

A Springtime Song of the Colorless Light

Homework Master, Class One

- 1) Relate briefly a traditional story about the circumstances which drove Lord Buddha himself to develop a form of *bodhichitta*, ultimate love for all beings.

[In a sutra called *The Different Forms of Karma (Karma Vibhanga)*, Lord Buddha tells a story to his monks about Maitri Yajna, a young man who was the son of a ship captain who had visited many countries but then died at sea. The young man and his friends decide to undertake a journey themselves, but the young man's mother dissuades him several times, and he obeys her.

He finally though decides that he will make the journey and starts to leave the house; his mother kneels and clasps his leg, begging him to stay. He breaks away from her and in the process steps on her head.

They set to sea and a typhoon sinks the ship, killing all the young man's friends. He floats to a strange land where he encounters, one after the other, fabulous cities where he takes the pleasure of beautiful goddesses.

Finally he enters a city with a black iron wall, and finds himself trapped inside. A man appears and explains that the youth has come to a hell on earth. The man wears a crown upon his head set with whirling knives which slice open his head, over and over. He explains how he came to be here, revealing that the story of his own life is exactly the same as that of Maitri Yajna. And then the boy realizes that the crown is about to move to his own head.

We learn that the visits to celestial cities were the karmic ripening of the seeds planted by obeying his mother's wishes; and that the crown of knives is a ripening of having stepped on his mother's head.

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But rather than running in terror at the approach of the crown towards his own head, the young man instead begins intense prayers for his mother, his father, and for every living being. He expresses his willingness to suffer the crown, in order to take upon himself the pain of everyone else who might ever suffer in this world.

He thus discovers ultimate love, and because of this the crown stops in midair above him, never to descend.

Lord Buddha reveals then that the boy was actually one of his own previous lives. This and other similar stories about Lord Buddha are typical of the traditional presentation of how a person develops ultimate love on the first of the five stages of spiritual evolution, by encountering firsthand extraordinary personal pain, and then realizing that everyone else in the world has the same pain.]

2) Describe briefly the way in which a practitioner who is on the path of a bodhisattva might experience for the first time love for all beings, especially in the context of the inner body.

[A person on the bodhisattva track might typically undergo an intense, brief experience of the direct perception of ultimate reality. This is triggered when the knots underlying the heart chakra are opened entirely, and prana or inner wind can for the first time flow freely within this area.

During the ensuing hours, the person's heart chakra is still somewhat open, allowing them a direct experience of ultimate love. In this experience they are suddenly able to look directly upon the face of every single living being in the entire world—in all the worlds there are—all at the same time.

They feel an intense love for each of these beings, and see directly a future time when they will stand above all the worlds there are, caring for each of these beings in infinite enlightened forms emanated spontaneously to help each one of them.]

3) At what level would the traditional presentations of how Lord Buddha developed ultimate love “meet” the description of how a person on the five stages of the bodhisattva track develops this same love?

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[We can picture the bodhisattva with heart chakra opened, suddenly undergoing an experience of ultimate love. But we need to appreciate, at the same time, *why* the prana has suddenly been able to move through their heart.

Remember that the story of Maitri Yajna is, in the end, a story about the power of karma, and comes from a sutra devoted to this very subject. Maitri Yajna undergoes a terrible and frightening experience because of a mistake he has made towards his own mother, but even in the midst of this experience the karma of the love he feels constantly for her enables him to transform the experience into a breakthrough: into ultimate love for every living being.

The same forces are at work below the prana which bursts through the bodhisattva's heart chakra and allows them the direct vision of every living being in the universe, all the ones they will serve. In the end, this movement of prana is dictated by the pure karmic seeds there within their own heart.

And so in actuality there is no difference between the two ways of approaching ultimate love. We can use the outer method of good deeds such as the service of our parents, or we can use the inner method such as moving the prana within our body, which cannot be done unless we have devoted ourselves as well to the service of others. Or we can combine, as we will see, the two together!]

Coffee shop assignment: Please meet with at least one other person—or better, a group of people—whom you didn't know well before this teaching; do your homework together and discuss together any questions you have. Please write here where, when, and with whom you did your homework:

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Homework Master, Class Two

- 1) *Kunlong Chupa* is a practice where before we undertake any activity at all we ask ourselves why we are doing it. What is a very simple and very powerful way of doing this practice with the seven steps for developing universal love?

[In the practice of *kunlong chupa*, we pause before we undertake any activity at all—before we leave for work, before we eat our lunch—and ask ourselves exactly why we are doing what we are about to do. We don't struggle against our motivation of the moment, however flawed or small it may seem; rather, we simply follow the implications of our motivation out into the future.

Let's say that I'm examining why I have come to this particular program. With some honesty, I find that I came hoping to meet some new friends. I accept this motivation for what it is, without judging myself, and ask where it's going to lead. I meet new friends, and then at some point they become old friends, and then at a later point (whether through some falling out, or simply everybody's getting old) they become ex-friends.

How many times in my life then can this particular scenario be continued, if each cycle of friends takes what—five years, six years? What will be the last event I attend; where will I be living, when I'm too old to go to another event? And how much time will pass between then and the day that I take my last breath?

Then this train of thought reaches a crucial point: What can I expect after I die? Here our thinking hits a wall: we rarely take the mind this far ahead into the future, because what lies beyond is simply a cloud, a fog—nothing that we can predict or expect.

If we have been trained in the teachings on how the seeds in our mind produce our reality, we are able to say with some confidence what will come next. If we have

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worked very hard to take care of others, then we know that our mind will throw ahead of us a world which will be a good one.

But what will come to those around us is something different. They normally have no understanding of where their world is coming from, much less about how the world ahead of them after death is being thrown there by their mind. They are facing death hopeless, and afraid, regardless of how they seem to be.

Simply as members of the human race, we naturally feel some empathy with these people, especially those who are close—people like our own mother. If we were fairly certain about a way of affecting what happens to us after death, and then refused to share it with the one who brought us into this life, and cared for us for so many years, with so much of her life and attention, then we could truly be considered a heartless person—especially if we knew she were very frightened about what unknown thing was coming.

And here we take ourselves through the content of the rest of the seven steps: what are the odds—given that time itself is infinite, and space as well—that whatever happened to thrust me into this life right now might be repeated? What are the odds, in infinite time, that any given person on the street has been my friend before, or even my mother?

And if so, how could I leave them now, with no hope, filled with fear, at the prospect of death? And what if there was a way that I could assure them, beyond this, of a world of happiness before them upon their death, or before?

And then from here we go naturally to the resolution that it should be us who helps them, and from there the wish to see every living being perfectly happy.

Slowly then we circle back to our present moment, to why we are about to have lunch, and with a sweetened reason for doing so we take our first bite, for the strength to save the world.]

- 2) Looking at our quest for ultimate love from the point of view of the inner body, we need to start from the structure of the heart chakra. Describe the growth of the first eight channels to form in the human body, and how their functions affect our ability to love.

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[The eight channels which form first, at the heart, should—first of all—not be confused with the eight channels which radiate from the heart chakra. The eight which do form in the body first—and this is at the location of the heart—include first of all the central channel.

In our original condition, prana or inner wind cannot flow freely through this central channel. Whatever amount does flow though carries upon it thoughts of goodness and light. If for example we are engaged in a meditation upon the seven steps for reaching true love, and if that meditation is going well, then this is because some amount of prana is flowing within the central channel.

The second channel which forms within the human body in the womb is called the “channel of taste,” or *pingala* in Sanskrit. This runs down the right side of the body in the back, in front of the spine, close to the central channel. When inner wind flows through this channel, we have thoughts of anger, of being upset.

Sometimes this channel is called the “channel of what is grasped,” because when prana flows through it we also misunderstand the objects around us—the people and things which are grasped to by our mind.

The third channel to form is the called the “solitary channel,” or *ida* in Sanskrit. This runs down the left side of the central channel, and when prana flows through it we tend to have unreasonable thoughts of desire—a third cup of hot chocolate at our local coffee shop, when a single cup is enough to stop our thirst and make us feel happy.

This channel is also called the “channel of the grasping,” since when prana flows through it we misunderstand our own mind and our own self—the subjects which are grasping to the objects around us.

The next four channels to form are those of the cardinal directions radiating out horizontally from the heart chakra. These have their own names: the Lady of the Triple Turn, which is the channel petal on the east side; and the Lady of Desire, the channel petal to the south, form first. Then form the Lady of Home, to the West, and the Lady of Inner Fire, to the north.

Through these channels flow the winds of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind; and the channels also split further down their length into the channels which carry the winds which impart to us our ability to sense the outer world. The four

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primary channels of the heart form because of a triple knot formed around the heart by the two side channels—those of taste, and the solitary channel.

The eighth and final channel which forms from the heart has the strange name of the "Obstructing Demoness." It runs together with the central channel, terminating at the navel chakra and at the throat chakra. It is related to the knot at the heart, in preventing the free flow of prana in this area of the central channel.

In terms of developing love then we have the following situation, even within the womb. The central channel would be carrying thoughts of love, but it is choked by two side channels. We might be able to see all the people of the universe, and feel love for them, but the channels which would create this perception are also running from the heart, and are similarly impeded.

Yet another channel runs the length of the region of the heart and prevents the prana that would make us feel our love, as well as the element of enlightenment that could flow in the central channel, and also bring on a feeling of ultimate love. In short, we need to open the heart chakra, if we have any hope of truly loving every other living being.]

3) The lack of a free flow of prana in the area of the heart blocks two important spiritual realizations: that of emptiness (the fact that there is nothing which is not coming from how we treat others around us), and that of ultimate love. How would one of these realizations lead naturally into the other?

[To realize that the things around us are empty is to realize that they are not coming from their own side, but rather flowing from the seeds in our own mind, according to the amount of kindness that we have paid to others.

We cannot for example ever enjoy a chocolate chip cookie unless we have provided the same or a similar treat to someone else: if we have not tried to see that such cookies cross into the mouths of others.

If we can never get a chocolate chip cookie crossing into our own mouth without assuring first that one crosses into someone else's mouth, then obviously our mouth and their mouth are connected.

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We can even go so far as to say that *their mouth is our mouth*, and not be exaggerating in the least.

It's no great difficulty then to come to the second realization: that the happiness of every living being is part and parcel with our own happiness.]

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Homework Master, Class Three

1) Describe what an inner “wind” is in terms of prana performing functions of the body. Give the names of the five principal winds, explain how they first form in the body, and describe their individual functions. Finally outline how they affect the mortality of the body, and how they relate to a core drop in the body, and the ultimate form of pranayama.

[We've seen how prana flows through the channels of the body, especially the principal ones, and how this flow affects our attitudes. When the physical body requires functions such as the elimination of waste, or breathing, then prana gathers from different parts of the body, teaming up to get what needs to be done done. When prana throughout the body gathers to perform a function, we call it a *vayu* in Sanskrit (unfortunately, the Tibetan translation for both the general prana and the concentrations of prana called vayu is the same: *lung* in both cases; this can cause some confusion).

There are five principal vayus or inner winds, and they form within the body at different points within the womb. Just after we make our crossing into our mother's womb, a continuation of our inborn winds is triggered; this then immediately triggers a gross form of the life-holding wind, or *prana vayu*. This wind functions to maintain the power of life within us, and to draw the other winds to the gateways of the senses.

During the second month in the womb, this first wind triggers the second: the downward-clearing wind, or *apana vayu*. This wind functions to release and to retain substances such as feces, urine, semen, and menstrual blood. In the third month, this wind triggers the equal wind, or *samana vayu*—which enables us to digest food and drink; to separate this out into nutritive and waste products; and to distribute the nutritive essence throughout the body. In the fourth month this wind triggers the upward-running wind, or *udana vayu*, which functions to draw wind into the upper

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part of the body; draw in the breath; enables us to speak; and makes possible the acts of drinking and eating.

In the fifth month, this wind then triggers the pervasive wind, the *vyana vayu*, whose function is to allow the body to move, allowing us to come and go. In the subsequent months of gestation, these winds lead to the formation of the winds which transmit our perceptions of the objects of sense.

Viewed as a group, all these functions of the body are in fact signs of our mortality: they keep the body alive, but in doing so they wear out, and wear the body out. Ultimately this is because of the knot in the chakra at the heart: the downward-clearing wind eliminates feces and urine for example because it is restricted by this knot to the lower part of the body, and cannot move up.

In the middle of the heart chakra then is a structure which reflects this dichotomy of the body into two parts, upper and lower, forever separated from each other. This is the indestructible drop, and inside of it are the red element and the white element, divided within the drop like two halves of a pea. Here too is the storehouse of all our karmic seeds.

As we release the three-fold knot at the heart, the downward-moving and life winds are allowed for the first time to rise and descend, respectively, bringing about an opening of the indestructible drop, and a perfect balancing of these two winds especially. Some even say that this balance is the very meaning of the word "yoga," or "joining."

As an outside sign, our breath comes to a stop: to what is called *kevala kumbhaka*, or the natural suspension of the breath. As an inside sign, we undergo the two great experiences related to the opening of the heart chakra: the direct perception of ultimate reality, and of ultimate love, the perception of and love for every face in the universe.]

2) List and then name the major chakras of the body, beginning from the bottom, in both Tibetan and Sanskrit, explaining the meaning of the Tibetan names. Then explain why in the yoga of Lady Niguma for example we work up the channels one by one. Finally mention the four steps we take at each of these chakras to open them.

[Here are the major chakras we will be working with in the body, starting from the bottom. At the groin, where the two legs meet, and then inside the body at this point

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about an inch, is what in Tibetan is called the “chakra of sustained bliss”; known in Sanskrit most commonly by the name of *muladhara chakra*, or the “chakra of the basis” or lower foundation part of the body.

Next in order, going up, is the *svadishthana chakra*, which is explained in Tibetan as meaning “the blessing of oneself,” a reference to a practice of the inner body used to open the chakras. This is located at the very base of the spine; we can think of it in many people as at the area of the top of the crack of the buttocks, into the body say an inch from the back.

Next is the *manipura chakra*, up against the front face of the spine at the level of the navel. The Sanskrit literally means “city of jewels”; and in Tibetan this chakra is known as the “chakra of emanation,” the idea being that from here the inner fire of the body splits off (“emanates”) flame to pass to the top of the central channel to melt the element there, and trigger the process of the opening of the chakras, particularly that of the heart.

After this is the heart chakra—meaning a chakra which is again located at a spot against the front of the spine directly behind the heart. This is known as *anahata chakra* in Sanskrit (the “unstruck” sound of the heart beating, like a drum, without ever having been struck by a stick). In Tibetan it is called the “chakra of all things,” from which the entire world is produced, as the seeds in the indestructible drop open and produce our world.

Next is what the Tibetans call the “chakra of experience,” with a very similar *vishuddhi chakra* in Sanskrit, referring to the area where we experience the taste of food and drink and begin the process of its purification (*shuddha*) into the nutritive essence. This is at the base of the neck, again up against the front of the spine here.

Finally there is the *sahasrara chakra*, the “chakra of the thousand spokes,” a reference to the many channels splitting off from this chakra at the tip of the head, just under the bone of the skull. In Tibetan it is known as the “chakra of great bliss,” given that this is the location of the white element, which plays a central role in the creation of spiritual bliss, and subsequent realizations.

In the Yoga of Lady Niguma, we purposely work up the chakras from the bottom, rather than attacking for example the heart chakra first, directly. This is because the heart has three turns of the two side channels choking it, and is therefore the most

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difficult of the knots to open. We are advised in the scriptures to go at this chakra by approaching it from the bottom, opening up the easier, lower chakras one by one, in successive order, bringing the prana up towards the heart chakra gradually, and then opening it.

Lady Niguma advises at each chakra four different types of yoga asanas or exercises to aid in their opening. First we "unbind the knot" by doing a twist, which loosens the side channels twisted around the central channel like a vine. Next we straighten these crooked side channels with a stretch.

After this we gather the prana by a sucking motion, by a bandha, to draw prana out of the side channels and induce it into the central channel, where it will trigger the two great spiritual realizations we seek: emptiness and love.

Finally we do some kind of "shaking out" asana which will distribute the prana and the associated drops of consciousness all the way up the length of the central channel, helping us to sustain our realizations.]