

Five Elements, Five Dakinis

Transforming emotional reaction into natural awareness

The five elements, earth, water, fire, air, and void, comprise everything we experience: the world of sensory experience, our bodies, our emotions, even awareness and mind nature. The five dakinis, female embodiments of natural awareness, transform our experience of these five elements, so the world, internal and external, becomes the play of natural awareness.

Full of practical tools for dealing with emotional reactions in daily life, this retreat offers an excellent introduction to vajrayana methods. It focuses on the methods in Chapter 6 of WUTYL. Because I teach it rarely, this is a good opportunity to learn these methods and prepare for other forms of vajrayana practice.

The retreat is held at a lovely camp located in a beautiful river valley about an hour and a half north of Vancouver, BC: good food and wonderful walks beside a full mountain river.

July 10 - 15 • Vancouver, BC • \$765 US • further info at www.unfetteredmind.org



Summer Retreat: Awake Asleep

This retreat continues our series of advanced practice retreats for experienced students. It focuses on two of the six yogas: dream practice (or lucid dreaming) and sheer clarity (or clear light). Both these practices transform the experience of sleep into the experience of presence. Dream and clear light practice depend on three methods: transformation of energy, intention, and relaxation. Meditation instruction will cover all three methods, including body movement work to help body and mind relax deeply.

This long retreat (23 days) will be held in the beautiful spacious environment of northeastern New Mexico. It's for people who have at least five years of practice experience and are familiar with either mahamudra or dzogchen practice. The cost of the retreat covers everything: accommodation, meals, instruction, meditation interviews, and sessions in guided movement to facilitate these practices.

August 2 - 25 • New Mexico, US • \$3000 US • further info at www.unfetteredmind.org



Individual Meetings with Students: how it works now

When I returned to teaching a bit over a year ago, I wanted to move responsibility for initiating meetings to you, rather than both of us falling into a routine of regularly scheduled appointments. The idea was for you to call, e-mail or set up face-to-face meetings with me whenever you wanted to and my availability would be supported through a quarterly contribution.

While this approach works very well for some of you, it doesn't work for many. Some of the reasons are:

- Being unclear about when to set up a meeting and when to call or e-mail me,
- Not wishing to intrude on my time for a short question
- Not being able to recognize when you needed help
- Difficulty in sensing or knowing the next step in your practice
- Not being able to relate to the new structure and not coming to see me at all
- Not suitable for new students with no experience of an ongoing relationship with a teacher
- Because of retreats and other commitments, I was unavailable some of the time

Out of this experiment, a kind of hybrid structure has emerged, combining the elements that worked from both approaches and giving you more choice as well as more responsibility:

- Meetings now take place on an "as needed" basis as determined by you
- Regular meetings are set up only for specific purposes in consultation with me (e.g., to learn a practice or study a text)
- You choose how you contribute to Unfettered Mind, either through quarterly contribution or by individual meeting

I hope this little note helps to clarify what, for many of you, has been a source of confusion. And I look forward to seeing you whenever you would like to discuss your practice, your studies, your experience in practice, or how you are applying it in your life.



Unfettered Mind
Pragmatic Buddhism
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Beverly Hills, CA 90211

RETREATS & WORKSHOPS

✿ **FIVE ELEMENTS: FIVE DAKINIS**
Vancouver, BC, Canada
DATE: July 10 to 15, 2007
TEACHER: Ken McLeod
LEVELS: All Levels
COST: \$765 US, \$795 Cdn
TO APPLY: dlawrans@telus.net or
<http://unfetteredmind.org/meditation/elements.php>

✿ **AWAKE ASLEEP:
DREAM & SHEER CLARITY**
Des Moines, New Mexico
DATE: August 2 to 25, 2007
TEACHER: Ken McLeod
LEVELS: Advanced only
COST: \$3000
TO APPLY: go to
unfetteredmind.org/meditation/awakeasleep.php

✿ **MAHAMUDRA**
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
DATE: September 18 to 23, 2007
TEACHER: Ken McLeod
LEVELS: Middle and above
COST: \$660 US, \$750 Cdn
TO APPLY: go to
<http://unfetteredmind.org/meditation/ontario.php>

✿ **FALL RETREAT**
Mt Baldy Zen Center, Mt Baldy, CA
DATE: October 10 to 14, 2007
TEACHER: Ken McLeod
LEVELS: Middle and above
COST: \$500
TO APPLY: go to
<http://unfetteredmind.org/meditation/fall.php>

For details on Study and Practice Groups,
please visit unfetteredmind.org



CLASSES & GROUPS

✿ **WAKE UP TO YOUR LIFE STUDY GROUPS**
can be found in the following cities:

- Columbus, Ohio
- Montpelier, Vermont
- San Diego, California
- Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Seattle, Washington
- St. Johnsbury, Vermont
- Toronto, Ontario, Canada
- Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

✿ **STUDY AND PRACTICE GROUPS**
can be found in the following cities:

- Claremont, California
- Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Los Angeles, California
 - Mt. Washington*
 - Santa Monica*
 - Studio City*
 - West Valley*
- San Diego, California

✿ **DIAMOND SUTRA STUDY GROUP**
Los Angeles, California
DATE: Third Sunday (Began 08/20/06)
Sitting from 4:30 pm - 6:15 pm
Study 6:30 pm - 8:30
CONTACT: Jeanne Pisano, 818.761.4180

SPECIAL EVENTS

✿ **UNFETTERED FILM TALK**
Join us at Julia's for UM's potluck dinner and film discussion. The film is to be arranged – see the website for details. Watch it beforehand, or with Julia and others at 3:00 pm, and bring friends or family for an informal evening of good food and good conversation.
DATE: September 30, Sunday, 6:00 pm
LOCATION: Pacific Palisades
CONTACT/RSVP: carpetsoup@hotmail.com

Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.

— John Wooden



Three Questions

Last year I took a short course in rock climbing — hanging from strangely shaped colored knobs bolted to a canted wall while I tried to figure out my next move before my arms and legs lost all their strength and I fell. Rock climbing, I reflected later, comes down to three points:

- willingness, even if you end up falling on a mat
- know-how, knowing how to use your body and the equipment properly
- capacity, having the strength and ability to grip or push or hold

Later, it struck me that Buddhist practice comes down to the same three points and that many of the difficulties and imbalances experienced in practice are due to not understanding which of these three points needs attention.

Willingness: do you want to?

One day, while staying at a friend's house, Nasrudin peered over the wall into the neighbor's yard and saw the most wonderful garden he had ever seen. He noticed an old man patiently weeding a flower bed and asked,

"This is a beautiful garden. I'd like to have one just like it. How do you make a garden like this?"

"Twenty years hard work."

"Never mind," said Nasrudin.

You say you want to be awake and present in your life, but you practice only occasionally, and even then, for relatively short periods. Maybe you do practice regularly, but your practice only goes so far, stopping at a wall that you can sense but can't name. What stops you? Are you willing to touch that wall, touch it and go into it? Are you willing to be present in any and every experience that arises, whether it be anger, shame, love, success, heartbreak, victory, insult or failure? What do you actually want from your practice?

You cannot compromise with the demands of awareness. To be awake and aware is to be awake and aware. The options of suppression or ignoring are no longer available to you. You do not get to choose what you are aware of, and not to act on your awareness becomes another form of ignoring. Ironically, the illusion of choice merely indicates a lack of freedom. Do you want to live this way?

Willingness means to let go of conventional concerns over happiness, wealth, status, and reputation, the agendas of life in society. As long as you limit your experience to what fits into the world of society, you will explore your spiritual potential only to the extent that it doesn't impinge on your life in society.



Because man must exist in society, there can be no freedom except in matters that do not matter; but because man must exist in the spirit, there can be no social rule, no social constraint, in matters that do matter.
— Peter Drucker, management expert (1909-2005)

Willingness means you practice living in the world of immediate experience, the world in which there is no time, the world in which you cannot trade or share a single thing with anyone, the world in which not a single person, not even you, exists, the world that is what you experience right now.

It also means "twenty years hard work".

Know-how: do you know what to do?

Nasrudin once worked as a ferryman. One day, he was taking a scholar across the river.

"Have you ever studied grammar?" asked the scholar.

Nasrudin shook his head, to which the scholar replied,

"Too bad. You've wasted half your life."

A little while later, the wind rose and waves began to rock the boat. Nasrudin asked, "Have you learned how to swim?"

The scholar shook his head.

"Well, you've wasted all your life," said Nasrudin. "We're sinking."

In today's world, in most major cities, you can meet and study with a teacher in virtually any of the major traditions of Buddhism. You can pretty well take your pick from an abundance of meditation practices and other tools that Buddhist teachers have developed over the last 2,500 years. Yet the availability of teaching doesn't ensure that you know how to practice or how to use these teachings to be present in what you experience.

How do you acquire know-how? The Chinese have a saying: to learn how to do something, do it 10,000 times. You learn a lot when you do something over and over again. Cal Ripken, Jr., the legendary shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles, fielded 1,000 balls every day. That's why he knew how to field a ball.

Know-how also comes through the struggle to find your way. It doesn't come from listening to a talk, or even from receiving personal instruction. You can learn a lot from a teacher, but real know-how comes from working through your own difficulties yourself. As Suzuki Roshi says, "In your very imperfections, you will find the basis for your firm way-seeking mind."



Capacity: do you have the resources?



"I can see in the dark," boasted Nasrudin one day in the tea-house.

"If that is so, why do we sometimes see you carrying a light through the streets?"

"Only to prevent other people from colliding with me."

From time to time, meditation practice just doesn't make any sense. You sit there, ostensibly resting in experience, but in reality, alternating between watching all kinds of thoughts and sensations come and go and being completely carried away by one thought or another. Only gradually do you find the ability to rest in the chaos. You are building a capacity in attention.

From time to time, you will struggle to know something that you simply don't have the capacity to experience directly. Attention is too unstable or it doesn't have enough juice. Without realizing you are doing so, you compensate, striving to know emptiness, compassion, or non-self by merely understanding it. Instead of building capacity, you put your energy into refining your intellectual understanding. This is a bit like a person trying to negotiate an overhang by studying a book on technique — instead of building strength in his or her arms, legs, and torso.

You build capacity in two ways, by repetition and by increasing the challenge, just as you do in building physical strength and stamina. You build capacity by returning again and again to the practice, to attention, or to natural awareness, on and off the cushion. And you build capacity by exercising awareness in more and more challenging experiences. In loving kindness, for instance, you start with people who are close to you, and then gradually extend to people you are not close to and eventually to people you definitely dislike.

Summing up

When you encounter difficulty in your practice, consider these three questions:

- Do I want to be present in this experience?
- Do I know how to be present in this experience?
- Do I have the capacity to be present in this experience?

Willingness will be there when you know why you are practicing. Know-how comes through your struggles to practice. Capacity develops as you increase your efforts. You need all three. Observe where your weaknesses are and put your energy into developing what you are missing. Don't use one to compensate for a lack in another: unbalanced efforts produce unbalanced results. Lack of capacity is one of the most common weakness. Like Nasrudin, many people just don't want to put in the time and energy. And that, I suppose, brings us back to willingness.