

Pristine Awareness - Foundation for Buddhist Practice

Five Year Practice Program – The Path of Joy and Ease

Our formal five-year practice program is focused on recognising and abiding in the natural state, which is spacious awareness alive with Bodhichitta. The destination for all those practicing in the Nyingma tradition is Dzogchen, the self-perfected natural state. Dzogchen is considered the “highest” and most precious of all Buddhist paths. The Vajrayana vehicle consisting of ngondro, followed by generation and completion stage practices (dzogrim & kyerim), prepares the practitioner for Dzogchen. This program has the same aim to prepare the practitioner for Dzogchen though does not follow the same trajectory. Indeed, it is not widely understood that Dzogchen can, and historically often was, approached as a completely separate path to tantric Buddhism (the path of transformation) with a number of different preliminary practices or foundational methods. Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche makes this clear:

Some people believe that Dzogchen is only the final phase of tantric practice, rather like the Mahamudra of the modern tradition, but this is because the arrival point of the path of anuyoga, too, is called Dzogchen. In reality, Dzogchen atiyoga is a path complete in itself, and ... is not dependent on the-methods-of the path of transformation.¹

Indeed, one of the oldest Dzogchen texts rejects all tantric or transformational styles of practice when it states:

Do not practice in the worldly way by meditating on the form of a deity as the activity of the body, by reciting mantras and formulae as the activity of the voice, or by visualizing and concentrating as the activity of the mind.

¹ Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, ‘The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of Dzogchen Semde’, *Snow Lion Newsletter*, Autumn 1999.

This program faithfully abides by this instruction. Furthermore, the program is based on the profound concept of *natural unfolding* – that by engaging in simple, essential practices all the realisations of the “higher” teachings such as Mahamudra and Dzogchen evolve naturally and effortlessly. These simple practices are the essence of all the yanas or vehicles. The essence of the Sutrayana is ethical discipline, renunciation, solitude and meditation (Shamatha and Vipashana). The essence of the Mahayana is the Four Immeasurables – joy, love, compassion and equanimity. The essence of the Vajrayana and Dzogchen is Guru Yoga. Each of the vehicles is perfect and complete in itself. Each vehicle and its practices are sufficient to bring about awakening on their own. This program zeroes in on the quintessential practices of each vehicle and as such is the condensed essence of all Dharma. It is a *parallel* path to that of Dzogchen, leading to the same result, the self-perfected natural state. The program has two completely equal streams:

1. Devotion Stream – for those drawn to devotion and Guru Yoga
2. Meditation Stream – for those drawn to the practice of joy, love and compassion

The Meditation Stream begins with the awakening of joy and culminates in realisation of the true nature of mind and the ability to rest in that pristine state at will. Indeed, joy can be an entire path in itself. As Kyabje Togden Amtrin has said:

Arouse joy and rest in its natural radiance!
Not only is this the heart of the path,
but indeed it is the heart of Awakening.²

The Devotion Stream awakens the heart and leads to realisation of the natural state very swiftly. Both the Devotion Stream and the Meditation Stream have a strong emphasis on a specific form of Shamata or Calm Abiding meditation. With regard to this specific form of Shamata meditation, which is fuelled by an open heart, the extraordinary Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche wrote:

² Kyabje Togden Amtrin quoted in Jamyang Tenphel, *The Awakening Heart: 108 Pith Instructions for Buddhist Practice*, Timeless Awareness Publications, 2023, p. 11.

Even without other modes of introduction from the guru, these pith instructions of mind resting upon itself offer a simple way to calm the mind that has none of the dangers associated with the forceful manipulation of energy. If you are able simply to place the mind upon itself in this way, workable concentration will be won swiftly and with little difficulty. Here there is no need for meditation upon subtle bindus/drops in the heart, nor upon letters, nor any shape and form for that matter. Nor is there a need to manipulate the breath.³

In this quote Mipham Rinpoche is stating that Shamata done in a certain way brings about the same outcomes of so-called “higher” yogic practices such as Tsa-lung, Trulkhör and Tummo and the same realisations that arise from generation and completion stage practices that involve visualisation and mantra recitation. He goes on to write that this simple practice combined with devotion will lead to ‘an experience of the empty clarity of the great Natural State—the spontaneous, self-emergent wisdom, which is the meaning of the Luminous Great Perfection’.⁴ Here Mipham Rinpoche is clearly saying that this simple practice can lead to the realization of Dzogchen.

It’s important to note that devotion does not have to be focused on a guru. It can be toward any or all of the three gems—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha—or their embodiment the Lama or Guru. Devotion towards the Dharma is an appropriate alternative to devotion to a Guru. By Dharma we mean both the teachings and the practice, but there should be an emphasis on the practice. Devotion to the Dharma begins as confidence in the practice or trust that the practice will lead to our liberation from suffering and enlightenment. That confidence evolves into devotion. What does devotion to Dharma practice look like? It is simply to love the practice, to deeply appreciate it, and to experience great gratitude and joy that we have the opportunity to practice. We also experience great joy in the doing of the practice.

Dudjom Rinpoche pointed to this natural unfolding, in which foundational and simple practices lead to the highest realisations naturally, with relation to Guru Yoga when he taught that practitioners who ‘give themselves wholeheartedly, with devotion, to an authentic Diamond Master’ will obtain the supreme and common accomplishments ‘even if they have no other methods’.⁵ This is a very clear statement that awakening can and does unfold from

³ Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *Profound Shamata Instruction*, translated by Sean Price, 2019, p.3.

⁴ Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *Profound Shamata Instruction*, translated by Sean Price, 2019, p.4.

⁵ Dudjom Rinpoche, *A Torch Lighting the Way to Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 2016, P. 260.

this one simple practice of Guru Yoga. He said this was possible even ‘without depending on anything else’.⁶ In other words no other practices are needed, though some make powerful supports. This quote by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche makes this even clearer:

There may be very high practices, like *trekcho* and *thogal* in the Dzogpa Chenpo, but for us to practice these at this point would be like giving solid food to a very young baby. He would not be able to assimilate the food, and it would just cause him harm. If we were to try now to practice those advanced teachings, they would just be wasted. Through the blessings that come from genuine endeavor in the practice of this Guru Yoga, on the other hand, the realization of Dzogpa Chenpo will arise by itself from the depths of our being like morning sun, and the meaning of the practice of trekcho and thogal will dawn within us.⁷

By relying on the principle of natural unfolding we are able to bypass the many complicated and sometimes arduous preliminaries normally associated with higher-level tantric Buddhism. Although participants are free to engage in other Buddhist practices the program will work best with as simple a practice schedule as possible.

To be clear, this five year program is not a tantric or esoteric one, but one inspired by the simplicity and openness of both the Dzogchen and Mahamudra traditions and the Chan traditions that emphasise the opening of the heart. Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche explains this further:

According to Dzogchen, and the special approach of the great Dzogchen master Sri Singha, there is a way of recognizing the nature of mind solely through devotion. There are cases of practitioners who simply through their heartfelt devotion attained realization, even though their teacher had already passed away or was nowhere near them physically. Because of their prayers and devotion, the nature of mind was introduced. The classic example is that of Jigme Lingpa and his consuming devotion for Longchen Rabjam.⁸

⁶ Dudjom Rinpoche, *A Torch Lighting the Way to Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 2016, P. 260.

⁷ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, Shambhala Publishing, 1999, pp. 92-93.

⁸ Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche quoted in Marcia Binder Schmidt (ed.) *Dzogchen Essentials: The Path that Clarifies Confusion*, Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2004, p. 136.

The alternative to opening the heart through devotion is opening the heart through the Path of Joy and Ease, which then leads to the natural unfolding of the other of the Four Immeasurables: Love, Compassion and Equanimity. A being who has attained the Four Immeasurables is a Buddha. The five year practice program offers both these streams, The Path of Joy and Ease and the path of devotion or Guru Yoga. Participants can engage with one stream or, preferably, both.

It is not widely known that there are multiple approaches to the self-perfected natural state (Dzogpachenpo) or awakening. All of these approaches are different yet equal. The three main approaches are:

1. The tantric pathway consisting of a foundation of ngondro followed by three roots practice (generation and completion stage) followed by trekcho and togyal. This is currently the most common pathway.
2. The devotional pathway consisting of Shamata and Guru Yoga as the foundation in which the realisations of Trekcho and Togyal unfold naturally.
3. Meditation pathway consisting of Shamata, the Four Applications of Mindfulness (Vipashana) and contemplation of the Four Immeasurables followed by the Trekcho teachings (if/as needed).

The Path of Joy and Ease Five Year Program is a unique combination of the second and third pathways. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, when asked what practitioners could do as a foundation for Dzogchen if they didn't want to take the ngondro pathway, said that they should follow pathway three.⁹ Interestingly, Thich Nhat Hanh also taught that Shamata, the Four Applications of Mindfulness (Vipashana) and contemplation of the Four Immeasurables were the essential Dharma practices. Indeed, one of the earliest of the Buddhist sutras, the *Rhinoceros Sutra*, extols everything that is needed to achieve awakening as originally taught by the Buddha. That sutra has a heavy emphasis on renunciation, solitude, right view (impermanence, emptiness and suffering of samsara) and the Four Immeasurables. This program is faithful to that early Buddhist tradition.

⁹ Quoted by B Alan Wallace, 'Commentary on The Fine Path of Liberation by Sera Khandro', <https://youtu.be/d9RuPg3PEmQ>

Furthermore, Westerners tend to meet with the Dharma later in life and may not have the time to complete the tantric pathway with ngondro etc. The great Dzogchen master Yangthang Rinpoche was asked about this by a woman in her mid-50s. His response was that, given her age, she should focus on Dzogchen even if she hadn't finished the tantric preliminaries (ngondro). Therefore, those of us who are 50 or older should definitely heed this advice.¹⁰ Furthermore, Lama B Alan Wallace has noted that if a practitioner has no desire to do ngondro and no faith in that practice then there would be no benefit in them following that pathway. Therefore, people with no desire or faith in tantric practice or ngondro should follow pathways two or three. The program we have designed is perfect for those who are older or who have challenges such as illness, as well as for those who have no faith in complex tantric practices.

The program is framed by the structure of View, Meditation and Conduct. Participants in the program will be supported by focused teaching and individualised practice guidance. Guest Lamas will contribute to the teaching program from time to time. After completing this five year program, participants will have firmly established themselves on the path to awakening. The practice program leaders, Pema Düddul and Jamyang Tenphel, see themselves as simple conduits for the teachings and compassion of their heart masters – Kyabje Togden Amtrin and Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche. Any benefit to the participants from doing the program is a result of the blessings of these Lamas and the participants' other teachers.

The practice commitment for this program is an hour per day of meditation and contemplation as well as attendance at an online weekend retreat each year. Participants are also encouraged to do at least one at home retreat per year. The graduation from year to year is not based on tests or completion of accumulations but on time and an interview with the program leader/s (Pema and Jamyang).

To cover the costs of providing this program there is a suggested contribution of **\$10AUD per month**. That being said, no-one will be turned away due to lack of funds and donations of any size are welcome.

¹⁰ Quoted by B Alan Wallace, 'Commentary on The Fine Path of Liberation by Sera Khandro', <https://youtu.be/d9RuPg3PEmQ>

LEVEL/YEAR	VIEW/TEXTS	MEDITATION/PRACTICE	CONDUCT/ETHICS	RETREAT	TEACHINGS
Level 1: Resting in Stillness	<p>1. <i>Stilling the Mind</i> – Dudjom Lingpa’s Shamata instructions (trans. B. Alan Wallace)</p> <p>2. Mipham Rinpoche’s <i>Profound Instruction on Shamata</i>.</p> <p>3. Sections of <i>Resting in Stillness</i> by Jamyang Tenphel & Pema Düddul;</p> <p>4. Sera Khandro’s <i>The Fine Path to Liberation</i>.</p> <p>5. <i>The Seven Mind Trainings</i> by Longchenpa.</p> <p>Fundamental concepts: impermanence, samsaric suffering, liberation.</p>	<p>1. Shamata or Silent Sitting. Gentle awareness of object, either the breath or another object.</p> <p>2. Path of Joy and Ease</p> <p>3. Contemplations: impermanence, suffering, Bodhicitta, and cause and effect.</p> <p>Optional practices: Guru Yoga.</p>	<p>1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts.</p> <p>2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas.</p> <p>3. Wearing maroon or red meditation shawl during practice and at teachings.</p>	<i>The Path of Joy and Ease</i> Weekend Retreat	<p>1. The Path of Joy and Ease;</p> <p>2. Freedom at Heart;</p> <p>3. Bodhicitta: Ground, Path and Fruit;</p> <p>4. Developing Confidence in Buddha Nature.</p>
Level 2: Cultivating Clear Seeing <i>Pre-requisite: 12 months of Shamata at least 20 minutes a day.</i>	<p>1. Dudjom Rinpoche’s <i>Play of Thought</i>;</p> <p>2. <i>Fathoming the Mind</i> – Dudjom Lingpa’s Vipashana instructions (trans. B. Alan Wallace);</p> <p>3. Sections of <i>Resting in Stillness</i> by Jamyang</p>	<p>1. Silent Sitting and Vipashana or the Natural Awakening practice. Looking into thoughts and sensations: from whence do they arise, where do they abide, where do they go?</p> <p>2. Path of Joy and Ease</p> <p>3. Contemplations: Tsewa (contemplations on love) and Buddha Nature.</p>	<p>1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Genyen vows while on retreat (8 precepts).</p> <p>2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas.</p> <p>3. Wearing white meditation shawl during practice and at teachings.</p>	<i>Cultivating Clear Seeing</i> Weekend Retreat	<p>1. Boundless Love;</p> <p>2. Cultivating Clear Seeing: Vipassana and Investigating the Nature of Mind;</p> <p>3. Infinite Potentiality:</p>

	<p>Tenphel and Pema Düddul; 4. Sections of <i>Luminous Awareness</i> by Pema Düddul; 5. <i>Retreat</i> by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo.</p> <p>Fundamental concepts: Loving kindness, fundamental goodness, Buddha Nature.</p>	<p>4. Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹ Optional practices: sky gazing, Illusory Form Practice.</p>			<p>Emptiness and Buddha Nature; 4. Ordinary Mind and Buddha Mind.</p>
<p>Level 3: Cultivating Awareness <i>Pre-requisite: 12 months of meditation at least 20 minutes a day; Lung or transmission for texts</i></p> <p>Note: We remain at this level for 24 months.</p>	<p>Full details released on entering this level</p> <p>Fundamental concepts: Compassion, non-self, emptiness, true nature of mind, unadorned awareness.</p>	<p>1. Silent Sitting and Trekcho. Looking into the nature of the mind itself: What is its shape, colour, texture? From whence does it arise, where does it abide, where does it go? 2. Path of Joy and Ease 3. Contemplations: Nyingje (compassion), Shunyata (emptiness). 4. Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹ 5. Sky gazing Optional practices: Illusory Form Practice.</p>	<p>1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Genyen vows while on retreat (8 precepts). 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Wearing white meditation shawl and maroon meditation skirt during practice and at teachings.</p>	<p><i>Insight into the Nature of Mind</i> Weekend Retreat</p>	<p><i>To be Announced</i></p>
<p>Level 4: Resting in Awareness <i>(Pre-requisite: 24 months at level 3; Lung or transmission for texts; Direct introduction to the true nature of mind by a qualified teacher)</i></p>	<p>Full details released on entering this level</p> <p>Fundamental concepts: Equanimity, self-liberation of mental phenomena, non-</p>	<p>1. Silent Sitting. Self-Liberating Meditation (Gompa Rangdrol). Remaining in the true nature of experience and resting in the true nature of mind. 2. Path of Joy and Ease 3. Contemplations: Tangnyom (equanimity/evenness).</p>	<p>1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Genyen vows while on retreat (8 precepts). 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Wearing white meditation shawl and maroon meditation</p>	<p><i>Resting in Naked Awareness</i> Weekend Retreat</p>	<p><i>To be Announced</i></p>

	meditation, unadorned primordial awareness.	<p>4. Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹</p> <p>5. Sky gazing and/or darkness meditation.</p> <p>Optional practices: Illusory Form Practice.</p>	<p>skirt during practice and at teachings.</p> <p>4. At the end of the fifth year, those wishing to do so can take Ngakma/Ngakpa ordination and thereafter wear a white skirt during practice and at teachings.</p>		
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1. In the Pristine Awareness practice mandala the gurus are Kyabje Togden Amtrin, Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche (Jigdral Yeshe Dorje), Shakyamuni Buddha, Padmasambhava, Yeshe Tsogyal, or any qualified Lama or teacher for whom you have trust and confidence.