



A Gift of Liberation
Course One—Perfect Stillness
Class One: A Plan for Enlightenment

1) What is the name of the book that we will be using for our trip to enlightenment? Who wrote it, and what are his dates? How has it come down to us?

2) What is the general outline and strategy that we will be using for our study of this book?

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Homework, Class One

3) What is the primary goal of learning to meditate, and what metaphor does Pabongka Rinpoche use to illustrate it?

4) What are the six helpful conditions that we need if we hope to develop an ability to meditate deeply?

5) What did His Holiness the Fifth Dalai Lama say about “sticking together with a second shadow”; how has this been interpreted wrongly, and how does the correct interpretation impact upon our plans for an “experiential teaching” of this text over the coming years?

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:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, meditating on how you plan to assemble the six conditions for good meditation in your own life and home. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Course One—Perfect Stillness
Homework Two: The Same as High School

1) What are the five problems that—according to the coming Buddha, Maitreya—we are likely to encounter as we progress in our meditation practice? What special way will we be using to learn about these five, and their eight antidotes?

2) What advice does Pabongka Rinpoche, following a special warning by Je Tsongkapa in his *Great Book on the Steps to the Path*, give with regard to the sources that we rely upon for learning how to meditate?

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Homework, Class Two

3) What are the four traditional antidotes for not feeling like meditating? Please give some detail on the first, and explain all four with a high-school metaphor.

4) When Pabongka Rinpoche discusses the second problem of meditation, he takes the opportunity to describe our different choices in meditation objects, and why some are not so powerful. Explain, making reference also to a metaphor for keeping our mind on the object of meditation.

5) How does Pabongka Rinpoche describe the difference between heaviness, gross dullness, and subtle dullness? What might result if we mistake the last for real meditation?

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, meditating on the reasons why you want to learn to meditate well. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Homework Three: The Steering Wheel

1) How does Pabongka Rinpoche describe the meditation obstacle of restlessness? How is it distinguished from distraction, and why?

2) How is gross restlessness distinguished from subtle restlessness?

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Homework, Class Three

3) What is the antidote which we apply when we feel dullness or restlessness, and why is it not exactly an antidote?

4) What is the fourth of the five potential problems in our meditation? What are some forms that its antidote might take when we have mental dullness, and how does applying the antidote resemble driving a car?

5) What are some antidotes which we can apply in the case of either subtle or gross restlessness?

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:

Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, meditating on trying to bring on an imaginary state of subtle dullness in your own mind, and then trying to fix it with the proper antidote. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:

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Homework, Class Four: When to Let Go

1) Pabongka Rinpoche notes that many masters of ancient times have advised us to “let go” into the meditation. What is it that we “let go,” what is the proper point at which we let go?

2) What are the seven components of the Meditation Posture of Vairochana? What is an eighth component which is sometimes added?

3) In the Mahamudra tradition of meditation, the object of meditation is our mind itself. What are the two ways, in this system, of meditation, of blocking an unwanted random thought from the mind?

4) Pabongka Rinpoche mentions a phenomenon where, as we first learn to meditate, it feels as if our mind is getting substantially worse. How does he explain this?

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Homework, Class Four

5) What is it which separates each of the eight states from the preceding?

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, meditating on what it would feel like to pass through the eight stages, dropping a particular problem at each of them. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Homework, Class Five: The Bliss of Meditation

1) What are the four modes of the mind as we move up through the nine levels of meditation?

2) It is said that even reaching the ninth level of meditation is not the full form of what we call stillness, or *shamatha*. What is the difference between the ninth level and full stillness? Include in your answer a description of the different types of meditative fluency.

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Master, Class Five

3) What level is it that we reach after we have developed total fluency of body and mind in meditation? Why is it given this name, and what do we use it for?

4) What crucial distinction does Pabongka Rinpoche make between the ultimate object of our meditation and that even of a meditation so deep as perfect concentration upon the workings of our own mind, reached in the practice of the Great Seal, or Mahamudra?

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, trying to imagine what each of the nine levels of the mind feels like as we rise through them. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:

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Homework, Class Six: A Great Lineage

1) What are the two great divisions of Pabongka Rinpoche’s discussion of emptiness, and why is the split made this way? What further division is made of the first of these two, and what difference does it reflect?

2) Explain the metaphor of the two wings without which a bird cannot fly.

3) What is it which can “tear the very fabric” of the cycle of pain?

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Homework, Class Six

4) Pabongka Rinpoche mentions that Lord Buddha in ancient times taught different versions of emptiness, some of which even seem to be contradictory. What unique feature does he mention about the highest of these different versions?

5) Who are the three great figures in our lineage of the teachings on emptiness? When did they live, and what is one great text that each of them wrote about emptiness?

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, picturing the eyes of the holy being who sits in front of you during your meditation. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Course One—Perfect Stillness
Homework, Class Seven: Three Me's

1) *One of the classical proofs that Pabongka Rinpoche mentions in support of the idea of emptiness is called the “Reasoning of the Seven Choices.” What is the basic paradox that this reasoning is built upon, and how does that apply to emptiness in a variety of ways?*

2) *What is the meaning of the Tibetan word *gakja*? What famous advice does Master Shantideva give us about it, and how can we carry out this advice in our actual life?*

3) *What are four different phrases used for the idea of emptiness, and what is the flavor of each of them?*

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Homework, Class Seven

4) *How does Pabongka Rinpoche describe the idea of a “self”? What are three ways of looking at “self” in the sense of “myself”? And what is the extent to which a wrong idea of the self spreads in the world?*

5) *If the things and people around us are all coming from our own mind, how does this affect whether they “work”—whether they do things, or not?*

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, mentally practicing the three ways of looking at ourselves, and contemplating on how we go through them at different times of the day. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



*A Gift of Liberation
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Homework, Class Eight: Milk & Water*

*1) In discussing how we reach the “deep meditation where things are like empty space,” Pabongka Rinpoche has said that we will be working through four different essential ideas. The first was identifying the *gakja*, or what emptiness is empty of. The second, now discussed, is called “deciding that there is coverage.” What does this refer to, and how does it lead into the third and fourth essential ideas?*

2) What very fundamental problems are raised simply by saying “my mind” or “my body”?

3) In examining whether I am my body and my mind, the question arises of just who it is that goes on when we die. How is this question answered?

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Homework, Class Eight

4) *Where does the metaphor of milk and water come in as we discuss the *gakja*, or the thing that emptiness is empty of?*

5) *What advice does Pabongka Rinpoche give us for our meditation during the points where we start to lose the strength of our perception that nothing is coming from itself?*

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*Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, focus on the “me” which *does* really exist, and then focus on the “me” which *doesn't*. Alternate between the two, for practice. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:*



A Gift of Liberation
Course One—Perfect Stillness
Homework, Class Nine: Empty Arising

1) *After describing emptiness as we experience it directly in deep meditation, Pabongka Rinpoche goes on to speak about the “wisdom of the aftermath, the wisdom of illusion.” Explain these two types of wisdom.*

2) *Pabongka Rinpoche says that there will come a point where we see that—despite the fact that everything is empty—it still exhibits dependent origination. How does he describe here what dependent origination means, and what are three traditional ways in which we can understand it?*

3) *How does Arya Nagarjuna, in his *Seventy Verses on Emptiness*, describe the relationship between dependent origination and emptiness? How do we use this in real life?*

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Homework, Class Nine

4) *How does Lord Buddha, in the *Sutra Requested by Anavatapta*, dispel the idea that—if things are empty, and therefore like an illusion—then there is no great difference between right and wrong, and no need to struggle to be good?*

5) *What are the two extremes that we can fall into as we try to understand how it is that things are empty? How, according (unexpectedly) to Je Tsongkapa, can we avoid them?*

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, thinking of specific examples in your own life where understanding how others are empty would lead you to treat them with more kindness. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations:



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Course One—Perfect Stillness
Homework, Class Ten: The Emptiness of Emptiness

1) *Close to the end of his presentation on emptiness, Pabongka Rinpoche discusses the emptiness of the mind itself. Explain how this works, using the example of the emptiness of depression—which is a very important “real” application of emptiness.*

2) *Having covered the emptiness of two of the divisions of all changing things—the emptiness of physical things, and that of mental things—Pabongka Rinpoche goes on to describe the emptiness of concepts, and other objects which are changing but are neither mind nor matter. Here he describes for example the emptiness of time; explain how he does so, and how this same emptiness is reflected in a visit to the dentist’s office.*

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3) Once he has completed his discussion of how changing things are empty, Pabongka Rinpoche goes on to describe how unchanging things are empty—a much more difficult concept. How does he explain the emptiness of space, or place?

4) There is one special unchanging thing which Pabongka Rinpoche takes care to cover, and that is emptiness itself. It's a difficult point to accept, on the one hand, that emptiness is ultimate reality, while on the other hand asserting that it is also empty of any nature of its own. What is one way in which Pabongka Rinpoche explains the emptiness then of emptiness itself?

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Homework, Class Ten

5) *One of the highest goals of spiritual practice is to achieve the union of meditative quietude and a special insight into the nature of reality. Give the Sanskrit names of these two high realizations, and explain how Pabongka Rinpoche describes the union of the two of them.*

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Meditation assignment: 15 minutes early in the day, and 15 minutes later in the day, reviewing Pabongka Rinpoche's description of how to go into the union of quietude and insight, and then actually attempting to get and stay there during meditation. Please write here the two times that you started these meditations: