

## **Introduction to Pure Awareness**

### **Notes from Viveka**

#### Terminology

Zen: Silent Illumination or Shikantaza, Just Sitting

#### Vajrayana

- Mahamudra, Great Seal
- Dzogchen, Natural Great Perfection

FWBO – Pure Awareness (the current terminology which could change)

Theravada – Satipatthana/anapanasati practice brings us to this kind of practice as well although there's not a formal name for it. Contemporary teachers speak of choiceless awareness or bare attention.

In all these traditions, the pure awareness type of meditation is practiced in a larger mandala of both samatha and vipashyana practices. It would be a mistake to see it as a stand alone approach.

#### My background

- Naturally I found breath awareness opening to pure awareness – probably closest to the Zen approach
- When I was ordained I found that Formless practice, not visualization, was where I wanted to explore the vipashyana dimension of my meditation practice
- 8 years ago, went on a 10 day silent retreat with Joseph Goldstein which provided experience with the “vipassana” approach method of the Insight Meditation Society and also led to taking up the 16 step anapanasati method in '99
- In 2001 I explored Dzogchen on retreat with Lama Surya Das which whom I've done retreat every year in the 4 years since. I consider Lama Surya Das a root guru with whom I verified the teachings. This year I formally asked became a Dzogchen student formally
- My pure awareness practice was also significantly boosted by a Zen encounter with Kwong Roshi (one of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi's earliest students in San Francisco) in April 2004 that confirmed the Dzogchen pointing out to the nature of mind.
  
- I do not have direct experience with Mahamudra teachers (except to the extent that Lama Surya Das has also been introduced to Mahamudra).

What Makes Pure Awareness Practice Distinct?

#### ***1. The VIEW of Pure Awareness as our basic nature.***

"This mind, O monks is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is; therefore for them there is no mental development." – *'The Buddha, Anguttara Nikaya Suttas of the Pali Canon'*

In Pure Awareness practice we are learning to recognize the luminous nature that is inherently there and does not need to and cannot be created. Fully recognizing this nature is to enter into deep entrusting of our basic OK-ness or purity and a deep relaxation or releasing of all contracted states which is to know enlightenment, nirvana, peace.

This view really came into its own as a teaching with the development of Buddha Nature teachings

From Sallie King's book, 'Buddha Nature', on the original Buddha Nature Texts:

- *All sentient beings possess Buddha nature and are thus guaranteed the realization of Buddhahood.*
- *Not only will we be Buddhas in the future, we already are Buddhas now.*
- *Insofar as we do not experience ourselves as Buddhas, we are deluded and not experientially Buddhas*
- *In such a case our Buddha Nature is covered up or concealed by adventitious defilements such as greed, hatred and delusion. These defilements are not essential to the human condition but simply the products of past karma. It is possible to free oneself from that karma and the power the defilements have to construct our reality.*

*Flower Ornament Scripture, "I now see all sentient beings everywhere fully possess the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones, but because of false conceptions and attachments they do not realize it" (Shakyamuni's utterance at the time of his enlightenment)*

*Zen Master Hongzhi "In the field of boundless emptiness is what exists from the very beginning. You must purify, cure, grind down, or brush away all the tendencies you have fabricated into apparent habits. Then you can reside in the clear circle of brightness."*  
*"It cannot be cultivated or proven. From the beginning it is altogether complete."*

In the Tibetan tradition it taught as:

- Nature of Mind (sems ryid) – like a mirror
- Mind (sems) – reflections that appear in the mirror. Dualistic and conceptual

The nature of mind is innately aware. This intrinsic awareness is rigpa.

Because there is a sense of knowing there is a sense of self. ONE who knows. So pure awareness practice is about going deeply into how is this? What is it really? Seeing through mind to the nature of mind.

Nature of mind can be expressed in two paths:

- With awareness leads to existence as a Buddha
- With ignorance leads to samsara, life as an ordinary sentient being

*“When there’s no realization, this intrinsic awareness observed  
when the mind is turned inward is a sentient being.  
It circles through the realms of the six living beings.*

*When there is realization, it’s a Buddha.  
The three Buddha bodies dawn in ourselves.”  
- 12<sup>th</sup> century Tibet yogin, Godrakpa Sonam Gyaltzen*

Our basic nature is the GROUND of awareness.

1. Its essence is:

- OPENESS
- sunya
- empty of color, shape, solidity
- not fixed

2. Its nature is:

- CLARITY
- knowingness
- luminosity
- cognizance
- radiance

3. Its activity is:

- SENSITIVITY
- responsiveness
- compassionate
- creative
- uninhibited

***2. EFFORTLESSNESS as the kind of effort. Just pure awareness (as the method, the attitude – not goal oriented, non-dualistic)***

This rides from the first aspect. Trusting the mind. And knowing that pure awareness, nature of mind is not something that can be created. We’re create conditions for us to

open or enter into pure awareness but not create it. Rather than trying to develop concentration and focus on an object the practice is to let the power of awareness be heard from and surrender to it.

A different kind of effort if we think of the spectrum of effort we can make in working with our minds:

- Generative/developing practice
- Allowing/unfolding practice

Both kinds of effort are valuable and guard against derailing to extremes of:

- Being completely lost in thought and our karmic patterns
- The deluded mind controlling the meditative process (the deluded mind cannot liberate itself)

*Hongzhi “Stay with that just as that. Stay with this just as this”*

We are seeing nakedly

- Direct experiencing of things as they are versus karmic perception
- Karmic perception posits a solidly existent self as the experiencer and reference point in polarity to what is experienced. Creating “me” and “mine” and taking basic information from the sense and reacting with craving or aversion.

From the introduction to Padmasambhava’s teaching ‘Self Liberation through seeing with Naked Awareness’:

*Seeing things just as they are without our vision being obscured and distorted by judgments and conceptual constructions that derive from our social and cultural condition in this life and karma from past lives. Living in the state of the mirror and not the condition of the reflections.*

*Whatever is seen nakedly is allowed to liberate itself into its own inherent condition, which is emptiness without any modification or effort on our part.*

Getting to mind as a self healing, self enlightening organ.

Non-linear perspective of spiritual practice

- Not going from samsara to nirvana
- The nature of mind is pure to start with. We are learning to return to our original nature.
- Not creating that original nature so in that sense it’s a non-causal practice. That’s why it’s called non-dual. In the absolute sense.

### ***3. The heart of the practice is FORMLESS***

Related to the kind of effort is the undirected, totally open, formless nature of the heart practice. This lives alongside practices of form/samatha/doing.

*Definition of just sitting from Dan Leighton, "... objectless meditation focuses on clear, nonjudgmental, panoramic attention to all of the myriad arising phenomena in the present experience."*

The route to knowing our basic purity is to stop the outward moving subject/object habit of the mind. To become aware of awareness itself. Discovering the mirror like nature.

- The inner illumination in Zen
- In Dzogchen this is rigpa – state of presence and intrinsic awareness which is the capacity of the nature of mind

Not directing awareness at objects (the nature of mind is not an object)

Not meditating upon something

Not constructing dhyana

Not withdrawing from the senses (eyes open)

Entering into pure presence, pure awareness, rigpa (beyond the mind's conceptions)