



Hello, my name is Lama Karma. I'm a teacher in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and Director of Milarepa Retreat Center in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. I also work for a company called aNuma designing sacred experiences in virtual reality for people facing a life threatening illness, to share with their family and loved ones.

From a certain point of view, we're already living in a type of virtual reality. There's different ways of explaining or understanding this according to the teachings of the Dharma.

The easiest to appreciate maybe is just to understand how we have constructed a box or a bubble around ourselves. And we curate that bubble, we draw in things that we want, we push away things that we don't want, and anything that's not relevant to our version of reality we simply ignore.

At the same time, as the recent pandemic has shown us, our personal bubbles, and those of the rest of humanity are intimately connected and dependent. We're all very much in the same boat, in a sense, as Buckminster Fuller put it, Spaceship Earth, we're all traveling on this spaceship together. Yet this spaceship is in crisis. We are facing challenges that are unprecedented in human history.

In order to tie together these different levels of the personal, the collective, and also to open up a space to really adequately address the challenges that we face, I'd like to introduce a meditation practice for you.

Meditation: The Eight Worldly Dharmas

Let's begin by finding a comfortable posture. We can do this in a chair, sitting down or you can even do it lying down. You can have your eyes open or you can have your eyes closed.

Begin by feeling into different directions around us, through the body. First feeling in front. What does the space in front of us feel like? Feel out. Sense.

Feel behind you. The sense of the back of the body and the space behind.

Feel out to the right side. Try to feel with as much of your body as you can to the right. Feel to the left.

Feel above. Feel below.

Now we're going to imagine that these different directions are screens, or walls, on which different scenes are playing out that we're going to imagine and project.

Imagine scenes of pleasure on the wall or the screen in front of you. Whatever comes to mind. Really let your mind run with this.



Physical pleasures. Emotional pleasures. Intellectual. Spiritual. Notice these scenes that play out. Welcome any sound, smells as well. As if you're watching a movie.

Now switch to the space behind you. Feeling into scenes of pain. Whatever is personally relevant to you, just painful.

Now move back to the front: scenes of pleasure.

Back to pain.

And back to pleasure in front.

Now let go and simply rest in the middle.

Now feel into on the right side, scenes of gain, of accumulation, winning, growing, accomplishing, succeeding. Again find those juicy scenes, memories, whatever is personally relevant to you. Feel that sense of gaining.

It can be wealth. Possessions. Status. Feel that in the body as it receives.

Now move to the left side: scenes of loss. Losing wealth, status, health, cognitive function, friends, loved ones. Loss.

Back to the right: gaining.

Back to the left: losing.

Back to gaining.

And once again losing.

Now just rest again in the middle. See if you can look directly at that resting mind. Look at the essence of the mind at rest in the middle.

Now directing attention upward, the ceiling above: scenes of praise, adulation, compliment. Receive that praise as if it's raining down.



Now below: blame. Scenes of blame. Blame that is justified, blame that is not. Feel how the body receives blame.

Back up to praise.

Back down to blame.

Praise.

Blame.

Now let go and rest in the middle. Release these polarities. Again glance at the resting mind. Look at its essence.

Finally again above: scenes of fame, collective positive regard. Receive that fame, that good name.

Then again below: this time disrepute, bad name. Collective dishonor.

Back up to fame.

Down to disrepute.

Back up.

Down again.

Again let go and simply rest in the middle. Not projecting in any direction. Feel the release, the relief of that rest.

Again glance, look directly at the essence of that resting mind.

These eight reflections we've just gone through, which are also projections onto the screens, are called the *Eight Worldly Dharmas*. They define the walls of our box, the walls of our prison, and they're all conditioned by craving, aversion, and ignorance.

The Middle Space: Equanimity

You might have noticed that as we progressed through the practice, a middle space began to emerge. A space of freedom that's not polarized, but also not asleep. This middle space is equanimity.



Equanimity is the capacity to stand in the middle and to see without bias. When we can see in this way, instead of being pigeonholed into a particular view, a vast spectrum of possibility opens.

Within this openness, we can respond to our circumstances with skill and with compassion. Also at various times I prompted you to look directly at the essence of that resting mind, that mind of equanimity.

When we can see in such a direct way, the essence of our own mind, we see the projector behind or beyond all of these walls of our box. This ability to see beyond is a doorway to insight. This insight is the basis of the freedom that is the hallmark of Dharma practice.

This is a lot of what the Dharma is about. When we have this freedom, we're no longer caught in our tight box. We're more available, therefore, to extend ourselves and to benefit others around us.

The Global Crisis: Grieving in Wisdom

When we turn to this topic of global crisis, without really understanding the extent to which we are stuck in our own box, our own version of things, our own habits, we can't accurately see what is happening around us.

We don't know the extent to which the crises, and the upheavals that we see around us are being filtered, and interpreted through the lens and the distortions of our own limited habits, our own projections.

When we start to see beyond these limitations, we become sensitive to what is actually happening around us. This space of genuine sensitivity opens.

Of course, we're all more or less sensitive to what's going on around us. It's hard not to be with so much tragedy, so much injustice, so much desecration of the natural world.

It's natural to feel grief, to feel outrage. But without fully grieving, we can't actually act in a sustainable way. We can't respond until we're able to fully grieve. The response that we're able to offer will always be cut short, and in a way, we cut short our grief.

We feel that if we were to grieve fully, it would annihilate us, it would destroy us, it would bury us, drown us. It would take away our capacity for equanimity. We'd lose our balance.

So we grieve, but then we bury the remainder of our grief. We numb ourselves, we distract ourselves, we divert our energy into righteous struggles, real or imagined even.



These struggles are defined by our personal attachments and aversions. But when equanimity becomes wisdom, we can fully grieve, we can find the full grief and we can feel the bottomless brokenness of the human condition.

We can feel the depth of the tragedy of environmental desecration. Instead of that feeling being a cause of bondage, of isolation, or of apathy or numbness, it actually unleashes our essential wisdom with more brilliance.

Grieving in wisdom in this way, only creates more space and capacity. This spacious clarity which is our essential nature, and the essence of all life is naturally responsive.

We're no longer stuck in a state of deliberation about what to do, or what not to do. We've gotten that out of the way entirely. We've stepped out of the reference points of me and my world, and therefore the deliberation about what to do between them.

When we're beyond limitation, in this way, we discover another aspect of wisdom, which is called all accomplishing wisdom. What needs to be done, is already and always accomplished. This kind of confidence and trust in the nature of reality that comes from insight is so crucial when we ask the question, what to do? How do I respond to the grief that I feel and the upheavals that we face?

This is the response that we've been looking for. When we act from this place, our life becomes the expression of wisdom and action. So equanimity is the doorway to wisdom, and wisdom is the basis for authentic response.

This response is both personally relevant and collective. You can see the thread that runs through directly.

I hope this has been beneficial to you. May we dedicate whatever benefit to the benefit of all. I thank you for spending this time with me and hope to connect more soon.