



# Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

## Yoga in Buddhism

*Lecture held at 3-Klang-Studio, Buckenhof-Erlangen, 1st November 2011*

I would like to present the topic of *Yoga in Buddhism* in four points:

1. The history
2. The meaning
3. The different types of yogic exercises
4. The way to practice

### **1. The history of Yoga in Buddhism**

There is evidence, that Buddha Shakyamuni himself practiced yoga and taught about it, so yoga is traditionally part of the Buddhist teachings.

After his ordination the Buddha spent six years on a river called Narensana, near Bodhgaya. There he practiced a form of yogic asceticism, during which he subsisted merely on a grain of rice and a drop water per a day. Some might now object that this is not really yoga, since neither arms nor legs are moved. In the following I will go into a little more detail about this.

Buddha was focused at that time on mind training, for which he had received instructions from various teachers. At the same time, he was practicing the meditations of calm abiding and clear insight. Through this he finally realised the true nature of phenomena, their inherent emptiness and how they appear through dependent arising. After having attained enlightenment, he began to teach and turned the wheel of Dharma three times, as it is said. He also gave explanations of yogic practice.

There are two types of Buddha's teachings that have survived: the Sutra<sup>1</sup> and the Tantra<sup>2</sup> teachings. In the Sutras it is described, for example, in which way the breath is used as support for the meditation of calm abiding, which is considered a form of yoga. These breathing exercises are called Pranayam in Sanskrit, and within Buddhism are practiced by the listeners (Shravakas), the self-realising Buddhas, and by the Bodhisattvas.

Within the secret Mantrayana, the Buddha's tantra teachings, we speak of three levels of yoga practice: Mahayoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. Here the word yoga is already integrated in the name. In Mahayoga the main focus lies on breathing exercises in connection with the inner wind or energies and the inner channels; in Anuyoga the focus is placed on the exercises of the inner essence drops, and in Atiyoga, also called Dzogchen, it is primarily about bringing out our primordial wisdom based on the breathing practice and the exercises of the inner channels.

Longchenpa (Longchen Rabjam) once said that yogic exercises have always been part of Buddhist mediation practice, beginning with the breathing exercises of the sutra teachings and extending to the highest tantric teachings.

In Tibet the yoga teachings were disseminated by Padmasambhava. This was done among other things by hiding some of the teaching texts (as so-called termas), which were partly only rediscovered centuries later by great meditation masters.

The teachings of the Namchö cycle were taught by the Tertön (treasure finder) Tulku Mingyur Dorje (1645-1667) whose first disciple was Karma Chakme, who in his turn was the teacher of Mingyur Dorje. Both then jointly wrote a commentary on the Namchö cycle, from which I in turn teach and which is the basis of my yoga teachings. In the Namchö cycle there are more than 100 exercises taught by Tulku Mingyur Dorje up to Penor Rinpoche that have been passed on in an unbroken lineage of transmission. I myself have done the exercises with Penor Rinpoche during a month-long retreat and received the corresponding explanations several times.

When I think about my own practice, I have to confess that sometimes I do it, but sometimes I haven't done it. I am a rather lazy practitioner, and despite my laziness, this practice has helped me a lot: during my studies for example, my body was very tense and cramped up from hours and hours of sitting over books. These tensions have improved enormously thanks to the exercises. So, if you really practice regularly and with more enthusiasm than I do, you can surely get even greater benefits

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<sup>1</sup> The discourses the Buddha held.

<sup>2</sup> Buddhist teachings designed to guide the student quickly and effortlessly to Buddhahood, especially by transforming impure perceptions into pure ones.

## 2. The meaning of yoga

The word 'yoga' comes from Sanskrit and has been translated into Tibetan as 'Nalshor'. 'Nal' is part of the word 'Nalma' and means 'true', 'real', 'actually'; here it refers to the true nature of phenomena. Indeed, every philosophical point of view has its own explanations of what is the true nature of things. What concerns the Buddhist view is, that all appearances arise in interdependence, that means are dependent on certain causes and conditions. In their essence however they are 'empty', that means "free of an inherent existence".

The word 'shor' can be translated with 'arriving' or 'reaching'. In connection with 'nal' it means the realisation of the nature of phenomena. To achieve this, one practices the exercises of the inner channels and the inner wind. By means of the methods of the inner wind, one gains insight into the nature of phenomena and can abide in it. This is called shamatha meditation. 'Nalshor' thus means the realisation of the nature of phenomena and of the mind, as well as abiding in it.

This explanation of the word is very different from what we usually understand by 'yoga'. Nowadays, we only refer to the physical exercises, the breathing exercises and exercises with the inner essence drops as yoga. But actually these are methods of preparation to finally experience 'yoga' or nalshor'. If we only practice these three, however, it is also all right, since they are the basis of the actual yoga. As they form the foundation of yoga, they must be carefully practiced as a prerequisite.

## 3. The different types of yogic exercises

There are four levels related to the body-mind relationship, which in Tibetan are called **Tsa, Lung, Tige and Sem and respectively Yeshe**. (1) Tsa denotes the inner channels, (2) Lung the inner wind or energy, (3) Tige the inner essence drops and (4) Sem the ordinary, conceptual mind and respectively Yeshe the primordial wisdom. All four levels are closely connected with each other. *Primordial wisdom is ultimately what we achieve through the yogic exercises*. The yogic exercises try to bring to light the state of the primordial wisdom by changing the inner channels, the inner energy and the inner essence drops and thus dissolving sem, our coarse mind which relies on concepts.

We can look at original wisdom as the stored information on a hard drive of a computer that we want to make appear on the screen: For this we need a keyboard, a mouse and so on. One way to make the original wisdom appear on the screen, so to speak, is to press in a certain way on different parts of our body to activate the channels and in this way to make

the inner wisdom appear on the screen - comparable to the power cable of a computer. With the activation of the cable, particles, i.e. the inner essence drops, or tige, are set in motion. The electricity, which sets these particles in motion can be compared with the inner energy, lung. The mind, yeshe, corresponds to the monitor. Finally the particles appear on the screen, because they were electrically transported there via the cable from the hard drive, this is analogous to the primordial wisdom, which is transmitted via the inner channels by the inner energy in form of the inner essence drops in our minds. All our qualities appear in this way.

Another example to describe this process is the planting of crops: The most important things are the seeds and the field. In order for the seedlings to grow, we need water. For this we need the water to reach the field by irrigation pipes. These pipes can be compared to our inner channels, tsa. With the help of energy, the water is pumped through the channels to reach the seeds. This energy corresponds to our inner wind, lung, and the water corresponds to our inner essence drops, tige. Now the crops can emerge, which corresponds to our primordial wisdom. Our entire body is like the field, which is permeated by the inner channels. When we move our body in a certain way, the channels become supple and the knots, which produce negative thoughts among other things, are loosened. That is why physical exercises are so important.

The organs in our body - lungs, liver, kidneys, and so on - are all connected by our blood vessels. If even one of these vessels is blocked, less blood flows through it, and blood pressure rises. This also causes the energy to no longer flow freely through the body, and the inner essence drops are also inhibited in their circulation. A sign of this is when our skin becomes sallow.

The close connection between our mind and our breath can be observed when for example our breathing immediately changes as soon as we are scared or excited and becomes faster or flatter.

In the Buddhist tradition, the first thing to talk about in connection with yoga is the physical condition, and then the corresponding exercises. Some of these exercises are kept secret and are not given to students until they have completed the preparatory meditation practices, others are allowed to be explained publicly. Therefore, I will only talk about the latter.

In relation to the body, we assume **three main subtle energy channels and five chakras**. There is a middle, a right, and a left energy channel. They are called the **Uma** (center), **Roma** and **Kyangma**. In men, the left channel is referred to as Kyangma and the right channel is referred to as Roma; for women the left energy channel is referred to as Roma and the right one as Kyangma. Through the middle channel, we attain knowledge of the

nature of phenomena and of mind, by which the actual meaning of yoga or 'Nalshor' comes to light. Roma is the channel through which the white inner essence drops of the father flow, Kyangma is the one through which the red inner essence drops of the mother flow.

If we were to try to locate the chakras and channels in our body by x-rays or surgery, we wouldn't find anything substantial. Therefore, we can look at these subtle areas like rainbow colours that appear on a meadow, when the sun shines on it after it has rained. They are energies of our body, which do appear, but cannot be grasped physically.

Chakra is Sanskrit and means 'wheel'. **The five chakras** are located on the forehead, the throat, at heart level, at the navel and at the secret place of the female and male genitals. This does not mean, of course, that there are real wheels located there. Their appearance is much more comparable to those of our subtle energy. During our practice we visualise seed syllables at these places and use them in the physical exercises, as they are special subtle areas where the channels often become knotted or entangled. When we try to loosen these knots, we can also dissolve our negative mental states. In ancient times wheels were used by kings as weapons to overrun the enemy. That is why this word was chosen for the energy centers, but it has nothing to do with the actual conditions of our body. Another reason to refer to these energy centres as 'wheels' is that wheels classically have spokes, which means that all energy channels are connected to these five points in the body and are also cleansed and knots can be released by the exercises. This leads to releasing the five negative emotions, anger, attachment, jealousy, pride and ignorance and to increasing the respective positive emotions.

Now we come to **lung or the inner wind**, by which we generally understand movement. There is an outer, inner, and a secret wind.

**The outer wind has two subdivisions:** the 'greater' outer wind and the 'smaller' outer wind. The 'greater' outer wind corresponds to our breath; a healthy human breathes approximately 21,600 times per day. The 'smaller' external wind changes with each of the 84,000 possible states of mind and with every thought we have. If we see a butter lamp, we think butter lamp; when we see something white or green and so on, we think 'white', 'green' and so on. With every thought there is a movement, which links from one to another, infinitely. There are machines, I think, that can measure these movements, like detectors that are supposed to detect whether someone is lying or not, based on physiological changes.

### **The inner wind can be differentiated into five distinct inner winds:**

\* The first is the wind of vitality and connected with the energy of the heart; it keeps us alive. If it is out of balance, we get nervous and start to breathe very fast and shallowly. The more imbalanced this wind, the greater the danger of becoming mentally confused or insane.

\* The second is the all-pervasive wind, which flows through all our limbs and channels in the body. It causes e.g. the blood to be transported to the tips of the thumbs.

\* The third wind is the wind, which balances the heat in the body, so that the temperature doesn't rise or fall too much. It also lets us digest food.

\* The fourth wind is the rising wind and responsible for swallowing and breathing.

\* The fifth wind is the descending wind and responsible for all excretions.

### **The secret wind embodies the five primordial wisdoms:**

- 1) the wisdom of reality or the nature of phenomena;
- 2) the mirror-like wisdom;
- 3) the wisdom of equality;
- 4) the all discriminating wisdom and
- 5) the all accomplishing wisdom. Unfortunately, here is not the space to explain them all in detail.

Now we address **the inner essence drops, the tige**. Here, we distinguish between the white essence drops of the father and the red drops of the mother.

By means of the winds in the channels in conjunction with the essence drops, our mind or consciousness permeates our body. So we train our body in such a way that wind, channels and essence drops are perfectly aligned and the coarse thoughts of our consciousness can be stopped and the original wisdom, that has always been indwelling, can be brought forth. This primordial wisdom recognises the nature of all phenomena, as it is, as well as the nature of our mind. This is what we call the real yoga or 'nalshor'.

The energy channels of our body are also referred to as the place of abiding, as this is where our consciousness and primal wisdom rest and form a common basis. Since the primordial wisdom is brought to light by the changes of the inner wind, we speak of the changeable inner wind. On this inner wind the essence drops move and are spread throughout the entire body; we call these the 'arranged essence drops'.

## **4. The way to practice**

Finally I would like to give a short summary of the practice: In order to purify and align the channels, the physical exercises are most important. To do this, we must first make our

joints supple and stretch our muscles. Because, if joints and muscles are not supple, all the following exercises for the body can become quite difficult and exhausting. The most important in any case is flexibility; muscle building is not the focus.

Subsequently we clean the three energy channels and the chakras. This is done with the help of those exercises, in which we jump and move the body more vigorously. Here it is especially important to practice long term and with care. Then we can improve every day.

Currently, there are an increasing number of yoga programs on television that would have us believe that we are capable of doing the exercises as depicted. However, this is often not the case. The exercises are usually not described precisely, and the goal is not only to keep us physically fit. For example, if it is shown how to cross the legs behind the head, certainly some preparatory exercises were preceding. However, due to time constraints, these cannot be shown on television, and this can easily create a false impression.

To harmonise the physical exercises with the energy channels, they are combined with the breath. There are three phases: inhaling, holding the breath in the body, and exhaling. When we inhale and feel the wind in the body, we should do this slowly, as if we were stretching a bow. Then we hold the breath. If we breathe in too quickly, it can lead to problems with the wind of vitality and we start to worry or develop fears. For this reason beginners should hold the breath in the abdominal region and not in the upper body. For example, if we are holding the breath in the area just below the throat, it happens easily that the air escapes during the exercise, which should be avoided. At the end of the exercises, we slowly exhale again, as if we were sticking a needle into a balloon letting the air out evenly. During the exercises, we meditate with the help of visualisations.

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