



Taming the Horse, Riding the Mind

by Chögyam Trungpa

The following talk, which first appeared in 1984 issue of The Naropa Magazine, is from the seminar "Educating Oneself Without Ego," which took place at Naropa Institute (now University), September 23 – 25, 1983.

Learning, from a non-ego point of view, is based on opening our heart and discovering a natural sense of discipline. Discipline in this case means attuning ourselves to our inherent purity. We don't have to borrow anything from outside ourselves, or mimic anybody. We are naturally pure and intelligent. We may already have some idea or experience of that, but we also need to go further in opening ourselves.

When we begin to open, learning isn't a struggle anymore. It becomes like a thirsty person drinking cool water. It is refreshing and natural. And the more we learn, the more we appreciate. It is quite different from a military academy approach or learning based on struggle of any kind.

Our path is sometimes rough and sometimes smooth; nonetheless, life is a constant journey. Whether we sleep, eat, dress, study, meditate, attend class—whatever we do is regarded as our journey, our path. That path consists of opening oneself to the road, opening oneself to the steps we are about to take. The energy which allows us to go on such a journey is known as discipline. It is the discipline of educating oneself without ego,

and it is also known as training one's mind.

Educating oneself is said to be like taming a wild horse, a horse which has never been touched by anyone. First you try putting a saddle on its back. The horse kicks, bites, bucks; you try again and again. Finally you succeed. And then you manage to put the rein over its head and the bit into its mouth. Maybe you have difficulty making the horse open its mouth, but at last the bit goes in.

That is a great success. You feel good, you feel that you have accomplished something. Nonetheless, you still have to ride the horse. And that is another process, another struggle. It is quite possible that the horse will throw you off. If you are able to hold on to the rein, that might help you to control the horse; but it is still questionable. Maybe that would give you forty percent control. For the rest you are taking a chance.

Our state of mind is like a wild horse. It contains memories of the past, dreams of the future, and the fickleness of the present. We find that to be a problematic situation, and so we practice what is known as meditation.

The word *meditation* has various meanings, as it is referred to in different traditions. According to The Oxford Dictionary, meditation means that you meditate on something. For example, when you are in love, you meditate on your lover. Your lover is so beautiful. He or she is extraordinary in love-making—moves beautifully, kisses beautifully, and quite possibly smells fantastic! Meditating on those kinds of perceptions just means that you are dwelling on something, occupying yourself with something.

In the fundamental sense, Buddhist meditation does not involve meditating on anything. You simply arouse your sense of wakefulness and hold an excellent posture. You hold up your head and shoulders, and sit cross-legged. Then very simply you relate to the basic notion of body, speech and mind, and you focus your awareness in some way, usually using the breath. You are breathing out and in, and you just experience that breathing very naturally. Your breath is not considered either holy or evil; it is just breath.

When thoughts arise you just look at them and you notice, "thought." It's not "good thought" or "bad thought." Whether you have a thought of wisdom or a thought of evil, you just look at it and say, "thought." And then you come back to the breath. By doing that, you begin to develop the notion of putting the saddle on the horse. Your mind begins to be trained. It becomes less crazy, less drowsy, and more workable at that point.

This particular practice of meditation is known as *shamatha*, which literally means "dwelling in peace." In this case peace is not a euphoric or blissful state, but simply a basic and down-to-earth situation which results from cutting out hassle and turmoil. We aren't trying to achieve any goal or attain any particular state of being, in either the religious or secular sense.

When we practice in this way we find that thoughts which perpetuate neurosis melt, or evaporate. Ordinarily we don't pay any attention to our thoughts. We unknowingly cultivate them by acting according to whatever they command. But when we sit down quietly and look at them, without judgement or goal—just look at them—they dissolve by themselves.

In shamatha meditation, one's attention span is naturally extended and one's open-mindedness is developed. You become more steady, and also more cheerful—free from turmoil. That is why it is called "shamatha," dwelling in peace.

So that is the first stage in learning: learning how to learn. That is the first step. First you cut through the basic notion of ego, of holding on to neurosis. Beyond that, there is what is known as vipashyana, which literally means "insight." In this case insight is seeing things as they are—not adding passion or aggression onto them. Now we are beginning to step outside the meditation compound and examine how we relate to our world.

The world that we live in is fabulous. It is utterly workable. We see motorcars going by in the street, buildings standing as they are, trees growing, flowers blooming, rain and snow falling, water flowing, and wind clearing the air, ventilating—whether there is pollution or not. The world we live in is all right, to say the least.

We can't complain at all.

We should begin to learn how to appreciate this world, this planet on which we live. We should realize that there is no passion, aggression, or ignorance existing in what we see. We begin by developing mindfulness of our steps, as we walk. Then we begin to experience the sacredness of brushing our hair and putting on our clothes.

Activities such as shopping, answering the telephone, typing, working in the factory, studying in school, dealing with our parents, our children, going to the funeral, checking ourselves in at the maternity department of the hospital—whatever we do—is sacred. The way we develop that attitude is by seeing things as they are, by paying attention to the energy of the situation, and by not expecting further entertainment from our world. It is a matter of simply being, being natural, and always being mindful of everything that takes place in our day-to-day life.

That develops naturally from shamatha meditation. Sitting meditation is like taking a shower. Vipashyana, or awareness practice, is like drying your body with a towel and then putting on your clothes.

So there are two aspects to our journey, to our learning process: there is learning by sitting meditation and learning by life experiences. And there is no problem in joining these two together. It is like having a pair of eyes and then putting on glasses. It is the same thing.

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Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939–1987) was one of the most influential Buddhist teachers in the West. He founded Shambhala, a network of meditation centres, as well as Naropa University, a Buddhist-inspired university. In addition to his extensive teachings in the Buddhist tradition, he placed great emphasis on the Shambhala teachings, which stress the importance of meditation in action, synchronizing mind and body, and training oneself to approach obstacles or challenges in everyday life with the courageous attitude of a warrior, without anger. The goal of creating enlightened society is fundamental to the Shambhala teachings.