P U R I F I C A T I O N

teachings by

Sonia Moriceau

2004 - 2010

DEDICATION

To my main teachers
John Garrie Roshi, Namgyal Rinpoche and
Norbu Namkhai Rinpoche
who tirelessly shared their wisdom and compassion

and to the many students who attended the teachings.

A bow of deep gratitude for your support.

Purification

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P U R I F I C A T I O N

So contact your posture and feel stable, present, in your body. Feel your posture giving to gravity, have a sense of what shape you are forming; occupy your body. Contact the density of the physical body; come into your body. Now from the top of your head down to your toes imagine your body hollow, empty, only space. Just space moving into space; hollow, from the top of your head down to your toes. Feel that, your experience of space. Notice the movement of your belly, the falling and rising of the belly. Place your attention on the movement of the belly. As you pay attention to the movement of your belly, if the mind goes to an event of yesterday, bring the mind home to the movement, gently but firmly. If the mind fantasises about the future, bring the mind home; bring the mind home to 'now in this body'. This is the practice of sitting.

The subject of purification is vast, we have time to take it gently, don't make too much demand on yourself. You need to take it gently so we start with body work, so you begin by lying down on your back. Know that you have a body. You get in touch with the body by scanning the body; you do that by bringing the attention to the points where it is in contact with the ground. Then do the hollow body, space, and now you are in the subtle body.

Emptying

The first *mantra* in every deity practice *sadhana* (text), a preliminary for any practice, is:

Om svabhava shuddha sarva dharma,
svabhava shuddho hum.

Svabhavha means to become, *shuddho* means purification, *sarva* means all, everything, *dharma* means phenomena, happenings. So the *mantra* means may all phenomena become purified, by emptying. There is no translation

for *om* and *hum*, they just mark the beginning and the end of the *mantra*. Purifying all inner and outer manifestations, to become empty.

To establish emptiness, the hollow body, visualise yourself empty, inner and outer both empty. Feeling empty like a bubble, like a balloon, from head to toes. Starting with the head and the chest, then the arms and hands, then the pelvis and the legs and finishing at the toes. You want to do that as a downward movement. The purpose of the *mantra* is to fix the mind, dropping the self, then out of that spaciousness a lot of potential can arise; so take time to drop the self. It is very important to start every practice in hollowness and this is the state to cultivate as we fall asleep and as we wake. For example after the nine breathings there is a moment of emptiness, clarity – for when we die. To do this for a short time, many times. A moment of stopping, emptying, not projecting the self; you can cultivate this in everyday life.

Bowing

Bowing is a movement of the body and the mind encouraging a letting go of the things just passed and the things yet to arise. It is a moment of inner silence, of leaving no trace of self, a true taste of emptiness. Imagine a snowflake touching the surface of the water, feel in your body, in your mind, in one instant…the silence, the texture. Don't try to hold onto it or to make it better. Just living the silence, bowing.

Bowing is a technique to be present, you practise it externally so it can become an internal movement. As you enter a different space – the Zendo, the kitchen - take a moment to stop before entering: stop, breathe in, bring the arms up and round and together; breathe out, bowing with the upper part of the body. And again when you have entered. Bowing is a way of stopping, letting go, coming into the moment. It comes to a place of feeling in union with everything. Bowing to the moment of the 'here and now', not to a person, not to the Zendo because it is a special place. The alignment is physical, emotional, fully upright (the spine is important). Before bowing you can make contact with the three centres and the sounds. It is an action of gathering, in a moment; right side, left side in union, moving to oneness. What being are you taking into the space? – a being of the past, future; a being that is angry? Before talking to someone – breathing in, breathing out, and bowing – then you are totally present. A Zen practice.

Aligning the three centres

Sounding *om ah hum* in the three centres is the first purification practice. The centres are places in the body, they are also called the three doors. They have sounds, vibrations. There is no translation of *om ah hum*.

- Sounding *om* you feel the vibration and the sound at the centre of the skull. Say it with surprise, with wonder. The *om* syllable relates to the body, form, right action; the colour is white: the shape of a white diamond radiating light in the ten directions in the centre of your head, in your brain.
- Sounding *ah* at the centre of the throat, with happiness; relating to right speech, expression, and energy level because it is connected with the breathing. It is also called the centre of integration. The colour is red – radiating ruby red light.
- *Hum* is sounded at the centre of the body, the heart-mind centre above the base of the sternum, in front of the spine. It relates to mind: right thought, intention, motivation, the drive in our life. Sounded with satisfaction, internalised in the centre of the being. The colour is blue, a deep blue diamond, radiating light.

The three centres have *mudra*s (hand gestures – *see diagram on inside front cover*). For *om* the palms are together, just touching the forehead, but with a little gap. For *ah* at the throat, the fingers are touching under the chin and the thumbs below the lump, the hands slightly open – it creates space, imagine you are holding a jewel. For *hum* at the breastbone the fingers are interlinked at the main joint, palms apart. The fingers are not really touching the centres, it is more a little physical contact to be in touch with the vibration.

So you have the sound, the gesture, the colours. Just imagine the colours if you can; the main aspect is the sound and you feel the vibration in the body. *Om ah hum* is the basic *mantra* for purification of body, speech and mind; and it is the shortest practice to come to the centre. If the three centres are not aligned you are not upright; if they are aligned you have a moment of stillness, no grasping. The mind is driving the speech and also the action. They are literally connected with the spine, if they are aligned it is literally upright. If the three centres are aligned you are in stillness, not crooked. *Why is the syllable for body at the forehead and mind in the chest?* In this practice the body, *Om*, is at the forehead; there is a centre of form in the brain. *Hum* is connected to the heart which is the seat of the mind. Practise and try to contact the vibration inside the body, sounding each syllable slowly many times and you will see which sound you have connection with:

mind, speech or body. And ideally you can finish by saying all three together three times.

Practise the sound until you really feel vibration in the three centres. Start with sounding louder than a normal voice, then as you would speak normally, and gradually more internal, bring it to a whisper until you feel a sense of vibration at the centre. Take them one at a time, with the hand gesture and colour and sounds. Practise the sound by itself, focus on one at a time. You may feel more connection with one centre than another, so with practice they will become equally active, alive. At the beginning do three *om, ah, hum*'s, then just one each time. For integration you can say it five or seven times quickly. You can do it last thing at night, first thing in the morning.

It is said that these are the sounds that we heard in the womb so they go far back, they have the ability to contact, to purify, deep patterns. I think this takes you back to your essence, this is the diamond state. So it gives you more strength to deal with your hindrances; they are still active in your life so you need to deal with them. Play with the sound, you have to find your sound and this will change each time you practise; it will vary in pitch, volume, tone. Practise this and ask the question, what is standing in the way in your life, standing in the way of this full radiance? What are the patterns that stand in the way of full awakening, that hide your true essence; repetitive patterns that don't lead anywhere? Do this only after sounding *om ah hum*, investigate from a place of radiance. This is the question you have to ask yourself; usually you get in a mess, a bad place, you beat yourself up. But you need to ask this question or you end up destroying yourself, being very negative. So you need a lot of safeguards – sound *om ah hum* then investigate.
How to attend to the hindrances? Very lightly. Ask the question in your mind from time to time, don't write anything down, and when you do the prostrations the answer – the hindrances – will come to you, from the depth. Instead of writing a list of all the bad things. This is because some of the patterns that we have are very deep, so deep that you need more than the discursive mind to contact it.

With prostrations

Do prostrations, touching the three centres, down onto the ground; give to the ground of being, it is supporting you. Coming up again, feel renewed. Repetition. It is a body meditation, realigning the three centres. Prostration,

purification, then rising again. Repetitive prostration makes you hot. Spend some time contacting the three centres, feel their different vibrations, then do the prostrations for twenty minutes. Don't do it too slowly, that gets dull. And don't wait for colours, you can feel the colours, you don't need to actually see them. Half prostration, a short version, is to go down onto your knees, bend and bow, hands onto the ground. Doing prostrations brings a deep realignment of the body. It really brings out distortions in the body, pains appear. Doing one hundred thousand prostrations in a lifetime brings out all bodily imbalances, the body has really gone through many changes to a deep shift in the body, and realignment. One hundred thousand in Tibetan culture means many, many, don't necessarily take it literally!
What is the significance of opening the hands? You receive the blessing of the *buddha*s, also when touching the back of the head when lying down. When doing prostrations with *mudra*s, hand gestures:

- first with palms flat, you are confessing, giving all
- then palms open to receive blessings from the *buddha*s, they are very pleased with you
- with the palms together on the top of your head, you are thankful.

Confession with prostrations

Purification
All my ancient, twisted karma,
from beginningless greed, hate and delusion.
Born through body, speech and mind,
I now fully avow

So this is a very important practice of purification of body, speech and mind. I want you to spend time saying this while doing prostrations. You say the purification text then you do the prostration. Say the text out loud, softly if you are in the Zendo; it is very important to say the words: 'I now fully avow'. (If you like you can say 'admit', a more familiar word; 'avow', in the text, that is the more traditional word.) This is to the point, there is no room for 'but, but, but'. Say the last line with conviction. I want to see some commitment when you say 'I now fully avow', with emotion, and you throw yourself on the ground. Or half prostrations; or if you cannot do that, you touch the three places and bow – brow, throat and heart. I want you to do this every night and morning. And of course when you say 'I now fully avow' you want to have in mind one of your short-comings. The fact that

you admit is purification. In this short practice you have got the body, speech and mind: body is the prostration, speech is the text, mind is intention. And try to give it much energy, not to slow down, not too sluggish, as powerful as you can do (as far as your body can do).

- *I'm increasingly aware of a huge amount of collective karma, behind the being that I am. Don't know if there's anything that I can do about it.* You can be specific or you can have a general feeling, intention. Again this practice is helping you to loosen your grip on the sense of self – your little self, your concept of self.
- *Because I was brought up on confession, there is a strong feeling of being the bad person.* Notice that I give you it in the context of being of benefit to beings. *Bodhicitta* is purified mind. So I expect you to feel more humble, more soft, through this practice of prostration.

You can do the prostrations for minutes or half an hour. When you practise alone you say it aloud, when you practise together you say it to yourself. Imagine the Buddha above your head.

Question and answer

How did you find the prostrations?

- *The physical action kept it physical and focused.* When you go down imagine that you are giving to the earth your short-comings.
- *At 'greed, hate and delusion', I found the opposites were hovering, wanting to come in.* Of course, if you let go of the negatives the positives will want to come in.
- *'Beginningless' filled me with dread, it almost sounds as if they are eternal.* Stay with beginningless, not eternal. Stay with the impression of the word rather than the meaning. It means that your hatred and desire are very old, very ancient.
- *When we come up from the prostration, what are we doing?* You are empty, the process of letting go is heavy, be in the process of purification. In the prostration as you go down imagine you are giving to the earth your short-comings. When you come up you are fresh, empty, purified. Really mean it, put all your energy, your determination into the movement. Emphasise the words, say them loudly in your head, see them in bold letters. You give not just your shortcomings but all beings' shortcomings.

Vajrasattva

Vajrasattva is a meditation practice of purification. The whole teaching could be summed up as letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome in body, speech and mind. We have accumulated countless moments of unmindfulness, moments when intentionally or unintentionally we have caused suffering to another living being either through our speech, our view or our action. Therefore we need a strong method, a skilful means to remove and purify our deeds. *Vajrasattva* is the main practice in the *tantric* tradition for purification. With the study of the one hundred syllable *mantra* we come to a state of union with the Diamond Being and realise our true nature, pure from the beginning.

Life review exercise

So I want you to look at your life, at three aspects of your life. The first one is the aspect of relationships. The second one is activity, your occupation. The third one is the environment, your place in the environment – it is where you spend your time; so if you commute to work you include travelling on the underground. As you look at your life, these three aspects, look at a pattern that is stuck, repetitive. The patterns that you know do not lead to a state of ease, contentment, a state of growing. I want you to approach this with extreme friendliness to yourself; not to destroy yourself, criticise yourself. You want some information, if we do purification we need to know what we are purifying – but without the drama. So before this work I want you to establish loving-kindness in your mind; establish a calm state, a generous state, a spacious state. You can do this through body work, chanting the *metta* text, through the *om ah hum* - anything that will bring you to a state of ease with yourself, a happy mind. It is so important because we tend to attack ourself too much, criticise, put down; then we don't get enough information about our pattern. If you approach it from a state of loving-kindness, of immense kindness to yourself, then we are going to see the pattern much more clearly and then we can do something about it. If you are not being kind to yourself, stop the practice and re-establish kindness to yourself, every time – through walking practice, or the *om ah hum* can be of great help here. *The review of life, it was tricky, a lot of activity – should I stop?* No stay with it, notice what is happening, don't push it away. All of you, you may have activity in the body – twitching, diarrhoea – all this is a sign of purification. The movement in the body means there is freeing, not clinging, not holding on.

So, we return to the text:

Purification

All my ancient, twisted karma
from beginningless greed, hatred and delusion
born through body, speech and mind, I now fully avow.

First of all you establish calm, then you review your life, you train your mind, you do purification with prostration. Full prostration; or if that is too difficult, half prostration; or if you are physically unable to do even that, bowing; or if nothing else is possible, to do it mentally. So this is very important work today. Spend twenty minutes with each phase, to have time to go into something. For three hours. One hour of each is too much, so you don't do that. Better to do a short session and to do it twice. Reviewing your life if you find it helpful to write things down, you write it down. If you find it is not helpful, then you don't do it. When you look at your life I would like you to make sure your back is leaning against something – to lean against for example a tree, a chair – so you need something that will make contact with your back. Otherwise you are going to go forward, to look forward. If you don't find a pattern it doesn't matter, leave it for now. If you look at it with kindness you are going to be able to go deeper. Then when you do your prostration you can take this tendency to be unkind to yourself, to hit yourself, and give it to the ground, abandon it to yourself. It is an amazing thing to let go finally, when you are ready to fully give it up. So if you are gloomy, depressed, beat yourself up with this practice – go skipping for a while. This was Rinpoche's advice to me when I was on a one-year retreat. As soon as you feel a little bit dull, depressed - skip to keep the energy positive, otherwise you cannot do the work.

Puja* and 100 syllable *mantra

The Sanskrit Dictionary defines *puja* as; " *honour, worship, respect, reverence, veneration, homage to superiors or adoration of the gods*". The *puja* is a different kind of practice in meditation, it involves all the senses. The intention is that you are drawn to the shrine objects – sometimes the flower, or the bell, it doesn't matter which; you start with one then are drawn to move on to another. So you are drawn to a deeper experience – outer, inner and secret. To focus on the objects, this is because we have a short concentration span; it is meant to be beautiful, to lift your spirit, so you are drawn to the wholesome. So you can keep your eyes open and focus on the objects. To get involved with the objects, look at the picture, the image, and to take the posture of *Vajrasattva* – that is how this kind of practice works. A lot of silk flowing around the picture represents movement of energy.

These outer things are triggers for inner, secret and most secret meanings, experiences.

Question and answer

- *What is the dorje and the bell?* The *dorje*, *vajra*, is skillful means, the male principle; the bell, wisdom, is the female principle.
- *What is the reason for saying the mantra quickly?* Fast is naturally, you start going fast when you know the *mantra* and your breathing goes in time with the *mantra*. Also in Tibetan practice you have to do one hundred thousand *mantra*s, so you need to go quickly!

One hundred syllable *mantra*

While saying the *mantra* you should think: "My body becomes clear like crystal, and is full of the *amrita* nectar like a glass full of milk".

OM VAJRA SATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA
Om Vajra Sattva guard my vows
VAJRA SATTVA TVENOPA TISHTA
Vajra Sattva, stay nearby.
DRIDO ME BHAVA, SUTO SHYO ME BHAVA
Steady me, gladden me,
SUPO SHYO ME BHAVA, ANURAKTO ME BHAVA
enrich me, be loving towards me.
SARVA SIDDHI MEM PRAYACCHA
Bestow on me every perfection
SARVA KARMA SU CHA ME
and in all my deeds
CITTAM SHRIYHA KURU
make noble my mind.
HUM HA HA HA HA HOH BHAGAVAN
SARVA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNCA
Diamond of all the Tathagatas do not abandon me;
VAJRI BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH!
make me diamond-like, oh Being of the Great Vow, Ah!

Now imagine *Vajrasattva* dissolving into light and being absorbed into you through the crown of the head (the 'gate of purity'). Your entire being is filled with the light and blessings of *Vajrasattva*.

Explanation of the mantra

The whole *mantra* is an aspiration to go deeper; to let go of stories and to enter the diamond state of being. There is a lot of 'me, me, me', you are

being greedy, you are asking for a lot of protection. This is because we need a lot of support to attain enlightenment, so we are right to ask for it.

- *'guard my vows' – SAMAYA* means discipline. So you are asking *Vajrasattva* to help you keep your vows, your discipline, your commitment.
- *'stay nearby'* – you are asking *Vajrasattva* to stay in contact with you and also to stay in touch with your deeper being. For you to stay connected with the diamond state of being. *VAJRA* is diamond, *SATTVA* is being, so *Vajrasattva* is a mind state, it is the diamond state of mind, beyond illusion. It is an aspiration: 'may I stay connected with my depth of being' - your higher self, you could say.
- *'steady me' – ME* is me, *BHAVA* is being, becoming. So you are asking to be more stable, not so distracted in your life, being firm in your connection with practice. There is a lot of 'me', we are asking a lot of things.
- *'gladden me'* – it means that if you contact the diamond state of mind you will be very high, very happy, you are going to be gladdened. So you are asking to be brought to this diamond state of mind; ultimate happiness is the state of enlightenment, not the mundane state..
- *'enrich me'* – it is encouraging us to search for a wholesome state; whatever will mature us, help us grow, will nurture us to come to that state. Namgyal Rinpoche said instead of 'enrich' it is more 'ripen me', 'mature me'. When we feel nurtured, supported, then we can mature.
- *'be loving towards me' – ANU* means again, *RAKTO* means blood. Rinpoche said to give me a 'blood transfusion', bring me back to life, to brightness, to radiance. Being reborn, you could say.
- *'bestow on me every perfection'* – again you are asking for the *SIDDHI*, the power, the tools (also the perfection of the *parami*s) to come to enlightenment, you are asking for the diamond state of mind. May I experience every moment as it is, without fabrication.
- *'in all my deeds make noble my mind'* – in all actions make my mind noble and pure. So, actions of body, speech and mind; may all my actions, my intentions, come from a pure mind; to guard my mind from the unwholesome.
- *'do not abandon me'* – so you are asking again the diamond state of being not to abandon you, to keep helping you towards this enlightened state. *HA HA HA HA* is the four directions, *HO* is a simple wake-up; you are sending for help in the four directions, to all the *TATHAGATA*s (*buddha*s). *HA HA HA HA* also represents

happiness, bliss, emptiness, and *HO* goes up through the crown of your head; it has been called the *mantra* of awakening.

- *'make me diamond-like'* – you are asking them not to forget this vow and not to abandon you.

This is the essence of the *mantra*. The *'great vow'* is the vow of continuing with the teaching, to carry on with the teaching of the *dharma*. The final *AH!* represents loving-kindness, love.

This explanation comes from Namgyal Rinpoche, I think you will not find it anywhere else. I find it very helpful, putting it in everyday life.

The practice of *Vajrasattva* is to remove all blocks, all blocks and negativities; to clear all illness and obscurations, to experience reality as it really is, to see things as they really are. Your body is clear as crystal; it is filled with *amrita* nectar like a bottle full of milk. It could be interesting if at home you say the *mantra* in the morning three times and in the evening three times, it would change your focus for the day to contact the deep *mantra*. It doesn't take long to say the *mantra* three times. You are asking all these favours from *Vajrasattva* you have to do something for it, you have to show up! *'Stay nearby'*, you are all nearby – physically you can be far away but in mind you are all nearby. It is said that if you practise the *mantra* twenty-one times each day, this will clear up any unwholesomeness for that day.

<u>Guided meditation on purifying white light</u>

1. So make contact with your posture. Imagine as if you have a cushion behind your back, gently leaning into the cushion, finding support. Make contact with your spine, feel the uprightness of the spine. You are supported by the ground and by the cushion behind your back. So you can safely, gently let go. And now notice the movement of your belly, with gentle attention to this movement, in and out. And imagine from the top of your head down to your toes your body is hollow, empty.
2. Now imagine above your head a source of radiant energy, of beautiful white light. Imagine that some of this energy flows down and around your body as a fine mist above, below and to the side; refreshing, cooling, offering protection. Very fine mist. You feel safe, you feel protected.
3. Now this source of radiant white light, this energy, becomes stronger and more vibrant; it pours in through the crown of your head and down the central channel as white liquid, spreading through the rest of your body. The energy source above your head is infinite, pouring

white *amrita* nectar down throughout your body, washing away all blocks and negativities, defilements, which leave the body through the soles of the feet and the anus as black smoke or liquid. Your body becomes filled with white liquid, like a glass full of milk.

4. This brilliant liquid, this nectar, has the potential of purifying all illnesses, all negativity. From the top of your head down to your toes your body is cleansed, washed, purified. Your body-mind becomes crystal. Imagine this brilliant liquid flushing out impurities, they are leaving the body establishing you in blissful energy. So maintain this image for a little longer. In this moment believing that all blocks are purified, all blocks. In this moment your body, speech and mind are purified; in this moment you are contacting your true nature, pure from the beginning.
5. Take twenty minutes on your own in silence, to process whatever sensations arose in your body during this sitting. Something very deep happened so we need to let it settle. So take twenty minutes here in the Zendo or outside.

This is what this practice does for you, the point of the essence pure from the beginning. So it is a joyful practice. There is the outer and the inner. The outer can be all twisted, the inner is pure and shining. Your body is clear as crystal; it is filled with white nectar like a glass full of milk.

White *A*

If we stay in a state where we are not influenced by thoughts of the past,
we do not invite thoughts of the future
and we are not disturbed by thoughts of the present.
In the fresh instant of the present moment,
there is a wisdom free from all concepts.
We should remain in this state without falling into drowsiness or without allowing our mind to withdraw naturally or to wander to external objects.

I want to help you to experience the state where you have no thoughts. You are in this state many times in a day, but don't realise it. If you don't catch it, you move out of that state very quickly. The device I would like to give you is the sounding of the White *A*. From time to time during the day you sound the White *A* and you stay in that state for a brief moment. Like the text says (last para), to cultivate that state *'without falling into drowsiness….'*.

Every time you find your mind going around with a story, busyness, you sound the White *A* three times. If you are in nature, sound it aloud; if you are in the dining room, sound it silently. You stop, take the posture, if standing look in the distance – and sound the White *A*; aloud, under your breath or mentally. See it as a study: what happens to the mind, to the grip of the mind, when you sound the White *A*. So you apply the White *A* to repetitive patterns – happy ones, unhappy ones, to patterns that are hooking you. Next time you get stuck, say the White *A* and offer the stuck-ness to, in, the White *A*.

You can practise on your bike, on the tube, you can practise everywhere. Last thing at night in bed, connect with the White *A*, chant the *mantra* three times. And first thing in the morning. I always give you things that I practise myself and this is my practice at the moment. Stop and say the White *A* during the day when you get caught in your things, it cuts through. And I want to be able to hear this White *A* – sitting, and in the practice of walking you can stop, sound. Be careful not to use it as a distraction, as a busy-ness. Whenever you sound it, do it three times; no variation from the instruction. It is a good practice. It is different, like jumping off a cliff - sometimes you are too loud, too fast, I feel that you are busy with the White *A*. The texture is different, don't try to hold onto it; the sound of your voice will match the texture, it is safer, not pushing or holding back. There are sound, light and rays coming from the heart, but it is not a solid shape. The sound, light and rays take you into the state of non-concept, non-abiding, non-clinging awareness; no more self, just sound, light and rays of light. There are sounds in the silence – *A* – but the sounds are not solid, spacious. Catch the luminous space, to recognise this texture, it is very different. The White *A* is the primordial state, your essence, beyond concept. *Shuddhe shuddhe* means purification, purification. Work with the shape, merge with it, go into the different space. Luminosity in the colour, white, should bring more lightness, brightness to your practice. Melt, give everything that you are in this moment to the White *A*: total letting go. It is the essential practice, a *dzogchen* practice.

<u>Question and answer</u>

- *I find it difficult to connect with the White A*. When you sound the White *A* imagine light rays coming from it. In that moment you give everything to it, merge with it, dive into it, and stay in that space just after. It is an experience, it is not a concept. If in the space after the White *A* there are thoughts coming, give the thought back to that

space. It is as if when you sound the White *A* it is the only thing in that space, there is nothing after it. Total letting go. And to be aware – awareness is either aware or not aware. For me sounding the White *A* is such a precious moment, like jumping off a cliff, giving it everything, not knowing what will happen next, if I will come out, if I will be there. Jump off a cliff when you sound *A*, you don't know where you are going to land. You have to look into the space when you sound the White *A*, you really give everything to it, it is a moment of abandonment, total abandonment.

- *Are we trying to create an image?* No, the syllable is an image, it is a door to open something else. That is why, when chanting the White *A* you are rushing into something, I feel bruised, 'they are busy chanting the White *A*'. Sometimes in the space there are thoughts, give them to the space; emotions, give them to the space. Sometimes during the day you sound the White *A* and it will trigger something for someone else, 'oh yes, the White *A*'. Sound it when you feel moved during the day, and when you are getting stuck in a cycle. I am trying to encourage you to find, for yourself, a familiarity with the spaciousness of the mind, the emptiness. The spaciousness is not spacey, spaced out, it is alert.
- *Is there a difference between spaciousness and emptiness?* In this context it is the same.
- *What if I'm having negative thoughts?* Give them to the White *A*. Draw it, paint it; the time you take to draw the picture, it involves you in the colour, sound, vibration, it makes a deep impression on your mind. There are three choices if an unwholesome state arises. To track, name it and let it go, this is the method of insight practice. To find an antidote, which would be loving-kindness; this is more pacifying, *samatha*. Or just say *A*: the White *A*. That is the supreme method: whatever is arising, melt it into the White *A*, spaciousness. There is no need of naming, antidote, letting go. Antidote is a crutch, you still have to go to the mind state and let go of the mind state.
- *I'm not confident about what to do in the White A practice.* The White *A* is a mind state beyond duality, beyond thought, beyond concept – practise not with thought but with sound, with non-identity. Everything you have in your being you melt into the White *A*, like emptying yourself, a hollow body. The light and colours always come from the White *A* in the heart. At the end, stay with that presence, of emptiness, in the White *A*; stay for a few breaths.

Five Elements Mantra

Purifying with the mantra of five elements
A
OM
EHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE
YAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE
BAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE
RAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE
LAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE
E YAM BAM RAM LAM
SHUDDHE SHODANAYE SVAHA

Explanation

- *E* is the Tibetan syllable for the element space, so when you say the syllable *E* you imagine blue light filling your body. *HO* means infinite, so first you start with the body then you imagine infinite space; you do it through the colour, and the blue is a deep blue. Imagine the colour deep sky blue, it comes from the outside of the White *A*, bathing the whole body and everything you touch, see and feel; infinite blue light, the whole room is blue. The aspect of space is mind, purifying the mind. *SHUDDHE SHUDDHE* means purify, purify. The first *SHUDDHE* is past, the second *SHUDDHE* is the future – it is very important to imagine the purification of both. Out of purification comes strength and protection.
- *YAM* is the air element balancing the breathing, the energy, and the colour is green emanating everywhere and through everything, and infinite air. The body is green.
- *BAM* is the water element, the colour is white, so you imagine the body white. This *mantra* is asking you to work with sound, light and rays, the rays of the light. You are balancing body fluids, the blood in your body.
- *RAM* is the fire element, the colour is red and it is to do with the body circulation, heat in the body. It can also be the absence of warmth, that is a sign of fire, the absence of fire.

- *LAM* is the earth element, the colour is yellow, gold and you are balancing the aspect of flesh, muscle.

In the *E*, *YAM*, *BAM*, *RAM*, *LAM* line, you have a choice for visualisation. You can imagine rainbow light flooding your body, ribbons or light of the five colours, coming out of the circle around the White *A*. Or you could also touch lightly the five centres, places, with your hand as you say the combined *mantra* - positioning *E* for space above the head, *YAM* at the throat for air, *BAM* at the heart for water, *RAM* at the solar plexus, *LAM* at the navel centre (think of the *hara* point below the navel). The colours of each element, the chanting and visualisation are for purification, strength, protection. *HO* is infinite – infinite element, go into the spaciousness of the element. Get the vibration, feel the presence of each element. With each element the White *A* sends out rays of the element colour; with each element you get into something luminous, vast, spacious. Think of it as a presence, the sounds as a presence, coming from the heart. It starts at the heart chakra, from this place rays of light come out from the *A* in the heart. With practice you might feel each element come into balance, an alignment coming into body, mind. At the end *SHODHANYE* means purified, *SVAHA* with joy – you have done the job! Spend ten minutes on this *mantra* and integration of the five elements.

The word *mantra* means a tool for training the mind; a device, technique to help focus the mind. So you use your body, speech and mind; the *mantra*, the colour, the light, so there is no room for your usual thoughts. The *mantra* is to do with balancing but also protecting, strengthening your energy. It is important to use voice, the speech aspect. Melt everything you are into the White *A*, a moment of total letting go; offer everything you are in this moment to the White *A*. When we go slow we contact the wisdom of the body, the stories of the body; if you meet discomfort, be gentle, give space, stay present. At night in bed chant the *mantra* aloud if alone, mentally if not. At least once, three times if you can. And first thing as you wake up, do the *mantra* again. The first thing is to remember - last thing at night, first thing in the morning. And any time during the day when you feel a bit out of balance, you can chant the *mantra* for yourself. The colours put you back in touch with the element in yourself. Don't think about the element, just use the colour and your voice.

Guided instructions for practising the *mantra*

The *mantra* of the five elements balances energy to come quickly to a space of losing yourself completely. I would like to suggest that now you add something more. You are going to spend ten minutes with each element.

- When you do the space element you go outside, you focus on the sky (or indoors so long as you are connecting with space). Find a place where you have a lot of sky, where you can stare at the sky, gaze into space. Lying on your back or sitting on a chair. You want to make contact with deep space; have contact with the sky at least. With each element make contact with it and make an aspiration, a statement of intention: *'I take in the space element, the space element is absorbing me, I and the space element are union'*. Say this three times. It is like a movement of energy, you take in the space, the space is taking in you, you become one with the space. You say that mentally, silently three times. Then you repeat the *mantra* for ten minutes or as many times as you want, the line of the mantra that corresponds to the element: *EHO, SHUDDHE SHODANYE SVAHA*. You can chant it or you can say it mentally also, while visualising blue; imagine the body is blue, whatever you touch becoming blue. And you do that with each of the elements.
- With the element air you find a place where you can watch the movement of branches, leaves, flowers, clouds, birds, long grass – focusing on the movement. So you find a place like this and you repeat your aspiration mentally, silently: *'I take in the air element, the air element is absorbing me, the air element and me are in union'*. Then you say the *mantra YAMHO, SHUDDHE SHODANYE SVAHA*. So you repeat the *mantra* while imagining the body becoming green, and still focusing on the movement. It is better outdoors, in touch with the actual element.
- With the *BAM* you go in the rain or find a source of water, still water or running water, or the sound of water. You say the aspiration three times, imagine the colour white bathing yourself and everything around you, then you repeat the *mantra BAMHO* …. This is a strong and very powerful practice, to come quickly to losing the self completely.
- With *RAM* fire, find a source of fire a source of warmth – a candle flame, rays of the sun, or an actual fire. The fire element is related to temperature, so it can also be absence of warmth. You say your aspiration and connect with the colour red, then say the *mantra RAMHO* ….

- The last element is *LAM* earth – you find some earth, to be in contact with the earth, you could do it walking barefoot. Again you make the statement, say the aspiration and work with the colour yellow, then you say the *mantra LAMHO* ….

You can either say or chant the *mantra*s. The idea is you go outside, get in contact with the elements and repeat the *mantra*. And see how this is changing you, balancing you. So you have a lot to do, your mind should be fully occupied, there should not be any space for your worries, for your thinking! After each element you can stop and take notes of what you have felt, changes in mood, awareness and breathing – to recognise, notice the change. At the moment do all five elements, make contact with them; later you can choose the one you are most in need of. So at the end of the day, find out which element is easiest to focus on and which is most difficult.

<u>Question and answer</u>

- *Does the exact words matter?* 'In union' or 'are one' is fine, the point is that you take in the element in that order. The intention is that you are going towards the element, the element is coming into you; see it as an exchange.
- *Is it a loose focus with colour?* Ask the colour to come in and see what happens. You are not going to physically see white, yellow, it is the intention.
- *White for water, not blue? – this is confusing.* So with *BAM* you imagine white, and put your confusion to the side. Going to the essence of the element.

The sound, the colour, imagine it pervading your body and everything around you; everything that you see, that you touch. It is about sound, light and rays; you don't have to think of the element to make your mental connection with the element. With space, it is purification of mind; *YAM* of the breathing; with *BAM* you are purifying your blood and body fluids; *RAM* you are purifying heat in your body, temperature; *LAM*, flesh. It is a healing *mantra* also a *mantra* that is protecting, strengthening your energy, purifying.

- *Can you use mind and breath instead of colour?* Use knowledge but also the colour – it is quite light, not to imagine everything, just blue, (for space). You want to go beyond concept, switch off the mind and focus on light, breathing and go into the vastness of the mind. At the

last line imagine rainbow light pervading space, floating around everywhere; purified, with happiness.

We are going to play with the elements and I would like you to keep the attitude of that, play. Keeping in touch with the element as your symbol and noticing how you are changing as you go through the elements. You could do a session ten minutes with each element, in the order with each element. *Keep the order?* Yes, Then later you can decide to go to each element as you feel like it. Do it as it comes, spontaneously, but you have to complete them all again. Stay in touch with the element, with the actual water. You stay in that still space; if thoughts arise you let them dissolve in the White *A*. So any time during the day you can repeat the *mantra*. It is very powerful, very immediate to balance the energy – you can say it aloud, sing it, also you can say it mentally. The aim is that you replace your inner conversation with the *mantra*.

It would be good if you could from time to time, for yourself, to maintain the *mantra*, to chant so the *mantra* is heard. Chant the *mantra* while doing morning activity. Find the level of voice that is comfortable for you, not too loud and not too soft. Again it is the intention, an intention to settle the element in ourself. It is a very powerful *mantra*, purifying and protecting for ourselves and for others, and for the environment also. This *mantra* is a protection. Driving your car and say the *mantra* as a protection, and imagine the five colours of the *mantra* surrounding you. For someone else, if someone is in hospital, you can imagine the *mantra* circling around them and protecting them.

<u>Guided instructions for working with the elements</u>

The idea is that you are going to explore your strongest element first, and spend as much time as you want. Then you attend to the weakest – the same, you spend as long as you want with this one. You could do a big block of time with each one or you could go back and forth and, and see what happens. Then do the integration work with:

E YAM BAM RAM LAM
SHUDDHE SHODANAYE SVAHA

It is very important that you do the integration.

<u>Earth</u>: *LAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*

Some suggestions how to work with the earth. You have to collect some earth, two handfuls of earth, place it on a plate; then you clean the earth of

all the debris, the stones, the roots. Then you make a mound of the earth, like a little mountain. And you maintain the *mantra* as much as possible, softly. When you have this mound, this little mountain, try to internalise it inside your being. Internalise the quality of it and observe how it is changing, in your body and your mind. You can walk with that feeling, you can sit with that feeling, and stay with that small mountain inside your body, that is the main quality of the practice. And noticing the quality that comes up; you notice the changes to get in touch with the quality of the earth. Then you dismantle the mound, you scatter it in fine, fine pieces, like dust. You bring the earth together, you break it up, and you scatter it back to the elements. And again you notice how this activity is changing you - this applies to both stages. Then you walk or sit with this feeling – it is very important, this phase, whether it is the strongest or the weakest element, it is going to balance you.

Fire: *RAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*
Working with fire you start small, you are going to light an incense stick and look at it; blow on it softly with your breath, fan it with your hand, and notice the glow. Stay with the stick all the way, don't give up - especially with the fire element. With fire the tendency is to find something interesting for a short time, giving up. Be patient, stay with the process. Close your eyes and see the ember glowing inside your belly. If you don't see or feel it, go back to the stick - maybe even take two sticks, three sticks, all together and feel the bigger glow. Repeating the *mantra*, it is a constant. Again you sit or walk with this feeling, of the ember in your belly, and notice how it is changing you. With this practice, don't place the fire in the solar plexus (as you would with the chanting), drop it into the belly (below the navel, the *hara*). And then notice what has happened to the solar plexus. I think that is enough, you don't need to go into the candle and lighting a fire; at this stage, stay with the glow of the incense stick.

At any point in the practice of the element you can do the integration, you can go back to the *mantra* of integration: if it gets too much for you, if you get lost, if nothing is happening. Try not to go into this practice with ideas about what is going to happen, what should happen - maybe something else is going to happen.

Water: *BAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*

You need to play with some still water and some running water, you alternate your practice with watching still water and watching running water. How does watching still water affect you, how does watching moving water affect you? Again you say the *mantra* during the practice. Then at some point in this practice you find a stream; you select a part of the stream and you watch this portion, fix to observe it. It is very important, try to really stay with this part of the stream, not going beyond; and see what goes in and out, in and out, of the stream. Then you close your eyes and focus on your being, to observe what goes in and out of your being: what thoughts, ideas, sensations in your body and in your mind. This is the key part of the practice. You are also just a stream in yourself. Just watch it as a continuous stream of coming and going. Don't try to hold onto it, to stop it - as you cannot stop a stream of water. You could put your hand in the stream, go into the stream and walk in the stream, sit in the stream, float in the stream …..

Air: *YAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*
With the air element you have to find a place high up, where you can have a wide view, a high place. And focus on the movement of the grass, leaves, or clouds, sheep, everything - just focusing on the movement. You could select a tree and watch the leaves move in the wind. Do that for twenty minutes. And again internalise the feeling, see how it changes you. You say the *mantra* from time to time. That's it!

Space: *EHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*
When you work on the space element you find a vista, you really want to focus on the sky. The practice is that everything that arises in your mind, you dissolve it into the space. It is the same practice as when we sound the White *A*, fall into the gap at the edge of a cliff and drop into the space. Everything - every thought, idea, even the technique of noticing, you give it to the space. You want to dissolve the boundary, dissolve everything into space. Get to a place where as soon as you have a thought it will dissolve by itself, it doesn't remain. Like the image of drawing in the water - what happens? It dissolves straight away. Like a snowflake touching the surface of the water, it disappears. No boundaries. This kind of practice is taking you directly to the essence of the element. With space, the colour is very important.

There is no minimum time (except for air), sometimes you can do it for a short time then you return to it. I would suggest you do work with what you

are interested in. The one thing you must not forget to do is the integration *mantra*, it is very important - at the end you say it three times, and you can use it in any other part of the practice as well:

E YAM BAM RAM LAM
SHUDDHE SHODHANAYE SVAHA

It is said that this work should be done every day for a month, one element daily for a month then another for a month. So we do the work very fast.

Outer / inner

Chanting the *mantra* of the five elements when going for a walk, being outside, feel the wind, the air on your skin – *YAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*, the air element. The rain washing your body – *BAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*, the sun shining on your body – *RAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*. Use the elements in nature to contact the element within, to explore the *mantra*. We always start with the outer to evoke the element within, when going for a walk or in walking meditation – awareness of the element on outer and inner. Lying down for sleep imagine space, deep blue, *EHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*. The *mantra* is two things: purifying; and giving more strength to balance, so if you have a weak element the *mantra* will give you more strength in it. It is useful when you go walking to keep in mind the element and keep the *mantra* going. Focus more on the sound and the light, the colour, of the element, don't get too busy with it. It is quite a concentrated form of meditation with this *mantra* because you are using the voice, visualisation. In time you come to feel the alignment in your body.

There are symbols for the elements:

- *E*, the syllable for the space element, is above the crown of the head; it has no symbol, no limitation, no boundary; the practice is being in the space, looking at the space (you could use the colour deep *lapis lazuli* blue to enter deep tranquillity).
- *YAM*, the air element, the symbol is a half sphere, a cup, of emerald green at the throat. The movement of air is an upward movement, with lightness, softness.
- *BAM*, the water element; the symbol is a translucent white sphere in the heart.
- *RAM*, the fire element; the symbol is a red pyramid, all sides equal, at the solar plexus.

- *LAM*, the syllable for the earth element, is in the belly; the symbol is a golden cube, it can pivot on one corner.

The symbols are there to open up an experience, they are a device. Be in touch with the elements within: sunshine comes out? – *RAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*; rain? – *BAMHO SHUDDHE SHUDDHE*.
You understand the purpose of this work? - you try to contact the external element to understand what is happening within yourself. First you focus on the outer, to externalise the experience. Then the inner, then you have a deeper experience. Come into this outer/inner dialogue. The *mantra* of the five elements balances energy to come quickly to a space of losing yourself completely.

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Notes

The intention has been to present Sonia's words as she spoke, to preserve the flavour and the spirit of her teaching. Anything else is in italics: contributions from students, texts, editing links, other languages (mainly *Pali*).
Only two significant aspects of the teaching have been omitted:

1. instructions for body work exercises / movements, which are learned from demonstration and experience;
2. the *sadhana* texts for deity practice (*vajrayana*), which traditionally are available only to those who were present during the practice and thus received direct transmission of energy from the teacher.

Acknowledgements

This text of teachings are based on notes taken by Gill Blair over the years of 2004-2010.
I would like to thank Gill Blair for her dedication in taking hours of notes over the past seven years and for editing and seeing this project to completion for the benefit of the larger *sangha*.
I also would like to thank Jane Sethi, Marion Pahlen, Eleri Walters and Peter May for their valuable comments in the finishing phase of the editing.