

Self-Liberating Meditation^[1]

A Profound Method for Attaining Enlightenment according to the Ultimate Great Perfection

by *Patrul Rinpoche*

*Have you heard, have you heard
This heart advice of Ragged Abu arranged in verse?*

*Emaho!
Without straying from the state of utterly pure dharmakāya,
You cut delusion at its root and realize primordial awakening:*

*Samantabhadra, may I swiftly gain your realization,
Exactly in the same way, without any error.
Fortunate children, if you seek to attain enlightenment,
Then I, the wandering vagabond, the old dog Patrul,
Shall explain my unerring heart advice in just a few words:
Put this into practice, my determined children, I beg you.*

What we call “emptiness dharmakāya” is the heart-practice of all the gurus and accomplished siddhas. It is the wisdom-mind of all the buddhas of the past, present and future; the life-vein of all *yidam* deities, the heart-blood of all *ḍākinīs*, the supporting abode of all dharma-protectors, the essence of all *sūtras* and *tantras*, and the refined quintessence of all the secret mantras and *vidyā* mantras. It is Mahāmudrā, Madhyamaka and Dzogchen combined into a single teaching: introducing the indivisibility of the dharmakāya and one’s own mind. It is knowing the one thing that liberates all. It is the universal, king-like solution. It is the Great Seal (Mahāmudrā) of reality. When realized in the morning, it brings enlightenment in the morning. When realized at night, it brings enlightenment at night.

These labels are magnificent, and the meaning is magnificent too: allowing your own mind, empty and uncontrived, to settle into whatever is naturally occurring.

Practitioners, male and female, who wish to realize the genuine view without mistake should allow the mind to rest with vivid clarity in an unaltered, empty state of mind. When the mind is still, then settle into that stillness, without trying to alter it in any way. When it is not thinking, settle directly into that non-thinking, without trying to alter it. In short, do not alter the mind, but settle directly within whatever occurs.

Don’t try to adjust or improve or to block or cultivate anything. Allow whatever occurs to unfold and settle into it directly.

Don’t draw the mind inwards. And don’t search for any external focus for meditation. Simply settle, without altering, in the very mind that seeks or thinks.

Don't draw the mind inwards. And don't search for any external focus for meditation.^[2] Simply settle, without altering, in the very mind that meditates.

You won't find the mind by searching for it. Mind has always been empty. There is no need to search. It is the very one who searches. Simply settle, without distraction, directly into the searcher.

“Have I understood or not?” “Is there something to observe or not?” “Is this it or not?” No matter what occurs in the mind, simply settle, without altering, in the very mind that thinks.

No matter what kind of thoughts arise — be they good or bad, positive or negative, happy or sad — don't indulge them or reject them, but settle, without altering, in the very mind that thinks.

Whether what arises is desirable or undesirable, simply settle upon the arising, without altering it.

In the Oral Transmission (*Nyengyü*) it is said:

The ground, unaltered, is Mahāmudrā, the Great Seal.

The path, unaltered, is Madhyamaka, the Great Middle Way.

The fruition, unaltered, is Dzogpachenpo, the Great Perfection.

Dispelling Hindrances to Unaltered Naturalness

When the mind is agitated, thinking of everything under the sun, allow your body, speech and mind to settle in total relaxation. Then remain in this state, keeping a close watch over the restless, thinking mind, without slipping into distraction.

When the mind has only subtle, barely perceptible thoughts, focus your awareness completely and settle in vivid clarity. Rest in that vibrant lucidity.

When the mind is sinking, dull or drowsy, then, without becoming attached to any experiences of bliss or clarity, settle naturally without trying to correct or adjust anything, and simply rest.

When the mind feels happy or sad, settle without distraction into the very one who feels happiness or sadness, and rest.

When you feel excited or joyfully satisfied, or are honoured and respected, avoid falling prey to the “demon of excitement” and becoming deliriously elated. Bow your head, calm your feelings, and rest with your body and mind totally at ease.

Whenever you are sick or suffering, or you fall victim to robbery or theft, or are insulted, slandered or physically abused, or whenever you experience adversity or hunger, don't become downcast and despondent, turning pale and shedding tears. Remain cheerful, inspired and in good spirits.

Revealing the Mind's Hidden Faults

Some 'great meditators', male and female, think they cannot recognise the nature of mind. They might even become depressed and tearful. But there is no need for sadness: recognition is not at all impossible. Simply settle directly in the very thinker, the one who thinks it is impossible to recognise the nature of mind — and that is it!

Some 'great meditators' say that it is difficult to sustain the nature of mind. It is not difficult at all. The fault lies in not knowing how to meditate. There is no need to search for meditation. You don't need to buy it. You don't need to create it, or to go somewhere else in search of it. Nor do you need to work for it. It is enough simply to settle in an experience of whatever is arising or taking place within your mind.

Your mind has always been with you, throughout time immemorial. It is not something that can be lost and then found. It is not something one has and then does not have. The mind you have always had is what thinks when you are thinking, and rests without thoughts when you are not thinking. No matter what the mind might be thinking, it is enough simply to relax directly in whatever arises, without trying to alter or adjust anything, and then to sustain that experience without becoming distracted.

This makes everything very simple and easy. To feel that practising the Dharma is difficult is a sign that you have accumulated heavy misdeeds or obscurations.

Some 'great meditators' don't allow the mind to settle in itself, as it should. Instead, they mistakenly use the mind to look outside or to search within. This is a fault based on the failure to understand that looking outside or searching within will never lead to seeing or finding the mind. There is no need whatsoever to look outside yourself or search within. Instead, settle directly into the mind that looks outside or searches within — and that is it!

Some 'great meditators' don't allow the mind to settle in thinking when there is thinking or in non-thought when there is no thinking. They believe that meditation must come from elsewhere, and so they search for it here and there. This means they don't recognise or realize the essence of mind. There is no reason to search hither and thither. Simply allow the mind to rest directly in thought whenever there is thinking, and in non-thought whenever there is no thinking — and that is it!

Some 'great meditators' don't trust that the mind is empty. They wonder whether it is or not, and they remain in doubt. This is a fault based on a failure to understand the real meaning. There is no reason to doubt. The mind has always been empty, right from the very beginning, so simply settle into its empty condition, and that is it. If you feel doubt, then settle directly into the nature of the one who doubts — and that is it!

Some 'great meditators' don't look into the thinking mind, but constantly look at the objects of their thoughts: their belongings, or the earth and stones, and so on. This is not the genuine view; it is a dualistic view. You must settle into the very one who is thinking, and look.

Some ‘great meditators’ don’t settle into the inseparability of perceptions and mind, but chase after and pursue what they perceive. That is not the genuine view; it is a dualistic view. Don’t chase outwardly after perceptions. And don’t draw things inwards. Simply settle in the inseparability of perceptions and mind.

Some ‘great meditators’ don’t allow the mind to settle naturally in its own place, but anticipate each rising thought like a cat lying in wait for a mouse. That is not the genuine view; it is just inviting thoughts. Instead, simply settle directly in thoughts whenever they arise and in non-arising whenever they do not.

Some ‘great meditators’ don’t know how to let the mind settle upon itself. They keep watching and following past thoughts. That is not the genuine view; it is simply chasing thoughts. Instead of chasing thoughts, settle directly in the one who is chasing.

Some ‘great meditators’ don’t settle their minds in whatever arises for as long as it can remain. They crave ‘good’ meditation, and so they squeeze and force their minds, while staring intensely. This is not the genuine view; it is altering the mind. Without altering or manipulating the mind in any way, let it rest by itself and settle in the experience of whatever arises.

Some ‘great meditators’ don’t allow thoughts to arise, but try to push them aside and take hold of their minds. This is not the genuine view; it is suppressing mental states. Instead, allow your mind to settle in stillness whenever it is still and in movement whenever it stirs.

Some ‘great meditators’ make their minds vacant, almost oblivious. This is not the genuine view; it is spacing out. Settle instead in an experience of emptiness with vivid clarity.

Some ‘great meditators’ think the mind is empty, and then meditate upon that. This is not the genuine view; it is fabricated meditation on emptiness. Settle instead in the very one who thinks, “This is emptiness!”

Some ‘great meditators’ look whenever they feel at ease, open or clearly focused, but don’t look whenever they feel agitated, ill at ease, vacant, or lacking in focus. This is not the genuine view; it is accepting and rejecting. Instead of accepting or rejecting anything, simply settle directly in whatever arises.

Some ‘great meditators’ look whenever they have positive thoughts, but don’t look whenever they have negative or impure thoughts. This is not the genuine view; it is favouring the good and rejecting the bad. Instead of favouring the good and rejecting the bad, settle without distraction directly in whatever is arising, be it good or bad.

Some ‘great meditators’ are delighted whenever the mind is at ease, but feel frustration whenever agitated thoughts arise. This is not the genuine view; the fault lies in not knowing how to sustain the essence of whatever arises. When agitated thoughts arise, settle out of a state of relaxation directly in the one who feels the agitation.

Some ‘great meditators’ do not alert themselves or relax regardless of whether it is necessary or not. This is not the genuine view; it is being slightly too contrived. The fault lies in not knowing how the mind abides. Alert yourself and relax whenever there is a need for it, but don’t do so when there is no need. Simply settle with vivid clarity in naturalness.

Some ‘great meditators’ are unable to meditate when the thought of delicious food or drink arises. They get up and try to find something nice to eat or drink, then spend time enjoying whatever they find. Carrying on like this, they will never arrive at the excellent meditation which savours the sustenance of concentration. An excessive appetite like this only turns one into a stubborn practitioner, so don’t become attached to pleasant-tasting food and drink. Feast instead on the sustenance of concentration.

Some ‘great meditators’ are unable to meditate whenever they are pampered, prosperous, powerful or respected, because they become too content or excited. They are also unable to meditate whenever they suffer, face difficulties, sickness, abuse or disagreement. They assume an expression as gloomy as a storm-cloud, exclaim profanities, and even shed a tear or two. Acting like this, they will never become excellent Dharma practitioners capable of realizing the equal taste of joy and sorrow. They will remain only ordinary, stubborn Dharma-less individuals ruled by passions and sorrows and the eight worldly concerns. You must therefore recognize the equal taste of joy and sorrow and bring them both onto the path.

The Life and Liberation of the Mind

Emaho!

Mind itself has always been without substance.
It is not seen by looking, but is emptiness.
It is not a void, but is cognizant and clear.
This inseparable awareness and emptiness is pervasive like space.
You can steady it, but it moves aimlessly and unimpededly.
You can set it in motion, but it returns to its own natural state.
Even without arms and legs, it runs about everywhere.
In motion, it does not disappear but returns to its own place.
Even without eyes, it sees everything.
But the experience of seeing turns into emptiness.
You cannot pinpoint any essence of mind,
And yet thoughts and impressions still arise.
It is not existent because it turns into emptiness.
It is not non-existent because it thinks, sees and experiences.
The radiance of the union of appearance and emptiness blazes.
The self-radiance of empty yet cognizant *dharmakāya* is clear.
Complete with the five wisdoms, it radiates fully.
The primordially pure natural state is spontaneously present,
The kāyas and pure realms appear without obstruction,
And the mother and child luminosities merge as one.

The natural state of mind, which is like this,
Have you realized it, all you realized ones?
Have you understood it, all you great meditators?
Put this into practice, all you yogis!

Instruction on the Self-Liberation of Delusion, which is like Turning Poison into Medicine

In emptiness there is no miserliness.
It is through delusion that miserliness arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels miserly.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Miserliness is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of miserliness.
There is no generosity higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no attachment.
It is through delusion that attachment arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels attached.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Attachment is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of attachment.
There is no discipline higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no anger.
It is through delusion that anger arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels angry.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Anger is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of anger.
There is no patience higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no laziness.
It is through delusion that laziness arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels lazy.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Laziness is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of laziness.
There is no diligence higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no distraction.
It is through delusion that distraction arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels distracted.

Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Distraction is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of distraction.
There is no concentration higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no confusion.
It is through delusion that confusion arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels confused.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Confusion is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of confusion.
There is no wisdom higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

In emptiness there is no conceit.
It is through delusion that conceit arises.
Without delusion, look into the one who feels conceited.
Look, and sustain that without distraction.
Conceit is cleared away and becomes emptiness.
Rest without distraction in this emptiness experience.
That is the total purification of conceit.
There is no contentment higher than this —
For the yogi who realizes it: Emaho, how amazing!

Instruction on the Self-Liberation of Destructive Emotions: Transforming Destructive Emotions into Wisdom

In the undistracted state there is no suffering.
It is through the power of delusion that suffering arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of suffering.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Suffering is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of suffering.
It is called the dharmakāya of great bliss.

In the undistracted state there are no destructive emotions.
It is through the power of delusion that destructive emotions arise.
Without distraction, look into the essence of destructive emotions.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Destructive emotions are no more: they turn into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of destructive emotions.
It is called the dharmakāya of non-arising.

In the undistracted state there is no anger.
It is through the power of delusion that anger arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of anger.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Anger is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of anger.
It is called the mirror-like wisdom.

In the undistracted state there is no pride.
It is through the power of delusion that pride arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of pride.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Pride is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of pride.
It is called the equalizing wisdom.

In the undistracted state there is no attachment.
It is through the power of delusion that attachment arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of attachment.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Attachment is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —

That is the total purification of attachment.
It is called the wisdom of discernment.

In the undistracted state there is no jealousy.
It is through the power of delusion that jealousy arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of jealousy.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Jealousy is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of jealousy.
It is called the all-accomplishing wisdom.

In the undistracted state there is no confusion.
It is through the power of delusion that confusion arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of confusion.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Confusion is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of confusion.
It is called the wisdom of dharmadhatu.

In the undistracted state there is no dullness.
It is through the power of delusion that dullness arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of dullness.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Dullness is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —
That is the total purification of dullness.
It is called the wisdom of emptiness and clarity.

In the undistracted state there is no agitation.
It is through the power of delusion that agitation arises.
Without distraction, look into the essence of agitation.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
Agitation is no more: it turns into emptiness.
Settle in that state that is empty and clear, without distraction —
That is the total purification of agitation.
It is called the unchanging wisdom.

In the undistracted state there are no three poisons.
It is through the power of delusion that the three poisons arise.
Without distraction, look into the essence of the three poisons.
Look and sustain that, without distraction.
The three poisons are no more: they turn into emptiness.
Settle into that empty and clear state, without distraction —

That is the total purification of the three poisons.
It is called the wisdom of the three kāyas.

For Generating Certainty: An Explanation of How Mind Reveals Itself

Sometimes there are no thoughts in the mind of a great meditator, just a blank or vacant state. When this happens, don't try to correct or adjust anything; simply settle in it, directly and vividly.

Sometimes the mind is vividly clear and blissfully at ease. When this happens, simply settle the mind in vivid clarity.

Sometimes the mind feels foggy or spaced out, incapable of clarity. When this happens, bring out the clear quality of your awareness, and settle in naked alertness.

Sometimes the mind is totally depressed. When this happens, rest in a state that is inspired, joyful and at ease.

Sometimes the mind can remain at rest for no longer than a moment or two as subtle undercurrent thoughts come and go. When this happens, tighten the mind at its surface and allow it to relax from within.

Sometimes it seems as if the mind is neither quite aware nor unaware. When this happens, draw out the penetrative clarity of mind, as if extracting a hair from a slab of butter, and settle in undistracted alertness.

Sometimes the mind busily thinks of everything imaginable, jumping from one thought to the next, and is incapable of remaining still for even a moment. When this happens, relax both body and mind, and without becoming distracted, allow the mind to keep watch in all areas and directions.

Sometimes you have no desire to meditate. You feel disheartened and cannot continue. When this happens, pray sincerely to the lama and settle in clear, vivid feelings of happiness and well-being.

Sometimes the mind is so blissful and clear you feel like getting up and dancing for joy. When this happens, don't allow grasping to enter your mind, but remain totally relaxed.

These ways in which the mind reveals itself occur only for beginners who haven't yet determined the natural state of mind. They do not arise to those who have already determined it, so now I shall briefly explain how it is for them:

When the natural state of mind is clearly determined,
There's no need to look, because clear light dawns naturally.
There's no need to meditate, because the nature of the mind naturally retains its hold.
Even in distraction, there is no distraction, because the nature of mind is sufficiently strong. Even in change there is no change, because awareness is as pervasive as space.
There's no need to correct or to alter anything, because you remain in the state of clear light.

The dharmakāya of your own undistracted mind
And the dharmakāya of the buddhas' wisdom mind
Are inseparably united in the experience of clear light.
And even as you maintain that state without distraction,
Out of the experience of dharmakāya-emptiness
There dawns the clear light of spontaneous presence.
Your own mind then is inseparable from the Buddha,
The kayas and pure realms manifest inseparably.
There's no hope or fear, no self-clinging, joy or sorrow.
There's no acceptance or rejection and no form of doubt.
That is how it is when the nature of mind is determined.

How to Carry Out the Four Types of Action

A great meditator, when walking around,
Does not race or leap about like a fool,
But moves with both body and mind at ease,
While guarding the mind from wandering.

A great meditator, when sitting down,
Does not set a chain of thoughts in motion,
But sits straight, applying the key points of posture,
And rests with the mind laid bare.

A great meditator, when falling asleep,
Does not slip into oblivion like a corpse,
But adopts the posture of the sleeping lion,
And, without distraction, merges into luminosity.

A great meditator, when eating and drinking,
Blesses the substances, transforming them into nectar,
And visualizes the body as hosts of deities,[\[3\]](#)
Then feasts in the undistracted nature of mind.

Whether walking, sitting, sleeping, or acting in any other way,
Be sure to do so within a state that is inseparable from emptiness,
And your own mind will be inseparable from the Buddha.

If you wish to have no regrets at the time of death,
This is how you must practise.

You must know how to follow a qualified teacher.
You must be a renunciant, free from worldly activity.
You must have the fortitude to remain alone in isolated retreat.
You must have the self-discipline to eliminate attachment to food and clothing.
You must have the diligence to avoid even a moment's distraction.

You must have the view that is free from the slightest trace of dualistic perception.
You must have a meditation that is continuous, uninterrupted clear light.
You must have a form of action that is effortless, without acceptance or rejection.
You must have the fruition of your own mind's inseparability from the Buddha.
You must uphold the *samaya* commitment that is free from attachment and hypocrisy.
And you must be free from vain longings for anything at all.
Practise these, the foremost of necessities, all you fortunate Dharma practitioners!

Should you wish for an excellent armour to assist you in your meditation, practise the following:

Avoid acting as a lord with many attendants and a great circle of followers.
Avoid hoarding vast wealth and property.
Avoid keeping many horses and cattle.
Avoid being the head of a large family.
Avoid being hostile to enemies and attached to friends.
Avoid arduous labour, farming and handicrafts.
Avoid the search for idle pleasures, profit or fame.
And avoid all schemes for achieving greatness or enhancing your reputation.
Unless you avoid these things, your mind will be carried away by distractions.
But should you avoid them, you will secure the stronghold of the nature of mind,
And, by securing that, truly become a buddha.

These days, at this moment in time,
There are masters skilled in teaching and students adept at meditation,
And there are many who have realized the nature of mind,
Many who have realized the genuine meaning.

The nature of mind, empty and clear in its essence,
May dawn to everyone just as it dawns to a single person.
Ask those who know and it will become clear.
Consult the wise and understanding will follow.
Free yourself from any doubt, and practise.

There is another crucial point, further advice for great meditators, which I shall now impart:

These days, at this moment in time,
There are some masters and students:
Masters who teach incorrectly and students who err in meditation.
There are many who meditate for seventy or eighty years,
Without ever gaining experience or realization.
There are many who have not realized the genuine meaning,
Many for whom what is not so appears to be so,
Many who lack understanding and practise foolish meditation,
Many who diligently pursue what is futile.
Masters skilled in teaching, students adept at meditation:
Don't self-aggrandize: seek advice from the learned.
Don't improvise: reach certainty within the mind itself.
Don't deceive yourselves: eliminate your doubts.

This is now complete.

Then again, it is also said:

Aho!

From the natural state of the ground of your own mind, (*view*)
The maṇḍalas of deities arise as unceasing compassionate energy, (*meditation*)
Transforming into the playful dance of the various wrathful ones, male and female: (*action*)
May this bring about the glory of guiding all beings, who pervade the whole of space!

| Translated by [Adam Pearcey](#), 2018. The translator referred to earlier English versions by Erik Pema Kunsang, James Low and Khandro Rinpoche, but relied upon a slightly different edition of the Tibetan text.

Bibliography

Tibetan Edition Used

O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po. "mthar thug rdzogs pa chen po sangs rgyas pa'i thabs zab mo bsgom pa rang grol/" in *gSung 'bum/_O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po*. TBRC W1PD107142. 8 vols. Khreng tu'u: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009. Vol. 8: 319–338

Secondary Sources

Low, James. "Self-Liberating Understanding" in *Simply Being: Texts in the Dzogchen Tradition*. London: Vajra Press, 1998. pp. 95–105.

Patrul Rinpoche. "Self-Liberated Mind" in Erik Pema Kunsang (trans.) *The Flight of the Garuda*. Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1986. pp. 146–163

Ricard, Matthieu. *Enlightened Vagabond: The Life and Teachings of Patrul Rinpoche*. Boulder: Shambhala, 2017.

Version: 1.2-20210920

1. Some versions of the Tibetan call this text *Gongpa Rangdrol* (*dgongs pa rang grol*), meaning *Self-Liberated Wisdom Mind*, but the Tibetan edition published by Zenkar Rinpoche calls it *Gompa Rangdrol* (*sgom pa rang grol*), *Self-Liberating Meditation*. ↩
2. The repetition here suggests a possible error in the Tibetan. ↩
3. A note in the Tibetan glosses this as peaceful and wrathful deities. ↩