



Namgyal Yangzab Buddhist Community of Canada

Essential Points of Buddhadharma

Excerpts from "Covid_19-Online-Dharma-Teachings 2020"

by Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen (Lama Mark Webber)

"Now, you may have a human body, but it is a map in the mind, so you don't actually want it to be your body."

"Some may have a hard time with it. But don't worry about that. It may happen when you're not trying. It is very biochemical; one can feel it physically come on, as the changes wash through you."

Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen

April 21, 2020, Excerpt of a Dharma Teaching by Zoom-meeting

Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen,

On the Hollow Body Practice

Question:

Do you visualize Hollow Body in your body, or do you visualize in the body of the Yidam, as the deity?

Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen:

There are two ways to practice Hollow Body. One is more effective for attaining Buddhahood, for full liberation, and one is very effective for *samatha*, tranquility. For the former, I always recommend, especially if we are practicing and embracing a *Vajrayana* view, that you really try to arise as the *Yidam* as the instruction texts say, and not as an ordinary human being. Now, you may have a human body, but it is a map in the mind, so you don't actually want it to be your

body. As I have said before, if you meditate on your body, you get your experiences; your old maps of what you think or feel is your human body, which is utterly illusory and perhaps loaded with feelings of conceit, attachment, anger, shame, frustration or pride. However, our purpose is going for full awakening. Perhaps not all of us who are here together today may reach full awakening in a single lifetime. Yet, the first Bodhisattva stage would be just fine! That's quite an accomplishment too. But if we don't aspire to full awakening, then we may be aspiring to very little. So I think it is very important to try, as much as we can, to aim for accomplishing the full Path by embracing the practices that put us directly onto that Path.

Is it necessary to try to picture oneself in the shape of a human? No, we should try to picture ourselves in the shape of the *Yidam*, which is neither human nor non-human. Yes, it has human relational qualities to it.

I will describe the way to practice, as I received it from Namgyal Rinpoche, also my modifications from retreat experience and from guiding beings. It is very similar to the practice of loving-kindness as taught in the *Vimuttimaggā* (Path of Freedom), and *Visuddhimaggā* (Path of Purification), two ancient *Theravadin* texts. It is an exacting practice, so that you know the Hollow Body experience is not vague or scattered. Once one arises in the body of the *Yidam*, whether it's *Chenrezig*, or *Tara*, *Vajra Yogini*, Medicine Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, or any other *Yidam*, here are my recommendations.

First of all, we will visualize the skin of the *Yidam*, which is your skin, like a transparent tent material. It can be like fabric but very transparent. Open and luminous. Those are the words; luminous and transparent. You are a transparent body of light. Next, from within the Heart Centre, we will work with the Hollow Body in ten directions, making sure that it is very clear in each of the ten directions. We will usually miss directions where we are weak. Perhaps it will be behind us, to the left, or to the right. Wherever there are areas where we generally don't go, we won't easily explore those spaces. We don't naturally open into those directions. It is important to know where we do and don't feel comfortable.

This is the way I practiced. These were very pith, bare instructions from Namgyal Rinpoche that I took and developed.

From the Heart Centre—it could be using a seed syllable, or it could be using a small Buddha figure in the Heart Centre in the Central Channel—we are a hollow body with no spine and no organs. It is just luminous and radiant, and the body has the features of the *Yidam*. The way to practice is to use a ten-point mandala. First, practice to the front. In a mandala, the direction in front is usually thought of as East. One goes to the limit of one's regular body. The order to practice in is first to the front, then to the right side, then behind, and then to the left side. That fulfills the four cardinal directions of a compass: East, South, West, and North. But at first, only go to the limits of one's regularly felt body, now being visualized as the body of the *Yidam*.

Next, I usually go above and below. Other instructions suggest going above and below later, after eight directions. However, I personally like this way because it quickly brings about the expansive qualities of the Earth *Dhatu*. Look up high and look way, way down like a tube going

far into the earth. This, I find very powerful. Once you establish those two points above and below, you work with the intermediate points; the in-between points to the four cardinal directions of the compass—South-East, South-West, North-West and North-East. You fill in the intermediate quadrants to the limit of the body. Now we have eight points at the horizontal level, and we have two points above and below. That makes ten points of direction.

These points are not like sharp thin lines. They are actually the filling of an entire space. So, when a text says 'ten points' or 'in the ten directions,' it means filling the entire space. I would recommend—and this is just the way I practiced—the whole body as the normal body dimensions but absolutely hollow and using ten directions. This means you also find and work with the areas or directions that are weak for you. Perhaps it's the back, or it's a side. It may take some time, but stay with it. You stay with it until you can really feel a sense of hollow openness equally in all directions.

Now, hollow doesn't mean nothing. Hollow means spacious awareness. Empty of obstruction, hindrance, or solidity. Space like. Hollow means a vivid, clear openness. It will feel good, full of kindness, *metta* like. That's how you know it's working. It feels really good. A good space to be.

Being vast in size:

In the next stage, we expand the experience further outwards. I would suggest three meters around the body. Just decide on a limit, so it isn't vague. I usually visualize and feel to the size of the room I am in. Whatever room size I'm in, I expand the body by moving my awareness as a hollow body to that limit. Experience this body, as the *Yidam*, now becoming the size of the room by going through each of the ten directions in order. This isn't fuzzy practice; this is exacting. It was Namgyal Rinpoche who suggested a Hollow Body retreat while he was teaching on it. I did a retreat for eight solid days on this, and it was a glorious retreat. I've never forgotten it. It was a very profound experience practicing just on Hollow Body, the entire retreat, but practicing with the *Yidam Dorje Phagmo, Vajrayogini*. Eventually, the practice merged naturally with breath and into *Tumo*. (I'm describing to you how I practiced in retreat.)

And then go another distance. What I usually do next is I go out to the space of where I am, for example the entire house or yard, or maybe an acre or 10 acres. You just state the distance and do exactly the same thing in the ten directions of that dimension and expand the body to that dimension. You can go further and further: one kilometer, ten kilometers, up beyond the atmosphere, a hundred kilometers, a thousand kilometers, the size of the planet, the size of the solar system, the size of a galaxy, and so on. And that's how you practice systematically with exactitude and not amorphously, similar to the manner described for the practices of loving-kindness and compassion in the classic *Theravadin* manuals. That's the way you do it.

If you practice systematically and start with the limitation of your experienced body and then the size of the room, whether it's three meters away or a meter away. Then you will see it will become very clear. And you have to practice again and again and again. Practice for short sessions initially, so it's not fuzzy. If it's dragged out for too long, you may defeat yourself in

your practice.

Here is another point, about why I say to go way above through the crown and way below through the root *chakra* or the secret center. I find this is a very quick way to bring upon the experience of the Earth *Dhatu*, the Earth quality, which has the quality of expansiveness. You can also experience it horizontally. However, through the base or below the central channel, you can bring upon that experience, which is really getting gigantic. You really do experience huge proportions.

Being very small:

And then we think, “I, the *Yidam*, will become a mustard seed,” or the size of a very tiny sesame seed, step by step until feeling atomic size. And we work that way until it actually happens. For some it may just start happening quite spontaneously. Expanding or shrinking in size is one of the classic experiences of *pīti* going to *sukha* in the *jhanas*, the meditative absorptions. Some may have the expansion and contraction happen before others.

Being Vast and tiny at the same time:

At some point, one may experience being hollow yet vast and tiny at the same time with no fluctuation. This experience is a deep space absorption and removes feelings and clinging to a definitive dimension, such as either vast, small or anything in between. If one gently persists with this practice and brings it to a natural quality, one may shrink right out! Or expand right out! Or both, where one’s relative awareness vanishes into luminous empty space: completion stage. Combined with bodhicitta and the *Yidam*, it is then likely, one day, that one will arise spontaneously in the impure or pure illusory form body of the *Yidam*.

Some may have a hard time with it. But don’t worry about that. It may happen when you’re not trying. It is very biochemical; one can feel it physically come on, as the changes wash through you.

That’s how to practice the Hollow Body.

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May any errors and omissions do not obscure the essence, and may they be forgiven.

May these teachings, so generously offered, help lead to the cessation of suffering and the full awakening of all beings!