

## DO YOU SEE THIS BUDDHA?

**Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche**

Only when we have a genuine, abiding desire to free ourselves from suffering and all its causes does our spiritual journey begin. That original desire is very potent and very real. It is the basis upon which we enter the path that will lead us to our goal. Yet from the point of view of the Mahamudra and Dzogchen traditions, there is no place to go on that path, no end of the road where we will one day satisfy our thirst for liberty. Why? Because the very thing that we are looking for—freedom, wakefulness, enlightenment—is right here with us all the time.

### *Finding Our Buffalo*

There is a story in the Mahamudra tradition about a farmer who owns a buffalo. Not knowing that the buffalo is in its stable, the farmer goes off to search for it, thinking it has strayed from home. Starting off on his search, he sees many different buffalo footprints outside his yard. The footprints of buffalo are everywhere! The farmer then thinks, “Which way did my buffalo go?” He decides to follow one set of tracks and they lead him up into the high mountains of the Himalayas, but he doesn’t find his buffalo there. Then he follows another set of footprints that lead way down to the ocean. However, when he reaches the ocean, he still doesn’t find his buffalo. His buffalo is not in the mountains or at the beach. Why? Because it is back home in the stable in his yard.

In the same way, we search for enlightenment outside ourselves. We search for freedom high up in the mountains of the Himalayas, at peaceful beaches and in wonderful monasteries, where there are footprints everywhere. In the end, you may find traces of Milarepa's enlightenment in the caves where he meditated or hints of Naropa's enlightenment at the bank of river Ganges. You may find signs of the enlightenment of many individual masters in different towns, cities or monasteries. What you will not find, however, is the one thing you are looking for—your own enlightened nature. You may find someone else's enlightenment, but it is not the same as finding your own.

No matter how much you may admire the realizations of the buddhas, bodhisattvas and yogis of previous times, finding your own freedom inside yourself, your own enlightenment, your own wakefulness, is much different. When you have your own realization, it is like finding your own buffalo. Your buffalo recognizes you and you recognize your buffalo. The moment we meet our own buffalo is a very emotional and joyful moment.

In order to find our own enlightenment, we have to start right here where we are. We have to search inwardly rather than outwardly. From the Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, the state of freedom, or enlightenment, is within our mind and has been from beginningless time. Like our buffalo comfortably resting in its stable, it has never left us, although we have developed the idea that it has left home. We think it is now somewhere outside and we have to find it. With so many footprints leading in different directions, so many possibilities for where it could be, we may start to hallucinate. We could think that it was stolen by a neighbor and is gone forever. We start to have all kinds of misconceptions and mistaken beliefs.

To summarize this, we can say: There is nothing called “buddha” or “buddhahood” that exists outside of one’s mind. We can say the same for samsara: It does not exist apart from one’s mind. That is why Milarepa sang:

*Nirvana is nothing imported from somewhere else*

*Samsara is nothing deported to somewhere else*

*I’ve discovered for sure the mind is the buddha...<sup>1</sup>*

From the Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, there is nothing within samsara, our state of dualistic confusion, to be relinquished, discarded or left behind, and nirvana, the state of enlightenment, is not a place we go to from here. It is not a place that is found outside of where we are right now. If you wanted to renounce samsara, leave it behind physically, where would you go? To the International Space Station, the moon or Mars? But still, you would be within samsara. So, how can you leave samsara behind?

What we are trying to leave behind is duality, the mind of confusion, our perpetual state of suffering. Physically, yes, you can leave your hometown behind and go to some secluded places such as mountain caves or monasteries. Your body will be somewhere else but will your mind be in a different state? How your mind functions when you are in a mountain cave, monastery or at home is what determines whether you are in the state of samsara or nirvana.

According to the teachings of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, enlightenment is right here within our mind’s nature. That nature is what we are trying to discover and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Three Nails: Sung At Tiger Cave Lion Fortress In Yolmo, Nepal*; composed by the lord Milarepa from the Tibetan text at page 259. Translated by the Marpa Translation Committee. © 2002 Marpa Translation Committee. Published in *Songs of Realization*.

connect with. That nature is what we are trying to recognize, to realize and to perfect. That is the whole journey on this path.

How can we recognize this nature of mind? The experience of awakening, of complete enlightenment, can be brought to you through many different methods. There is the Hinayana approach, the Mahayana approach and the Vajrayana, or Mahamudra-Dzogchen, approach to awakening. These three methods lead to the same goal. The difference is not in the result achieved but in the time it takes to reach that result and in the methods used. Of these three, only the latter is said to possess the methods that can lead to the realization of the true nature of mind in one lifetime. In the Vajrayana liturgy, this way of achieving the state of wakefulness is called attaining “complete enlightenment in one instant.” When we take the instructions to heart, when we employ the methods properly, stage by stage, and when we focus on the path and do not fall into any sidetracks, then this awakening can take place in any minute. One moment we can be a totally confused, ordinary sentient being, and the next we can be a completely enlightened being. This outrageous but very realistic notion is known as sudden enlightenment or “wild awakening.”

### *The Path of Devotion*

The path of Mahamudra is sometimes known as the path of devotion. With the eye of devotion—toward our guru, our lineage and our instructions—we can see the true nature of mind. What role does the guru play in your journey to find enlightenment? On the one hand, it is said that enlightenment is right there within you, and on the other hand, it is said that there is no enlightenment without devotion to the guru or lineage of enlightened masters. It sounds a little contradictory.

Why is devotion so important? How does it work? Devotion is a path, a skillful means through which you develop basic trust—trust in your own enlightened heart, trust that your mind is totally, utterly pure and has been right from the beginning. Trusting that is what devotion is. You can see that through the guru and the lineage. Your relationship with your guru is personal, yet it is beyond the personal. It is so close that you feel like you can control it, yet at the same time, you realize it is beyond your control. It is similar to your ordinary relationships in the world, to your spouses, friends and family, yet it goes beyond those mundane relationships. If you can work with this relationship, it opens a door to working with every relationship in the world. It becomes a great vehicle for transforming our negative emotions and suffering.

The point here is that guru simply plays the role of a mirror. When you look in a mirror, what is reflected back to you is your own face. The mirror does not reflect itself. It shows you whether your face is clean or dirty, or if you need a haircut. The mirror is unbiased; it reflects positive and negative qualities equally clearly.

In the same way, when you look at the guru with devotion, you see both your positive and negative qualities. You see your failures, your struggles, your disturbing emotions arising, just as you see dirt on your face in an ordinary mirror. At the same time, you see beyond the surface impurities that can simply be washed away. You see your true face, your actual reality, which is the perfectly pure nature of your mind.

What happens, though, if you are sitting in front of the mirror in a room that is dark? The mirror still possesses the potential to reflect, and you still possess all those qualities to be reflected. But, if there is no light, you could sit there in the dark for ages and nothing would happen. You would never see anything.

Therefore, it is not enough just to sit in front of the mirror. You need to turn on a light. In this case, the light is the light of devotion. When this light is on, and when the mirror of the guru is in front of you, then you can see the reflection of your own nature of mind very clearly and precisely, yet in a nonconceptual manner. That is the role of the guru and the lineage in our enlightenment, our realization of the nature of mind. The guru is not the creator of your enlightenment. He or she is simply a condition for your attaining your own enlightenment.

The mirror does not turn on the light for you. It does not bring you into the room and tell you to sit in front of it. It does not say, “Look here!” The mirror is just a mirror occupying a certain space. You have to enter the room, turn on the light, walk towards the mirror and look into it. So, who is doing the job here? It is us. We are being active in this relationship.

Some traditions say that you have to be passive to receive divine grace or to have mystical experiences—but here it is the opposite. To invoke the blessing of the lineage, you have to be active. Everything is done by you; the guru is simply a condition, a mirror, which you have chosen to keep in your room. That mirror did not mysteriously land there, you know. You selected it and placed it there through your own efforts.

The lineage instructions are also not the creator of your enlightenment. They are simply another condition. They are powerful and profound tools, which you must employ. Instructions are like directions for getting where you want to go. For example, if you are in a building and wish to leave but are unsure where the exits are, then you ask for directions. If you are lucky, someone will be there who can point out the various ways to go. One way may be easy to find but a little

complicated to follow. About this one your guide tells you: First, you go upstairs to the attic, which gets a little dark, but you will find an opening in a wall there, and then you climb through that to another set of stairs that leads down to the basement, and then you walk straight towards the back of that room where there is another set of stairs that goes up one flight to the second floor where you will find the exit. That's one way, the Hinayana way. It takes a little bit of time but the directions are very concrete and you'll find the exit no matter what.

The Mahayana's directions are a little more straightforward. Your guide tells you, there is also another way: You walk through this door right here, and then you will see another set of doors, and you walk through those, and then there is one more set of doors, which you walk through, and then you will be outside in the parking lot, where you have probably parked your car.

The Vajrayana's directions say that exits are here, there and everywhere. For these, your guide tells you: There is a window right here that you can jump through and you will be outside instantly. There are also windows over there, or if you like, there is a side door here that will let you out—there are actually many direct exits right here. You don't have to look anywhere else. You can choose the exit you want to take based on how quickly you want to get out.

These directions are like the instructions of the lineage. What do they do? Not much by themselves. We hear them all the time—instruction after instruction. Even so, the only way we will ever get out of this building is by standing up and walking out on our own two feet—not on the feet of the guru or the lineage. There is no such thing as “lineage feet” or “guru's feet,” on which you can walk. You have to be willing to stand up and walk on your own feet. When we can do

that, we are beginning to find our own exit out of samsara and to the beautiful space of freedom. We are beginning to find the path to enlightenment.

You can see from these examples how the instructions play an important role, but not more important than your own. You play the more active role on the path. It is you who acts upon the instructions. They give you all the information you need to get out, which way is the safest, which is a little bit risky, and which is the fastest but most hazardous. However, if you take no action, then aeons from now you will still be wandering around in this same building.

We have the full choice, the full power, to decide the course of our personal journey. This is the Buddhist view. Even from the perspective of the Mahamudra and Dzogchen, you are the center of the path and your enlightenment depends on your own individual effort. It is not dependent on anyone or anything outside of you.

### ***Using Mind to Discover the True Nature of Mind***

The basic nature of our mind, and the basic nature of all phenomena that we perceive as being external to our mind, is luminous emptiness. In other words, all forms, sounds and so on, as well as all thoughts and emotions, are appearing yet empty, empty yet appearing. There are different approaches to discovering this nature of mind that is with us all the time.

From the Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, we first look directly at the appearances of thoughts and emotions and ascertain their emptiness. Their nature of appearance-emptiness is easy to see because such mental forms are fleeting and insubstantial. Once this is seen with confidence, then we look at external appearances. Once we have penetrated the nature of thoughts and



emotions, then seeing the true nature of the outer world—the external objects that appear to our sense consciousnesses—becomes much easier. We see that they are equally empty.

In the general Hinayana-Mahayana, or Sutrayana, approach the order is reversed. We first focus our analysis outside and ask: How is form is empty? How is sound is empty? How is smell empty? and so on. Through the Mahayana reasoning process, we discover that the true nature of all these forms is emptiness. Once we find that the nature of all perceived objects is empty, then we conclude that the nature of the perceiving subject is naturally empty as well. Subject and object exist only in dependence upon one another. So, the Mahayana approach starts with analyzing outer phenomena, the outer world, while Mahamudra-Dzogchen begins with analyzing your mind. That is the difference in how, or where, each of these methods begins.

From the Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, it is easier and more straightforward to analyze your mind first. Your own mind is very clear to you. You know your thoughts and emotions very well and you experience them directly. They are not hidden from you. They are not something you have to discover through analysis. Your emotions, your thoughts, are right there in front of you. So, when you look at them, your examination is experiential. It is not just a theoretical analysis, like when you analyze an external form—a small rock or a whole mountain range. When you analyze a thought or a pattern of thinking, it is direct experience. Sometimes it is too bare, too close. There is nothing in between you and that experience. Often, our problem is not in seeing; it is seeing too much—our raw thoughts and emotions are suddenly exposed.

When we analyze a form or sound, or turn our mind to the metaphysics of seeds and sprouts, we have no such problem. It is conceptual, an academic exercise. Through this process, we come to “know” but our knowing is not direct knowledge. Therefore, from the Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, that approach is regarded as indirect analysis. It is not a direct experience. For this reason, the Hinayana and Mahayana stages of the path are called the “causal vehicles.” They cause us to have, or lead us to, the direct experience later. The methods of the causal vehicles will bring us to that experience at some point, but not right now.

That kind of analysis is similar to the methods of physics or other sciences, where research is done in a laboratory setting. Buddha sat in samadhi and analyzed phenomena that appeared to his mind, investigating them with penetrating insight; scientists enter their own state of concentration and analyze phenomena of the external world using super-smart high tech instruments. They have even sent their instruments to Mars.

When the goal of analysis is to find the ultimate nature of the object under examination, both methods come to similar conclusions. Neither finds any concrete, true existence. Modern physicists do not find any true or substantial existence of atoms, and alternate forms of energy, such as strings or quarks, can only be posited theoretically. Buddha calls this emptiness, or *shunyata*. So, the modern scientific approach is actually similar to that of the Sutrayana approach.

Mahamudra-Dzogchen uses the approach of direct analysis, which is known as the “analytical meditation of the simple meditator,” or *kusulu*. This does not mean simple in the sense of being intellectually deficient, but simple in the sense of being intellectually “uncomplicated.” The Sutrayana approach to analysis is

known, on the other hand, as the “analytical meditation of the scholar,” or *pandita*, which is clearly theoretical or scholarly analysis. While the scholarly approach is necessary, if used alone, it does not bring us direct experience right away.

The analysis of the simple meditator, in which we begin by looking at our immediate experiences of mind, is very clear and brings direct experience to everyone. Using this method, when you look closely at a thought or emotion, you can see its nature of inseparable luminosity and emptiness. You do not find any solid or substantially existent thing. The reason that we do not find anything solid is because, on the absolute level of reality, nothing exists in that manner. Therefore, when we look for it, it is not found.

True emptiness, however, is not just “not finding” something. If, for example, you searched your home to see if there was an elephant somewhere in your house—in the attic, the basement, the kitchen, or living room—and you did not find any elephant, would it mean that elephants do not exist? No. There are elephants living in zoos and in the wild.

Simply searching for something and not finding it is not the kind of analysis that leads us to the genuine experience of emptiness. To arrive at the true experience of emptiness, our analysis is based on looking at something we do see, that appears to us to exist, whether that is an external or internal object. When we analyze that object, let’s say an elephant, we are looking at it in order to discover its true nature, its fundamental reality. We look for that nature by thoroughly analyzing the existence of the elephant and each of its parts—ears, trunk, eyes, great body, legs and tail—until we exhaust our looking. At that point, we come to the conclusion that we cannot find the true existence of this solidly appearing

being. Nevertheless, we can see, smell, hear, and touch this empty, yet appearing elephant. That is the method of analyzing that leads to the experience of emptiness.

In the same way, when we look directly at a thought or emotion, it is hard to find anything solid. We may be experiencing strong anger, but when we look at those intense feelings of aggression, we can't really pinpoint them. We can't really identify what they are. We may not even be certain why we are angry. After a while, our anger dissolves. One moment, we can barely speak or breathe because we are so enraged. In the next moment, that fury is gone, leaving nothing behind. Even if we wanted to maintain our anger, to continue tormenting our rival or foe, it is too late. Our empty-appearing anger is gone. In truth, it was never there in the first place.

### ***Ordinary Mind***

The actual point of all our efforts on the spiritual path, whether we are studying, meditating or engaged in socially oriented activities, is to return to the genuine state of our mind, the inherent state of wakefulness, which is very simple and completely ordinary. This is the goal of all three vehicles, or *yanas*, of the Buddhist path.

The Hinayana school calls this state egolessness, selflessness or emptiness. The Mahayana school calls it the great emptiness, or *shunyata*, freedom from all elaborations, all conceptuality. It is also known as the emptiness endowed with the essence of compassion, or *bodhichitta*, the union of emptiness with the qualities of compassion and loving-kindness. Further, it is known as buddha nature or *tathagatagarbha*, the essence of all the buddhas, the “thus gone ones.” In

the Vajrayana,<sup>2</sup> it is called the vajra nature, or sometimes the vajra mind or heart, which refers to the indestructible quality of awareness. In Mahamudra, it is called ordinary mind, or *thamal gyi shepa*, and in Dzogchen, it is called bare awareness, or *rigpa*. The meanings of all these terms point to the most fundamental reality of our mind and phenomena, which is luminous emptiness. In other words, all forms, sounds and so on, as well as all thoughts and emotions, are appearing yet empty, empty yet appearing.

While many different methods are taught to reach this basic state of mind, many of the methods themselves can appear to be quite the opposite. In some sense, they are extraordinary, rather than ordinary; abnormal, rather than normal; and complex, rather than simple. The Hinayana path, for example, is known for its many detailed instructions for practice and postmeditation conduct. For monastics, there are the customs of shaving one's head and putting on beautiful robes, which are rituals prescribed in order to lead the practitioner to the realization of selflessness. In the same way, followers of the Mahayana system for realizing the great emptiness undertake the paramita practices, the six transcendent actions of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence (or exertion), concentration (or meditation) and discriminating knowledge (or prajna). In the Vajrayana, there are many complex practices, such as the visualization of deities and mandalas, which lead to the realization of the vajra mind.

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<sup>2</sup> When the Buddhist path is viewed from the perspective of three vehicles, or *yanas*, the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana, then the Mahamudra and Dzogchen lineages are generally grouped with the Vajrayana. From another point of view, Vajrayana can be regarded as an aspect of Mahamudra known as Mantra or Tantra Mahamudra. There are various systems of classification. Whichever is used, one meaning is that all three, Vajrayana, Mahamudra and Dzogchen are “resultant vehicles,” extremely effective and rapid methods for realizing the nature of mind.

So, with all these practices, are we getting any closer to the natural state? Since it is natural for our hair to grow, the Hinayana practice of continually shaving the hair from our heads seems unnatural. It is also not the normal custom of society. In the Mahayana, there are many highly conceptual and occasionally “counter-intuitive” methods for purifying negative states of mind, such as breathing in the impurities of the minds of others.<sup>3</sup> In the Vajrayana, in contrast to the Hinayana practice of shaving off our hair, we visualize not only extra hair, but also we imagine extra heads, extra arms and extra legs. Why do we do this when such methods seem to take us further and further away from an ordinary, normal and simple state of mind? There must be a reasonable explanation! The answer is simply because in order to reach the level of ordinary mind, to truly arrive at the basic state of simplicity, we have to cut through our habitual, dualistic pattern of labeling some things as normal and others as abnormal. If we have too much fixation on normality, on ordinary convention, then we have to cut through that fixation in order to experience our mind as it truly is.

Therefore, in order to break through and transcend such solid, dualistic notions, we create “abnormal” situations to practice with on the path. In the deity yoga practice of the Vajrayana, you might be visualizing yourself in the form of an enlightened being with multiple heads, arms and legs when you suddenly realize that you have no idea who you are—which is a wonderful experience. We usually have too many preconceived notions about who we are and the world “out there.” We are so caught up in the process of labeling that we never see

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the practice of *tonglen*, or taking and sending, in which we mentally give out all our happiness and well-being to others, and in exchange, mentally take in all of their pain and misery, with the intention of completely relieving all beings from suffering. In the process, we overcome our selfishness and ego-clinging, which is the source of our own suffering and is that which obscures our own state of enlightenment.

beyond the surface of those labels—to the nonconceptual reality that is their basis.

When we work with profound and skillful methods like those of the Vajrayana path, they cut through the very root of our dualistic concepts. Thus, in some sense, we can say that with these methods we are relying on concept to go beyond concept, on thought to go beyond thought. A good example of this is a bird taking off from the ground. When the bird wants to fly, it has to first either run a little bit or push down against the ground so that it can leap up. It has to rely on the earth to go beyond the earth—to leap into the space of sky. In the same way, in the beginning, we have to rely on dualistic concepts in order to leap into the space of non-conceptuality or non-duality.

This is what all of these teachings do for us. Through words and concepts, they point out the nature of phenomena that is emptiness beyond words and concepts. If, when Buddha realized the true nature of mind and the world, he had never spoken about it, never communicated his wisdom to us through words, then we would have no way to enter this profound path.

When it comes to the Mahamudra-Dzogchen path, however, the masters of these traditions introduce ordinary mind, or bare awareness, with utmost simplicity. Such a master might say to a student, “Look, a flower. Do you see it?” The student will say, “Yes, I see the flower.” The master will say, “Do you see the beautiful sunshine outside today?” The student will say, “Yes, I see the beautiful sunshine today.” Then the master will say, “That’s it.”

That is supposed to be the highest teaching of the Mahamudra-Dzogchen path. The highest teaching is so simple and straightforward, without any

complications. When I was studying at the Shedra, the monastic college, I reached a point where I felt like my concepts were multiplying quite rapidly. Each day, as we memorized texts and debated philosophical views, my concepts seem to expand—to the point where I felt like I must go and talk to my master. So I went to Khenpo Rinpoche.<sup>4</sup> I told him I had seen in the teachings where it's said that through study and practice our concepts will gradually dissolve and fade away—to the point that we become totally concept-free. However, I was having the opposite experience! The more I studied, the more I concepts I developed. When I told my master about this, he said, "Yes, that may be how you experience it, but in actuality what's happening is that your concepts are becoming more subtle."

How can we appreciate this? When we look at a mug, for example, ordinarily we just see the mug's overall shape and color. But if you put it under a microscope, you will see a whole range of colors and textures beyond anything you saw before—you will even see the bacteria that live on the mug. In the same way, when we look at our thoughts and concepts through the microscope of our discriminating awareness, we see them on a much more subtle level; therefore, we see them in much greater detail. Instead of moving further away from actuality reality, our more refined conceptual understanding brings us closer to a direct experience of it. We can see the arising and cessation of thoughts. We can see how they erupt into emotions, coloring our mind with the energy of passion, anger or jealousy.

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<sup>4</sup> Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, head teacher at Karma Shri Nalanda Institute, at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, during Ponlop Rinpoche's student years. The Shedra course is a nine-year program of intensive studies.



At this stage of looking, we might think, “This is hopeless. I will never be able to calm the incessant, compelling movements of mind.” But from a Mahamudra-Dzogchen point of view, the fact that we now see mind’s activity so clearly is a sign of success in meditation, not of failure. We usually do not see the constant arising of thoughts, or how they shift and change from moment to moment. We do not see how we follow after them, or notice the moment our awareness slips away—and we become totally lost. Therefore, whenever we *do* recognize our thought patterns, it is a profound moment—one that will take us directly to the experience of the ordinary mind.

Normally, we feel that our perceptions, thoughts and emotions are too ordinary to mean much. Just seeing a flower or the sunshine on a beautiful day is too simple to be profound. As meditators, we want whatever is profound, and so we look past our mundane experiences. We are looking for something that is extraordinary. Something big. We want the “maha,” or “great,” religious experience that we know is out there somewhere in a mysterious place called “the sacred world.” However, whenever we try to look outside, that is the point at which we depart from our own enlightened nature. We start walking away from the natural state of our mind—the basic state of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. “Looking outside” does not mean that we literally leave our home and go look in our neighbor’s backyard, or that we pack our bags and catch a bus for the next town, or shave our head and enter a monastery. Looking outside means *looking outside whatever experience you are having right now*.

Think about it from the perspective of your own experience. What do you do when an aggressive thought suddenly arises? You might try to stop that thought, deflect its energy by justifying it, or even correct it—change it from a “negative”

thought into a “positive” one. We do all of these things because we feel that that thought, just as it is, is not good enough to meditate on. We will meditate on the next pure thought we have; or even better, we will rest in the essence of the gap between our thoughts, the very next one we recognize. In this way, we continually miss the moment that we are awake now. The problem is that we will never catch up to the wakefulness of the next moment, the wakefulness we will have in the future. If aggression is here now, then that aggression is at heart, in its very nature, vividly awake, empty and luminous. As our simple-minded master of Mahamudra and Dzogchen might say, “Do you see it? That is it.”

You may prefer to meditate on the Buddha rather than on your emotions. The Buddha is always perfectly relaxed and at ease; therefore, you feel very comfortable. When you are meditating on your emotions, you may start to feel slightly anxious and uncomfortable. You may think that your mental health is at risk, or that the environment of your mind is not in a sacred, uplifted or spiritual state. It is helpful to a certain point, in the beginning of our training, to meditate on pure objects like images of the Buddha, deities or great masters. If, however, you get addicted to relying on such objects, then there can be negative consequences. When you feel you cannot invoke the experience of sacredness or connect with your basic, enlightened mind through your everyday experiences of perceptions, thought and emotions, then you are developing a serious problem. Our emotions are as familiar, as commonplace, as sunshine and flowers, and that is great news for realizing ordinary mind. We have so many opportunities. We should appreciate and take advantage of them.

What you have been looking for—the true nature of your mind—has been with you all the time. It is with you now, in this very moment. The teachings say that

if we can penetrate the essence of our present thought—whatever it may be—if we can look at it directly and rest within its nature, then we can realize the wisdom of buddha: ordinary mind, naked awareness, luminous emptiness, the ultimate truth. The future will always be out of reach. We will never meet up with the buddha of the future. The present buddha is always within reach. Do you see this buddha? Where are you looking?

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