make sense. Someone might say about it: *"Oh, its like the play of the rain in the clouds."* You got it. Or: *"it is like the wind in the bamboo"*, you got it. You became a full time water-mooner. That could be on your ID tag: *Full time water-mooner*

There is not a moment where you have to *"do"* your meditation. Do you understand? At this point you are not telling yourself anymore: *"Oh, gosh, I forgot to do my meditation today, I have to do my meditation now, okay I'm doing it, that is it, I've done it now let's watch T.V."* You are beyond that.

Sometimes people ask me: *"how often do you meditate."* It is a difficult question to which I often answer by saying: *"In your terms, never. In mine, well, I wouldn't say 24/7 because that would be immodest, but, as often as possible."* It is a tricky question. If I say, *"Never"*, some people might say: *"Tsony is never meditating."* Monkey see, monkey do. They take it as a justification for their laziness. So what should I say?

I am often confronted with a very interesting thing. As I am teaching different people, at different stages of their encounter with the Buddha nature and their mind, I have to teach and practice different techniques with them. Sometimes, in a class with people having their first encounter with this path, we have to work a lot with basic techniques, counting the breath and so on. At the end of the day, I feel like I have lost my meditation. I believe that, while we meditate together, I also have to do what I instructed them to do. I am sort of trapped by this thinking. When I finish the meditation class, and I go out, simply sitting on the deck, I reconnect with the water-moon simplicity.

One has to become able to sense what is necessary at different moments of your exploration of mind's nature. Every day is different. There are days where I definitely need counting my breath, because I'm very busy, I'm tired, drowsy, agitated, whatever... I really need to work first, counting my breath, checking my posture. If I do that for a while it opens up. Then, I get rid of the crutches, and simply stay there. Maybe the water-moon will come. But if I want the water-moon to come, then... you know.

Some of my friends, about my age, are wondering how to find the perfect partner. They ask me: *"We fear to be alone for the rest of our lives. How can we find the ideal soul mate?"* I answer: *"I have no idea, it is often a miracle."* The only thing I know is that if you badly want it, if you're on the hunt, it will never happen. Not that I know much about relationship, but I know a little bit about meditation. If your lover is like the water-moon, and you try to grasp the moon, put a ring on it, to fix it so that it belongs to you, simply by

this intention you've already lost it. The water-moon is like a zebra. You have to be very careful when you try to come close to these animals. Before you know it, they ran away. It is also very true for the mind. I have observed it again and again in the passionate relation I could have had with my water-moon. The same goes with anything in this world. The only thing you can do is to open up and be engaged in a very non-conceptual, non-grasping relation with the water-moon.

Jacques Prévert, a French poet wrote *How to paint the portrait of a bird* (*How to Paint the Portrait of a Bird. Jacques Prévert ISBN-10: 1596432152; ISBN-13: 978-1596432154*), a poem that illustrate beautifully the process I am trying to describe

It is the same thing with the water-moon. You create a cage: calm-abiding techniques. It has nothing to do with painting the bird. You might say, what a stupid poem, really. Why do you have to build a cage, to paint a bird? Because you cannot paint a bird! Think about this. You cannot paint a bird. You cannot paint, create, conceptualize, describe by words, the water-moon of your Buddha-nature. So how do you make a picture of something that cannot be represented?

First you create a cage: calm abiding, posture, and counting your breath, being here. Once you are Here, the bird will show up. You have to sustain attention: close the door of the cage. Sustain attention, but very carefully. Then you have to let go of the bars, one after another. They are all the concepts you have about how to paint the bird, what a bird is and what a painter is. Remove the bars one after another. You have a portrait of a bird that you never actually painted. The bird appeared, became perceptible, because you made some effort to be present by designing the cage, finding something that is suitable, useful, and beautiful for the bird. This is your mind of awakening. This is generosity, ethic, all the six paramitas, and the transcendent qualities that you develop. This is what is useful for the bird. A lots of things could illustrate your exploration of the water-moon such as this French poet did. He probably never thought that he was describing in his poem the path of awakening. But that is the beauty of the thing. For his part Rinpoche loves the hologram metaphor.

This is how to work with supports without being trapped by them. Dare to explore. This is your mind, it is not my mine. Your mind does not belong to a church. It doesn't belong to the Kagyu lineage, or the Buddha. Your mind doesn't even belong to you, anyway. But you begin an exploration of this water-moon, and for that you need a frame, therefore you need a "cage". If you don't have this frame you will never see the bird. Something that is everywhere remains nowhere for who doesn't know how to look.

I like to take photographs. What is photography? Frame and composition. You can have color, but I think color is a trick. I'm talking about "real" photography, black and white. Basic contrast of form and emptiness. Of course you can have all the subtle tinges of color, but they are like a trick in your mind. They divert you from the real thing. Basic black and white, form and emptiness, composition. This is about a frame. The picture is a frame. If you don't have a frame, it is not a photograph. Your eye is lost in spaciousness. At this point of your journey on the discovery of the true nature of your mind, you cannot deal with spaciousness. You need a "cage". You need a frame. Often people say: "You need to think out of the box." Sure, but first you have to know the box. How can you think outside of the box, if you have no idea of what the box is? You have to think first within a frame. Later, this frame will help you to become acquainted with spaciousness, by contrast: in the frame, out of the frame. Then you can think out of the frame, in a spacious, not scattered, way. Then you can really embrace the true nature of your mind, which is limitless, unborn. If you don't have the frame to begin with, you will never do that.

If you want to be a writer, a painter, a musician, dancer, or a cook, but you don't want to learn the steps, you don't want to learn the words and the grammar, you don't want to learn the basic elements of taste, composition, spices, and all of that. You don't want to learn your ABC's. You just want to be smart. It is never going to happen. Like me, who wants to dance, but as long as I don't dance like Fred Astaire, I'm

not going to try. If some of you have been dancing, you know how much work it is before the magic of the suspended moment. Same for musicians, before you reach the Blue Note. It requires so much work. The frame precedes and induces the freedom. Freedom is just not *whatever*. *Whatever* remains *whatever*. Freedom moves beyond the frame once the frame is mastered. Therefore you need the “*cage*”, and you need to know how to let go of the cage, once it is the time to do so.

The problem with techniques is that often, when people practice a technique, within a school, a system, they tend to get stuck. They cannot think outside of the boundary. They keep grazing, it is nice and cozy. They know their pasture, but they’re stuck. Like in the poem, you make a cage, once the bird has come, you would close the cage, end of the story! There is more than that to the process. It is not so much a poem about how to draw a portrait of a bird, as it is a poem about how to make a cage. How to remove slowly and carefully the bars of the cage without disturbing and harming the colors of the bird. It is about form and formlessness, it is very important to understand this.

There is often a lot of confusion about spaciousness and freedom. There is also a dash of laziness in the mix. We think we know how to manage spaciousness, wanting to be free. We think, mistakenly, that freedom has no frame. But in reality, you have to reach the border of the frame to understand. If you say: “*I want my child to be really open minded*”, and you let that child do anything he or she wants, you are actually generating a cosmic monster. You have to display some borders of *do and don't*. It is only when you sense some limit that by contrast, limitlessness will be realized. Otherwise you are constantly expanding, trying to find a sense of who and where you are. That is how you become a cosmic monster. It applies for a kid, and also for whatever discipline you practice, art, cooking, anything.

You need the training. This frame is very often transmitted within a tradition. Tradition is the warehouse of frames. You receive this, you learn, you touch your limit. You begin to learn the contrast of limit and unlimited spaciousness, not with a scattered cosmic monster mind. You should also, now and then, step over the board fence. It is very important to be able to dare to do that. Not in a provocative way, like a teenage crisis: “*I’m going to show you what I can do!*” There are moments where you need to expand your experience. You adjust the way you practiced so far. You know how to practice, you became skilled. It is a fine balance though. We have to fail, that is okay. If we want to be perfect at the first attempt you will be paralyzed. Failure is part of the learning process. You fail, you learn, you change, you adjust, you move on. I rather like to accompany somebody who is daring, than constantly have to wake up to reality somebody who is trying, very conscientiously, to paint within the limit of the printed drawing. We are often like this in our meditation, but hopefully sometime we dare. The freedom of the movement is important. Are my body, breath and mind together as I draw? Breathing out, breathing in, when you use your brush. Are you connecting your breath with your movement, or are you just trying to make a “*nice drawing*”, with no involvement of your body, your attention and your breath?

Painting, dancing, cooking demand a full engagement of the body, the breath, energy, and of your insight. It is risky. You are stressed, because you don’t want to take a chance, afraid you might screw it up, feeling the urge to be very cautious. Many people meditate like this. Some other are totally discombobulated, arrogant and sloppy and think they are in the non-doing. So much so that they don't show up to meditation anymore.

So, be caring, be daring.