

From The Chronicles of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

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In this short audio recording [11 minutes], Rigdzin Shikpo, formerly known as Michael Hookham, talks about his training with Trungpa Rinpoche in the 1960s, beginning while Rinpoche was studying at Oxford. For more information, on Rigdzin Shikpo and the Longchen Foundation,

Tribute to Trungpa Rinpoche

I and a friend first met Trungpa Rinpoche in 1965 in London. We both had been very impressed by his teaching and asked if we could meet him and talk further and get some teaching from him at his flat in Oxford, the flat he called Anitya, meaning impermanence. We went and stayed there for a long weekend, going up on Friday and getting some teachings from him in the evening, staying over Saturday and Sunday and getting some final instructions in the morning on Monday. The most astonishing thing about this period of time for us was that he was very enthusiastic in teaching us something of dzochen or Maha Ati as he called it. We perhaps didn't realize at the time just how profound this teaching was, but nevertheless it was something that was very impressive and very telling for us, and in fact has something that stayed with us right up to the present the day.

The first aspect of the teaching he wanted to bring across to us was a very practical aspect, and that is the teaching of what he called *complete openness*. He said this is the way that you had to act to everybody and to every situation you encountered, you had to be completely open, without having prejudice mind and you had to train yourself in that particular way. And that this was the keynote of the essence of formless meditation itself and no matter what kind of thing arose in meditation, no matter how emotional it might be, no matter how confusing the quality of openness, opening yourself out to what was there always had to be present. It wasn't a question of indulging in the experience, but allowing yourself to feel it in a very complete way, and then be able to let go of it when you'd done that. So the essence of formless meditation was really this teaching of complete openness. And it wasn't simply that the complete openness was a meditation instruction, but simply he said that everything *was* completely open in nature. It didn't matter what it was, the nature of everything you encountered, all situations and all people, no matter what the experience might be, complete openness was the keynote.

Another thing he mentioned at that time he said it's not just a question of things of being open, which one might interpret perhaps as some kind of ultimate emptiness, but that things form some kind of coherent pattern just naturally, and this he called *natural perfection*. As things manifest to you naturally in your life and in your experience they formed patterns that have

meaning and significance in a way that he sometimes described as the mandala principle. There isn't anything that is not significant and not valuable. And there is nothing you can say about your experience that doesn't make it perfect, even if you were to experience something negative, then the perfection involved in that is of course the fact is that you had yourself constricted or interfered in some way with the natural flow or natural expression of that pattern, and as you did that then the pattern changed and it formed a different kind of natural pattern that might seem to our minds rather confused or rather negative, but it was simply the natural outcome of one's personal participation with the pattern, along with the participation of all other beings and everything that went up to make up that natural situation.

The important thing in one's life and in one's behavior was to see this kind natural patterning and to go with that, not in the sense, again, of indulging in it, but to be able to experience it and to open out to it and then to allow the third aspect, which he described as very important, which was to allow the quality of *absolute spontaneity* to arise. Absolute spontaneity isn't really something that you can say, "I'm going to be spontaneous"; that of course wouldn't make any sense, and you can't in any way make spontaneity happen, of course, but it is possible to lay some kind of ground for that spontaneity to arise, and the important thing there is to not have preconceived, solid ideas about notions of causality, why you think that the volitions that you have should arise in a particular way, such as, well I think in this way because it's the way am, or I think in this way because it's the force of my notions that make me think like this, or maybe I think it's a series of associations that makes me behave or think in this way, but in fact, as you allow yourself to open up into something of that ground from which actions arise, you realize the actions that you called "yours" don't arise from ego at all, they are not ego centered, and they simply arise from some bases which is actually beyond thought, beyond concepts. You could say its like a fountain of goodness, that all actions are fundamentally good in nature. When it seems that they don't work and there is some negativity involved, one can see that it is one's modifications and constrictions in how one treats one's experience that makes that negativity there, and makes me think that I perhaps performed this particular action, and the egocentricity that is involved in that makes it not a spontaneous act.

You had to bring the three together, the natural perfection of everything, the complete openness and spontaneity all came together and that it was possible in the general experience of one's life and one's Buddhist practice to make those three things a complete unity, and then if you do that you have the experience of what is called the *tree of life*. That everything that arises has something of significance or value, that nothing in your life is to be considered, as it were, an accidental event, everything had to do with dharma, everything is the living dharma, as he would sometime say, on that on this day the dharma wants me to do this particular thing, or the dharma wants me to do - that is something that obviously you have to find out for

yourself - but his idea was that dharma was alive with these three particular qualities and that was the basis for him for the whole of the dharma and this particularly the formless meditation.

And as I said that was something he said to take to heart and we did our best and of course even in those weekends with the instructions were straight from his mouth, as it were, when we went back to our hotel and started to meditate we would say to ourselves, "Well, we can't force meditation into a particular way or frame it in a certain way," but of course we couldn't have not guided the meditation along a bit, to shove it in a particular direction, it took years, to learn to abandon yourself to this quality of spontaneity and to rely on natural perfection and to realize that complete openness was the only way.