

THE
ESSENTIAL
CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA



EDITED BY CAROLYN ROSE GIMIAN

Shambhala

ABOUT THE BOOK

Chögyam Trungpa wrote more than two dozen books on Buddhism and the Shambhala path of warriorship. *The Essential Chögyam Trungpa* blends excerpts from bestsellers like *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, *Meditation in Action*, and other titles into a concise overview of Trungpa's teachings. Forty selections from fourteen different books articulate the secular path of the Shambhala warrior as well as the Buddhist path of meditation and awakening. This “new classic” vividly demonstrates Trungpa's great appreciation of Western culture which, combined with his deep understanding of the Tibetan tradition, makes these teachings uniquely accessible to contemporary readers. It will appeal to beginning students of meditation as well as seasoned readers of Eastern religion.

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA (1940-1987)—meditation master, teacher, and artist—founded Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, the first Buddhist-inspired university in North America; the Shambhala Training program; and an international association of meditation centers known as Shambhala International. He is the author of numerous books including *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, and *The Myth of Freedom*.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA was among the very first Tibetan Buddhist lamas to present the Buddhist teachings in English to Westerners and to publish those teachings in the English language. In 1966, Chögyam Trungpa published his account of his upbringing as a high lama in Tibet and recounted his daring escape over the Himalayas. Aptly enough, he entitled his first book *Born in Tibet*.

In the early 1970s, having spent a number of years in England (talks from these years were gathered together and published in *Meditation in Action*) and then having moved to North America, Chögyam Trungpa published the first collection of his talks in America. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* quickly garnered a substantial reputation on the American spiritual scene. It remains a classic today. Several other titles, including the popular *Myth of Freedom*, followed in the 1970s.

Then, in 1984, Trungpa Rinpoche published another title that broke new ground and captured the attention of a large readership. *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior* presented meditation as the path to what Trungpa Rinpoche referred to as “secular enlightenment.” The last book published before his death in 1987, it is available today not only in English but in nine foreign editions. Altogether, between his arrival in England in 1963 and his death in Canada in 1987, thirteen books of his were published in trade editions. In addition to his dharma teachings, two books of poetry were published as well as a translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* with Francesca Fremantle and several other translations from the Tibetan, joint efforts of Trungpa Rinpoche and the Naland Translation Committee.

Remarkably, since his passing, two of his senior editors, Judith Lief and Sherab Chödzin, have edited almost a dozen additional books of Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhist teachings. Among these, Ms. Lief has also edited two books that show us Chögyam Trungpa as artist: *The Art of Calligraphy: Joining Heaven and Earth* and *Dharma Art*. Trungpa Rinpoche's poetry has also been newly selected and presented in *Timely Rain*, edited by David I. Rome. And in addition to these trade editions, Vajradhatu Publications (the publishing arm of Chögyam Trungpa's meditation centers) continues to publish limited editions of edited transcripts and special-interest titles. All of this may be just the beginning of the literary legacy that he leaves us, for there remain several thousand dharma talks that could be transcribed, edited, and published.

The Essential Chögyam Trungpa is drawn from his two dozen books published by Shambhala Publications over the last thirty years. A complete listing of these titles can be found at the back of this volume. While I reread and considered all of these books, not all are represented here. *The Essential Chögyam Trungpa* includes thirty-eight selections drawn from fifteen published sources, one unpublished poem, and a chapter from the forthcoming *Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of Shambhala*. The present volume includes material on both the

Buddhist and the Shambhala teachings. It includes a sprinkling of Chögyam Trungpa's poems and several chapters on the theme of art but does not attempt to treat these aspects of his teaching comprehensively. The Shambhala teachings are presented first in this volume, although they were the later teachings given by Trungpa Rinpoche. Their accessibility and heartfelt nature made them seem the best introductory material for this book.

Although drawn from the diverse archive of Trungpa Rinpoche's published work, this volume has been structured to be read as a coherent whole. Rather than picking a page here and a page there, I generally have chosen complete chapters from his books, to allow the flavor and flow of his teaching style to come through. The reader will no doubt notice differences in tone, language, and style from one chapter to the next. Nevertheless, there is a unifying thread that runs through the material and connects it, one hopes, in a compelling fashion.

That thread is the essence of the teachings. Chögyam Trungpa was a master in presenting that essential quality, free from the trappings of exotic culture. The word *essence* comes to us from the Latin *esse*, "to be." If one were to summarize Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings in a single word or phrase, surely *being* and *how to be* might be terms one would choose. It was his passion, and one might even say his mission, to present the essence of nowness, the essence of being, as it manifests in all activities of life. Thus, it seems singularly appropriate to speak of the essential Chögyam Trungpa and to give that title to this book.

Trungpa Rinpoche presented the essence of the Shambhala path as basic goodness: the human nature of genuine tenderness and bravery. Within the Buddhist path, he often taught in terms of a journey through the three *yanas*—*hinayana*, *mahayana*, and *vajrayana*—the three great vehicles or schools of Buddhism. That three-yana structure has been incorporated into this book. The essence of the hinayana, or the narrow path, is the realization of egolessness through the practice of meditation. In the mahayana, the open path, the inherent quality of human wakefulness, or one's buddha nature, is an essential element. And on the diamond path of vajrayana, the essence is *vajra* nature: the indestructibility of sanity and wisdom. Whatever the subject, Chögyam Trungpa spoke from the heart and addressed the heart of the matter. His teaching was multifaceted and multidimensional. He spoke at once to both beginning practitioners and seasoned meditators.

In reviewing his published work to make selections for this volume, I was particularly struck by the inclusive, or nondualistic, nature of his teaching. Whatever the experience of the practitioner, whatever human strengths and weaknesses one possesses, Trungpa Rinpoche always encouraged us to start with the raw materials and not to reject any part of ourselves. In that sense as well, he spoke to what is essential in human beings and pointed out how it can be found throughout our experience, throughout our lives, good and bad, happy and sad.

One cannot adequately introduce *The Essential Chögyam Trungpa* without noting the author's remarkable grasp of English. Chögyam Trungpa loved the English language. He studied it; he played with it; and in the 1970s, he employed it to pioneer the language of Buddhism in America. By this, I mean that he sought

and found English words and phrases that would aptly convey the essence of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings in their new home: in the West and specifically in North America. He was a major force in the creation of a lexicon for the presentation of Buddhism in America, one that is used by virtually every teacher today. For example, while he certainly did not invent the word *ego*, he popularized the use of this term for the concept of *atman*, the self or the soul. And he used the term *egolessness* to apply to *anatman*, or the insubstantiality of self. “Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism”; “buddhadharma without credentials”; “one taste”; “crazy wisdom”; “back to square one”; “first thought—best thought”; “cool boredom”; “basic goodness”—these are but a few of the colorful phrases he employed to describe the noble path of the Buddha and the warrior’s sacred journey toward enlightened society.

I hope that the reader will enjoy the feast of teachings in this book and enjoy the words that Chögyam Trungpa used to serve up this feast. It has been daunting but rewarding to select the courses from the myriad ingredients that might have been used. Although this book seeks to present the essential Chögyam Trungpa, it is far from exhaustive. Some may find this a complete meal, but for many it will merely whet their appetite, like an hors d’oeuvre of *nowness*. For those readers, there are more than seventeen of his books still in print from which to choose.

May this book serve to introduce you to the work of this extraordinary dharmic master. May it proclaim genuine dharma in all directions.

Carolyn Rose Gimian
Halifax, Nova Scotia
October 1998

EDITOR'S NOTE

IN A VERY FEW PLACES in *The Essential Chögyam Trungpa*, I have made editorial changes. To create continuity from one chapter to the next, I have sometimes changed or reordered the opening sentences of a chapter. In several chapters, gender references have been modernized, and in some places, I have omitted material so specific to the original book that it would not be appropriate in its new context. Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization have been somewhat standardized, but some differences from one source to another remain.

C.R.G.

The Dohā of Confidence

Sad Song of the Four Remembrances

As I look constantly to the Great Eastern Sun,
Remembering the only father guru,
Overwhelming devotion blazes like a bonfire—
I, Chōkyi Gyatso, remain alone.

Having been abandoned by my heart friends,
Though my feverish mind feels great longing,
It is joyful that I am sustained by this great confidence
Of the only father guru and the Great Eastern Sun.

Having seen the beauty of a mist covering the mountain,
The pines moving gently in the wind,
The firm power of rock-hard earth,
I am constantly reminded of the splendor and beauty
Of the only father guru and the Great Eastern Sun.

Wildflowers extend everywhere
On mountain meadows filled with the sweet smell of fragrant herbs.
Seeing the gentle deer frolicking from place to place,
I constantly remember the compassion and gentleness
Of the only father guru and the Great Eastern Sun.

Fighting enemies in the chasm of love and hate,
Having sharpened the weapon's point of joy and sorrow, hope and fear,
Seeing again and again these cowardly hordes,
I take refuge in the sole confidence
Of the only father guru and the Great Eastern Sun.

Fatherless, always dwelling in foreign lands,
Motherless, not hearing the speech of my own country,
Friendless, tears not quenching my thirst,
Remembering the warriors of the father and mother lineages,
I live alone in the sole blessing
Of the only father guru and the Great Eastern Sun.

The Rain of Wisdom, Page 289

THE SACRED PATH OF THE WARRIOR



The Shambhala teachings are founded on the premise that there is basic human wisdom that can help solve the world's problems. This wisdom does not belong to any one culture or religion, nor does it come only from the West or the East. Rather, it is a tradition of human warriorship that has existed in many cultures at many times throughout history.

Creating an Enlightened Society

IN TIBET, as well as many other Asian countries, there are stories about a legendary kingdom that was a source of learning and culture for present-day Asian societies. According to the legends, this was a place of peace and prosperity, governed by wise and compassionate rulers. The citizens were equally kind and learned, so that, in general, the kingdom was a model society. This place was called Shambhala.

It is said that Buddhism played an important role in the development of the Shambhala society. The legends tell us that Shakyamuni Buddha gave advanced tantric teachings to the first king of Shambhala, Dawa Sangpo. These teachings, which are preserved as the *Kalacakra Tantra*, are considered to be among the most profound wisdom of Tibetan Buddhism. After the king had received the instruction, the stories say that all of the people of Shambhala began to practice meditation and to follow the Buddhist path of loving kindness and concern for all beings. In this way, not just the rulers but all of the subjects of the kingdom became highly developed people.

Among the Tibetan people, there is a popular belief that the kingdom of Shambhala can still be found, hidden in a remote valley somewhere in the Himalayas. There are, as well, a number of Buddhist texts that give detailed but obscure directions for reaching Shambhala, but there are mixed opinions as to whether these should be taken literally or metaphorically. There are also many texts that give us elaborate descriptions of the kingdom. For example, according to the *Great Commentary on the Kalacakra* by the renowned nineteenth-century Buddhist teacher Mipham, the land of Shambhala is north of the river Sita, and the country is divided by eight mountain ranges. The palace of the Rigdens, or the imperial rulers of Shambhala, is built on top of a circular mountain in the center of the country. This mountain, Mipham tells us, is named Kailasa. The palace, which is called the palace of Kalapa, comprises many square miles. In front of it to the south is a beautiful park known as Malaya, and in the middle of the park is a temple devoted to Kalacakra that was built by Dawa Sangpo.

Other legends say that the kingdom of Shambhala disappeared from the earth many centuries ago. At a certain point, the entire society had become enlightened, and the kingdom vanished into another more celestial realm. According to these stories, the Rigden kings of Shambhala continue to watch over human affairs and will one day return to earth to save humanity from destruction. Many Tibetans believe that the great Tibetan warrior king Gesar of Ling was inspired and guided by the Rigdens and the Shambhala wisdom. This reflects the belief in the celestial existence of the kingdom. Gesar is thought not to have traveled to Shambhala, so his link to the kingdom was a spiritual one. He lived in approximately the eleventh century and ruled the provincial kingdom of Ling, which is located in the province of Kham, east Tibet. Following Gesar's reign, stories about his accomplishments as a warrior and ruler sprang up throughout

Tibet, eventually becoming the greatest epic of Tibetan literature. Some legends say that Gesar will reappear from Shambhala, leading an army to conquer the forces of darkness in the world.

In recent years, some Western scholars have suggested that the kingdom of Shambhala may actually have been one of the historically documented kingdoms of early times, such as the Zhang-Zhung kingdom of Central Asia. Many scholars, however, believe that the stories of Shambhala are completely mythical. While it is easy enough to dismiss the kingdom of Shambhala as pure fiction, it is also possible to see in this legend the expression of a deeply rooted and very real human desire for a good and fulfilling life. In fact, among many Tibetan Buddhist teachers, there has long been a tradition that regards the kingdom of Shambhala not as an external place, but as the ground or root of wakefulness and sanity that exists as a potential within every human being. From that point of view, it is not important to determine whether the kingdom of Shambhala is fact or fiction. Instead, we should appreciate and emulate the ideal of an enlightened society that it represents.

I have presented a series of “Shambhala teachings” that use the image of the Shambhala kingdom to represent the ideal of secular enlightenment—that is, the possibility of uplifting our personal existence and that of others without the help of any religious outlook. For although the Shambhala tradition is founded on the sanity and gentleness of the Buddhist tradition, at the same time, it has its own independent basis, which is directly cultivating who and what we are as human beings. With the great problems now facing human society, it seems increasingly important to find simple and nonsectarian ways to work with ourselves and to share our understanding with others. The Shambhala teachings or “Shambhala vision,” as this approach is more broadly called, is one such attempt to encourage a wholesome existence for ourselves and others.

The current state of world affairs is a source of concern to all of us: the threat of nuclear war, widespread poverty and economic instability, social and political chaos, and psychological upheavals of many kinds. The world is in absolute turmoil. The Shambhala teachings are founded on the premise that there *is* basic human wisdom that can help to solve the world’s problems. This wisdom does not belong to any one culture or religion, nor does it come only from the West or the East. Rather, it is a tradition of human warriorship that has existed in many cultures at many times throughout history.

Warriorship here does not refer to making war on others. Aggression is the source of our problems, not the solution. Here the word *warrior* is taken from the Tibetan *pawo*, which literally means “one who is brave.” Warriorship in this context is the tradition of human bravery, or the tradition of fearlessness. The North American Indians had such a tradition, and it also existed in South American Indian societies. The Japanese ideal of the samurai also represented a warrior tradition of wisdom, and there have been principles of enlightened warriorship in Western Christian societies as well. King Arthur is a legendary example of warriorship in the Western tradition, and great rulers in the Bible, such as King David, are examples of warriors common to both the Jewish and

Christian traditions. On our planet Earth, there have been many fine examples of warriorship.

The key to warriorship and the first principle of Shambhala vision is not being afraid of who you are. Ultimately, that is the definition of bravery: not being afraid of yourself. Shambhala vision teaches that in the face of the world's great problems, we can be heroic and kind at the same time. Shambhala vision is the opposite of selfishness. When we are afraid of ourselves and afraid of the seeming threat the world presents, then we become extremely selfish. We want to build our own little nests, our own cocoons, so that we can live by ourselves in a secure way.

But we can be much more brave than that. We must try to think beyond our homes, beyond the fire burning in the fireplace, beyond sending our children to school or getting to work in the morning. We must try to think how we can help this world. If we don't help, nobody will. It is our turn to help the world. At the same time, helping others does not mean abandoning our individual lives. You don't have to rush out to become the mayor of your city or the president of the United States in order to help others, but you can begin with your relatives and friends and the people around you. In fact, you can start with yourself. The important point is to realize that you are never off duty. You can never just relax because the whole world needs help.

While everyone has a responsibility to help the world, we can create additional chaos if we try to impose our ideas or our help upon others. Many people have theories about what the world needs. Some people think that the world needs communism; some people think that the world needs democracy; some people think that technology will save the world; some people think that technology will destroy the world. The Shambhala teachings are not based on converting the world to another theory. The premise of Shambhala vision is that in order to establish an enlightened society for others, we need to discover what inherent we have to offer the world. So to begin with, we should make an effort to examine our own experience, in order to see what it contains that is of value in helping ourselves and others to uplift their existence.

If we are willing to take an unbiased look, we will find that in spite of all our problems and confusion, all our emotional and psychological ups and downs, there is something basically good about our existence as human beings. Unless we can discover that ground of goodness in our own lives, we cannot hope to improve the lives of others. If we are simply miserable and wretched beings, how can we possibly imagine, let alone realize, an enlightened society?

Discovering real goodness comes from appreciating very simple experiences. We are not talking about how good it feels to make a million dollars or finally graduate from college or buy a new house, but we are speaking here of the basic goodness of being alive—which does not depend on our accomplishments or fulfilling our desires. We experience glimpses of goodness all the time, but we often fail to acknowledge them. When we see a bright color, we are witnessing our own inherent goodness. When we hear a beautiful sound, we are hearing our own basic goodness. When we step out of the shower, we feel fresh and clean, and

when we walk out of a stuffy room, we appreciate the sudden whiff of fresh air. These events may take a fraction of a second, but they are real experiences of goodness. They happen to us all the time, but usually we ignore them as mundane or purely coincidental. According to the Shambhala principles, however, it is worthwhile to recognize and take advantage of those moments, because they are revealing basic nonaggression and freshness in our lives—basic goodness.

Every human being has a basic nature of goodness, which is undiluted and unconfused. That goodness contains tremendous gentleness and appreciation. As human beings, we can make love. We can stroke someone with a gentle touch; we can kiss someone with gentle understanding. We can appreciate beauty. We can appreciate the best of this world. We can appreciate its vividness: the yellowness of yellow, the redness of red, the greenness of green, the purpleness of purple. Our experience is real. When yellow is yellow, can we say it is red if we don't like the yellowness of it? That would be contradicting reality. When we have sunshine, can we reject it and say that the sunshine is terrible? Can we really say that? When we have brilliant sunshine or wonderful snowfall, we appreciate it. And when we appreciate reality, it can actually work on us. We may have to get up in the morning after only a few hours' sleep, but if we look out the window and see the sun shining, it can cheer us up. We can actually cure ourselves of depression when we recognize that the world we have is good.

It is not just an arbitrary idea that the world is good, but it is good because we can *experience* its goodness. We can experience our world as healthy and straightforward, direct and real, because our basic nature is to go along with the goodness of situations. The human potential for intelligence and dignity is attuned to experiencing the brilliance of the bright blue sky, the freshness of green fields, and the beauty of the trees and mountains. We have an actual connection to reality that can wake us up and make us feel basically, fundamentally good. Shambhala vision is tuning in to our ability to wake ourselves up and recognize that goodness can happen to us. In fact, it is happening already.

But then, there is still a question. You might have made a genuine connection to your world: catching a glimpse of sunshine, seeing bright colors, hearing good music, eating good food, or whatever it may be. But how does a glimpse of goodness relate with ongoing experience? On the one hand, you might feel: "I want to get that goodness that is in me and in the phenomenal world." So you rush around trying to find a way to possess it. Or on an even cruder level, you might say: "How much does it cost to get that? That experience was so beautiful. I want to own it." The basic problem with that approach is that you never feel satisfied even if you get what you want, because you still *want* so badly. If you take a walk on Fifth Avenue, you see that kind of desperation. You might say that the people shopping on Fifth Avenue have good taste and that therefore they have possibilities of realizing human dignity. But on the other hand, it is as though they were covered with thorns. They want to grasp more and more and more.

Then, there is the approach of surrendering or humbling yourself to get in touch with goodness. Someone tells you that he can make you happy if you will just give your life to his cause. If you believe that he has the goodness that you

want, you may be willing to shave your hair or wear robes or crawl on the floor or eat with your hands to get in touch with goodness. You are willing to trade in your dignity and become a slave.

Both of those situations are attempts to retrieve something good, something real. If you are rich, you are willing to spend thousands of dollars on it. If you are poor, you are willing to commit your life to it. But there is something wrong with both of those approaches.

The problem is that when we begin to realize the potential goodness of ourselves, we often take our discovery much too seriously. We might kill for goodness or die for goodness; we want it so badly. What is lacking is a sense of humor. Humor here does not mean telling jokes or being comical or criticizing others and laughing at them. A genuine sense of humor is having a light touch, not beating reality into the ground but appreciating reality with a light touch. The basis of Shambhala vision is rediscovering that perfect and real sense of humor, that light touch of appreciation.

If you look at yourself, if you look at your mind, if you look at your activities, you can repossess the humor that you have lost in the course of your life. To begin with, you have to look at your ordinary domestic reality: your knives, your fork, your plates, your telephone, your dishwasher, and your towels—ordinary things. There is nothing mystical or extraordinary about them, but if there is no connection with ordinary everyday situations, if you don't examine your mundane life, then you will never find any humor or dignity or, ultimately, any reality.

The way you comb your hair, the way you dress, the way you wash your dishes—all of those activities are an extension of sanity; they are a way of connecting with reality. A fork is a fork, of course. It is a simple implement of eating. But at the same time, the extension of your sanity and your dignity may depend on how you use your fork. Very simply, Shambhala vision is trying to provoke you to understand how you live, your relationship with ordinary life.

As human beings, we are basically awake and we *can* understand reality. We are not enslaved by our lives; we are free. Being free, in this case, means simply that we have a body and a mind, and we can uplift ourselves in order to work with reality in a dignified and humorous way. If we begin to perk up, we will find that the whole universe—including the seasons, the snowfall, the ice, and the mud—also powerfully working with us. Life is a humorous situation, but it is not mocking us. We find that, after all, we can handle our world; we can handle our universe properly and fully in an uplifted fashion.

The discovery of basic goodness is not a religious experience, particularly. Rather, it is the realization that we can directly experience and work with reality, the real world that we are in. Experiencing the basic goodness of our lives makes us feel that we are intelligent and decent people and that the world is not a threat. When we feel that our lives are genuine and good, we do not have to deceive ourselves or other people. We can see our shortcomings without feeling guilty or inadequate, and at the same time, we can see our potential for extending goodness to others. We can tell the truth straightforwardly and be absolutely open, but steadfast at the same time.

The essence of warriorship, or the essence of human bravery, is refusing to give up on anyone or anything. We can never say that we are simply falling to pieces or that anyone else is, and we can never say that about the world either. Within our lifetime, there will be great problems in the world, but let us make sure that within our lifetime, no disasters happen. We can prevent them. It is up to us. We can save the world from destruction, to begin with. That is why Shambhala vision exists. It is a centuries-old idea: by serving this world, we can save it. But saving the world is not enough. We have to work to build an enlightened human society as well.

Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Pages 25-34

Discovering Basic Goodness

A GREAT DEAL OF chaos in the world occurs because people don't appreciate themselves. Having never developed sympathy or gentleness toward themselves, they cannot experience harmony or peace within themselves, and therefore, what they project to others is also inharmonious and confused. Instead of appreciating our lives, we often take our existence for granted or we find it depressing and burdensome. People threaten to commit suicide because they aren't getting what they think they deserve out of life. They blackmail others with the threat of suicide, saying that they will kill themselves if certain things don't change. Certainly we should take our lives seriously, but that doesn't mean driving ourselves to the brink of disaster by complaining about our problems or holding a grudge against the world. We have to accept personal responsibility for uplifting our lives.

When you don't punish or condemn yourself, when you relax more and appreciate your body and mind, you begin to contact the fundamental notion of basic goodness in yourself. So it is extremely important to be willing to open yourself to yourself. Developing tenderness toward yourself allows you to see both your problems and your potential accurately. You don't feel that you have to ignore your problems or exaggerate your potential. That kind of gentleness toward yourself and appreciation of yourself is very necessary. It provides the ground for helping yourself and others.

As human beings, we have a working basis within ourselves that allows us to uplift our state of existence and cheer up fully. That working basis is always available to us. We have a mind and a body, which are very precious to us. Because we have a mind and body, we can comprehend this world. Existence is wonderful and precious. We don't know how long we will live, so while we have our life, why not make use of it? Before we even make use of it, why don't we appreciate it?

How do we discover this kind of appreciation? Wishful thinking or simply talking about it does not help. In the Shambhala tradition, the discipline for developing both gentleness toward ourselves and appreciation of our world is the sitting practice of meditation. The practice of meditation was taught by the Lord Buddha over twenty-five hundred years ago, and it has been part of the Shambhala tradition since that time. It is based on an oral tradition: from the time of the Buddha, this practice has been transmitted from one human being to another. In this way, it has remained a living tradition, so that, although it is an ancient practice, it is still up to date. In this chapter, we are going to discuss the technique of meditation in some detail, but it is important to remember that if you want to fully understand this practice, you need direct, personal instruction.

By *meditation* here, we mean something very basic and simple that is not tied to

any one culture. We are talking about a very basic act: sitting on the ground assuming a good posture, and developing a sense of our spot, our place on the earth. This is the means of rediscovering ourselves and our basic goodness, the means to tune ourselves in to genuine reality, without any expectations or preconceptions.

The word *meditation* is sometimes used to mean contemplating a particular theme or object: meditating *on* such and such a thing. By meditating on a question or problem, we can find the solution to it. Sometimes meditation also is connected with achieving a higher state of mind by entering into a trance or absorption state of some kind. But here we are talking about a completely different concept of meditation: unconditional meditation, without any object or idea in mind. In the Shambhala tradition, meditation is simply training our state of being so that our mind and body can be synchronized. Through the practice of meditation, we can learn to be without deception, to be fully genuine and alive.

Our life is an endless journey; it is like a broad highway that extends infinitely into the distance. The practice of meditation provides a vehicle to travel on that road. Our journey consists of constant ups and downs, hope and fear, but it is a good journey. The practice of meditation allows us to experience all the textures of the roadway, which is what the journey is all about. Through the practice of meditation, we begin to find that, within ourselves, there is no fundamental complaint about anything or anyone at all.

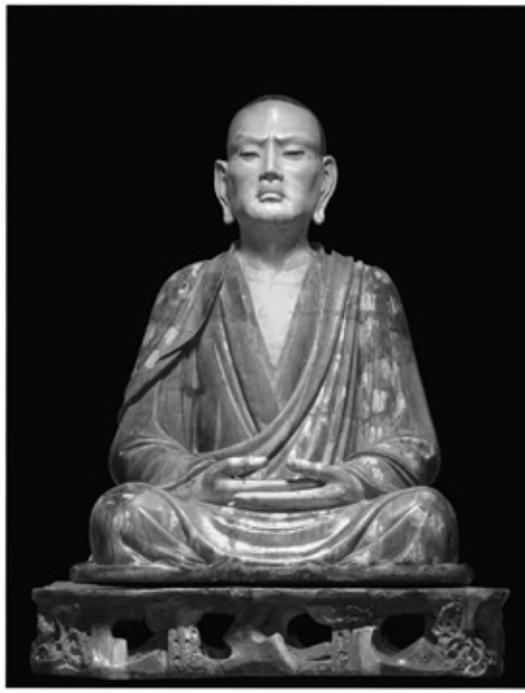
Meditation practice begins by sitting down and assuming your seat cross-legged on the ground. You begin to feel that, by simply being on the spot, your life can become workable and even wonderful. You realize that you are capable of sitting like a king or queen on a throne. The regalness of that situation shows you the dignity that comes from being still and simple.

In the practice of meditation, an upright posture is extremely important. Having an upright back is not an artificial posture. It is natural to the human body. When you slouch, that is unusual. You can't breathe properly when you slouch, and slouching also is a sign of giving in to neurosis. So when you sit erect, you are proclaiming to yourself and to the rest of the world that you are going to be a warrior, a fully human being.

To have a straight back you do not have to strain yourself by pulling up your shoulders; the uprightness comes naturally from sitting simply but proudly on the ground or on your meditation cushion. Then, because your back is upright, you feel no trace of shyness or embarrassment, so you do not hold your head down. You are not bending to anything. Because of that, your shoulders become straight automatically, so you develop a good sense of head and shoulders. Then you can allow your legs to rest naturally in a cross-legged position; your knees do not have to touch the ground. You complete your posture by placing your hands lightly, palms down, on your thighs. This provides a further sense of assuming your spot properly.

In that posture, you don't just gaze randomly around. You have a sense that you are *there* properly; therefore, your eyes are open, but your gaze is directed slightly downward, maybe six feet in front of you. In that way, your vision does not

wander here and there, but you have a further sense of deliberateness and definiteness. You can see this royal pose in some Egyptian and South American sculptures, as well as in Oriental statues. It is a universal posture, not limited to one culture or time.



I-Chou Lohan. This statue shows one of the disciples of the Buddha in the posture of meditation. *Courtesy Robert Newman. Photograph by Betty Morris. From the collection of the British Museum.*

In your daily life, you should also be aware of your posture, your head and shoulders, how you walk, and how you look at people. Even when you are not meditating, you can maintain a dignified state of existence. You can transcend your embarrassment and take pride in being a human being. Such pride is acceptable and good.

Then, in meditation practice, as you sit with a good posture, you pay attention to your breath. When you breathe, you are utterly there, properly there. You go out with the outbreath, your breath dissolves, and then the inbreath happens naturally. Then you go out again. So there is a constant going out with the outbreath. As you breathe out, you dissolve, you diffuse. Then your inbreath occurs naturally; you don't have to follow it in. You simply come back to your posture, and you are ready for another outbreath. Go out and dissolve: *tshoo*; then come back to your posture; then *tshoo*, and come back to your posture.

Then there will be an inevitable *bing!*—thought. At that point, you say “thinking.” You don't say it out loud; you say it mentally: “thinking.” Labeling your thoughts gives you tremendous leverage to come back to your breath. When one thought takes you away completely from what you are actually doing—when you do not even realize that you are on the cushion, but in your mind you are in San Francisco or New York City—you say “thinking,” and you bring yourself back to the breath.

It doesn't really matter what thoughts you have. In the sitting practice of meditation, whether you have monstrous thoughts or benevolent thoughts, all of

them are regarded purely as thinking. They are neither virtuous nor sinful. You might have a thought of assassinating your father, or you might want to make lemonade and eat cookies. Please don't be shocked by your thoughts: any thought is just thinking. No thought deserves a gold medal or a reprimand. Just label your thoughts "thinking," then go back to your breath. "Thinking," back to the breath. "thinking," back to the breath.

The practice of meditation is very precise. It has to be on the dot, right on the dot. It is quite hard work, but if you remember the importance of your posture that will allow you to synchronize your mind and body. If you don't have good posture, your practice will be like a lame horse trying to pull a cart. It will never work. So first you sit down and assume your posture, then you work with your breath; *tshoo*, go out, come back to your posture; *tshoo*, come back to your posture; *tshoo*. When thoughts arise, you label them "thinking" and come back to your posture, back to your breath. You have mind working with breath, but you always maintain body as a reference point. You are not working with your mind alone. You are working with your mind and your body, and when the two work together, you never leave reality.

The ideal state of tranquillity comes from experiencing body and mind being synchronized. If body and mind are unsynchronized, then your body will slump and your mind will be somewhere else. It is like a badly made drum: the skin doesn't fit the frame of the drum, so either the frame breaks or the skin breaks and there is no constant tautness. When mind and body are synchronized, then because of your good posture, your breathing happens naturally; and because your breathing and your posture work together, your mind has a reference point to check back to. Therefore, your mind will go out naturally with the breath.

This method of synchronizing your mind and body is training you to be very simple and to feel that you are not special, but ordinary, extra-ordinary. You sit simply, as a warrior, and out of that, a sense of individual dignity arises. You are sitting on the earth, and you realize that this earth deserves you and you deserve this earth. You are there—fully, personally, genuinely. So meditation practice in the Shambhala tradition is designed to educate people to be honest and genuinely true to themselves.

In some sense, we should regard ourselves as being burdened: we have the burden of helping this world. We cannot forget this responsibility to others. But if we take our burden as a delight, we can actually liberate this world. The way to begin is with ourselves. From being open and honest with ourselves, we can also learn to be open with others. So we can work with the rest of the world, on the basis of the goodness we discover in ourselves. Therefore, meditation practice is regarded as a good, and in fact excellent, way to overcome warfare in the world, our own warfare as well as greater warfare.

Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Pages 35-41

The Genuine Heart of Sadness

IMAGINE THAT YOU are sitting naked on the ground, with your bare bottom touching the earth. Since you are not wearing a scarf or hat, you are also exposed to the heaven above. You are sandwiched between heaven and earth: a naked man or woman, sitting between heaven and earth.

Earth is always earth. The earth will let anyone sit on it, and earth never gives way. It never lets you go—you don't drop off this earth and go flying through outer space. Likewise, sky is always sky; heaven is always heaven above you. Whether it is snowing or raining or the sun is shining, whether it is daytime or nighttime, the sky is always there. In that sense, we know that heaven and earth are trustworthy.

The logic of basic goodness is very similar. When we speak of basic goodness, we are not talking about having allegiance to good and rejecting bad. Basic goodness is good because it is unconditional, or fundamental. It is there already in the same way that heaven and earth are there already. We don't reject our atmosphere. We don't reject the sun and the moon, the clouds and the sky. We accept them. We accept that the sky is blue; we accept the landscape and the sea. We accept highways and buildings and cities. Basic goodness is that basic, that unconditional. It is not a "for" or "against" view, in the same way that sunlight is not "for" or "against."

The natural law and order of this world is not "for" or "against." Fundamentally, there is nothing that either threatens us or promotes our point of view. The four seasons occur free from anyone's demand or vote. Hope and fear cannot alter the seasons. There is day; there is night. There is darkness at night and light during the day, and no one has to turn a switch on and off. There is a natural law and order that allows us to survive, and that is basically good, good in that it is there and it works and it is efficient.

We often take for granted this basic law and order in the universe, but we should think twice. We should appreciate what we have. Without it, we would be in a total predicament. If we didn't have sunlight, we wouldn't have any vegetation, we wouldn't have any crops, and we couldn't cook a meal. So basic goodness is good *because* it is so basic, so fundamental. It is natural and it works and therefore, it is good, rather than being good as opposed to bad.

The same principle applies to our makeup as human beings. We have passion, aggression, and ignorance. That is, we cultivate our friends and we ward off our enemies and we are occasionally indifferent. Those tendencies are not regarded as shortcomings. They are part of the natural elegance and equipment of human beings. We are equipped with nails and teeth to defend ourselves against attack; we are equipped with a mouth and genitals to relate with others, and we are lucky enough to have complete digestive and respiratory systems so that we can process what we take in and flush it out. Human existence is a natural situation, and like the law and order of the world, it is workable and efficient. In fact, it

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