



Welcome back to this retreat. I hope you have enjoyed the previous ones. I'd like to begin by telling a little Zen story to highlight the theme of going beyond thinking. So, in a book on the famous Zen Master Dogen, which is called *Beyond Thinking*, there's a story from Yaoshan, who was a teacher. A student came up to him and said, "When I'm meditating, what do I think?" And Yaoshan replied, "Think not-thinking." And the student was puzzled, and asked, "How do I think not-thinking?" And Yaoshan replied, "Beyond thinking."

So what we're exploring here today is not just beyond thinking, because we want to include thinking, but beyond thinking about thinking. And beyond thinking about thinking is a kind of non-conceptual awareness. This awareness is often called *rigpa* in Tibetan Buddhism. It's called nature of mind, source of mind, or original state. And this is our basic way of knowing, to which we can add thinking, to which thinking is well regarded. But when we discover this non-conceptual awareness—this awake awareness—we can shift into this, as a new way of knowing.

And this shift of knowing is crucial for awakening, and it is not that difficult. So this is what I want to emphasize this time, is that, just as mindfulness has been discovered to be both easy to learn, or at least learnable—though for some, it takes some time, and is difficult at first—awakening is learnable. It is learnable, and some of the learnability is unlearning. In fact, a lot of it's unlearning. However, because the awakeness that we're seeking is already here, it's our real nature, and a possibility within this lifetime, in the midst of your daily life.

So I thought we would begin by exploring the difference between awareness and thinking, and we'll do a simple practice to begin. So this is kind of a variation on a practice that could be done as a mantra practice, but actually, the way I'm using this one word is to occupy thinking so that we can see the awareness between and around thinking, and the awareness that's aware of thinking, and the awareness that's inherent *within* thinking. So what I'll do is I'll ask you to repeat one simple word, and be aware of the space in between. So you can do this—once I give



the instruction, you can turn off the video and do this for as long as you like, but we'll just do it together, here. So the simple word I'd like you to use is the word "bala." So we're giving this word to the thinking mind, to give it a job. So say "bala" and then be aware of the space; and the, bala, aware of space. Bala—space. Bala—awareness of space *and* bala. Bala—awareness, space, and bala. Bala—space, awareness. Be the awareness in between, around, and within, as you continue to just notice intentional thought. Bala, bala, bala.

So perhaps you turned off the video, and you're back, or you've just experienced that short experience. But just notice how easy and simple it is to shift—like a background-foreground shift—from being identified with thought, looking up to thought, thought looking to thought, thought looking out, as if I am the thinker, to shifting from awareness being hidden, to awareness being primary, to awareness being our full way of knowing. And when this awake awareness is knowing, it first seems to be a detached witness, like a meditator or a spacious, big sky, choicelessly aware field that is impersonal and transcendent. But this is not the end. This is not the goal, just to step out or be beyond personal or human experience. But it is often a stage that is helpful to untie awareness and intelligence and awakeness from thought; to separate out that it is truly the source of mind, the nature of mind, is awareness mind, is *rigpa*, is not *sem*, which is small or conceptual mind, or discursive mind.

Discursive mind is a tool. Thinking is the sixth sense, and awareness is the nature of mind. Then, once we've unhooked awareness from thinking, we've also unhooked this mini-me. We've deconstructed it. We've allowed it to rest and return home. It may protest and return. We often can get scared back to the mind, because it says, "Well, I've gotten you this far, and you ain't dead yet, so come on back." Or we might get bored by peace, and look for excitement. We come back to the drama. But once we've actually relaxed into this awareness—awareness becomes a body—the curiosity and playfulness, the joy, sense of wellbeing, and expression begins to come from openhearted awareness. There is such a live curiosity and interest, playfulness, enjoyment available, that there's no need to go back for drama. There's no need to be scared back, because



there's a sense of safety and wellbeing. So, it's important that we discover that we can simply unhook or drop or step out, just as a way of doing small glimpses in the midst of the day.

So maybe we'll play a little bit with this sense of unhooking, dropping, opening, and then including. So if you are identified or attached to thinking, and you just simply allow that awareness that's identified to come to hearing, and then open to space, notice the feeling of relief, peace. Notice that you have gone beyond an ego center. And then notice that if that awareness that is open to space can discover spacious awareness that's already aware, or some people go to the corner of the room and do a flip-turn, a U-turn, and turn around and come back, and look, or open to the sky, and look from the sky, like an eagle looking back at her nest. But some way of turning around, so you now can inquire, and feel the difference by inquiring: "Am I aware of the spacious awareness that is such a relief and peace, content-free, boundless, timeless *or* is awareness—spacious awareness—actually aware back toward thoughts, feelings, and sensations that I recently called 'me,' but now are coming and going?"

So look again: "Am I unhooked to hearing, to be aware of spacious awareness? Am I aware of spacious awareness this way, or actually, am I located in the spacious awareness that feels back, looks back pervasively, is aware of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that are coming and going?" So you both notice that you're not the arising and passing contents of consciousness, but you're not *not* them, either. They're part of you, but they're not the location of who you are. Right? Location, location, location is shifted to the spacious awareness, which is also pervasive. This awareness is now the ground of being, and it is the boundless ground—sometimes the groundless ground—because it's invisible and empty. The emptiness is the ground of human being, that arises like a wave. But once you get a feel for this, it is wisdom. It is the source of wisdom. It's the source of the heart-mind to which you not only have woken up from the mini-me, but you've woken into awake awareness, and then awake awareness wakes into your body, and phenomena, consciousness, to include it, and then there's a waking out.



So there's waking up from, into, discovering the new ground, which is important, because without this new operating system, many people who deconstruct in meditation can get flooded by unconscious material. If you stop at waking up from the sense of separate self, and just allow consciousness, or the storehouse of consciousness, or unconscious material, then you have no ego defenses to protect you. Because you have no ego, now you have no ego defenses. So this can be either a phase that often is done in a monastery, for a long time.

So this Sutra Mahamudra is one of waking up from the mini-me, by asking, "What is here when there's no problem to solve?" then discovering the new ground of being, which is the emptiness that is aware. Then that emptiness that's aware is not only formless, but is inherent within form, as form, appearing as the ornament or the expression, aliveness, of you as a particular human being that is none other than interdependent, alive: life itself. Then you discover there's a possibility, from this ground of being, to know from this heart-mind. And then you can begin to speak and walk and talk, and even type e-mails, often like a baby Buddha.

At first, you have to rewire to get the information to come down to your heart, in your home, as you remain at home. There's a little wiring to be able to function from this new operating system: awareness-based, openhearted awareness, which is the ability to live in the world without forming an ego to function, and then go back and meditate, to relax, and then feel less stressed, but having, still, to operate as a less-stressed ego identity. The option of awakening is simply to discover this new foundation of awareness-based knowing and ground of being, so that your identity has shifted, and your way of knowing has shifted. When that happens and you do it small glimpses many times, you use the word for "meditation," in Tibetan, which is "familiarize," and you familiarize with the new sense of living without a manager in your head, but you learn how to live from the flow, kind of like a flow state, which is one of the non-conceptual awareness intelligences that we have now mapped in our understanding in Western psychology, is the ability to actually live and operate at a very high level of functioning, without a sense of being located in a small self.

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Those who operate in the flow, with the research done by Csikszentmihalyi, describe a sense of feeling interconnected with all people. Time slows down. There's a sense of being in the now. There's a sense of not being a separate ego, and yet highly functioning as a particular person in the world. So, this sense of the possibility of awakening is shifting to a new operating system, to openhearted awareness, which is both highly functional, wise, and more unconditionally loving, and has the ability to compassionately express in the world, because that's its nature.

So, I hope you've enjoyed this session and look forward to seeing you.