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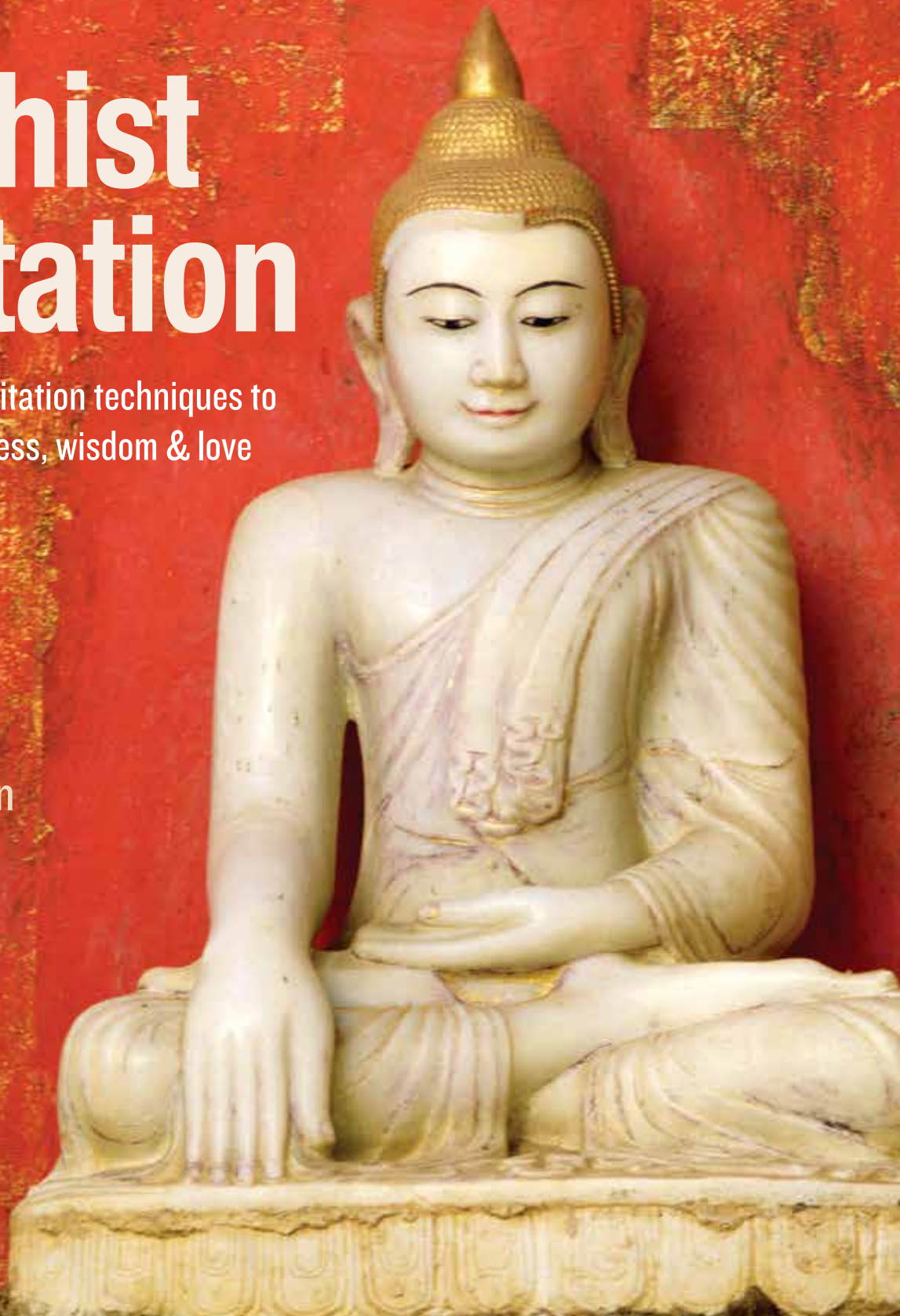
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# Dzogchen

## The Sky of Wisdom

Let the display of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions unfold naturally and without clinging, says TSOKNYI RINPOCHE, like clouds passing through an open sky.

**O**UR REAL MOTHER is the spaciousness of wisdom, rigpa. So when phenomena arise—perceptions, thoughts, emotions of different kinds—gently introduce them to her. If a positive or negative emotion comes up, let them rest with their mother.

Wisdom doesn't tell positive feelings such as loving-kindness and compassion, "Please come in, you are welcome here." Nor does it say to stupidity, aggression, and clinging, "Get out of here!" Rigpa is a spacious mother to all her children; they know they are always welcome home just as they are.

As practitioners of *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection, we let experiences unfold naturally, like clouds passing through an open sky. Liberation does not mean suppression. It means letting everything unfold naturally. Whatever the display is, allow it to arise and unfold as it is on its own. This is the opposite attitude of avoiding or suppressing our experience. Wisdom is a bit

*laissez faire* in this way. It freely allows whatever the display is to come and go by itself, without altering or modifying it.

When we begin training to be a Dzogchen yogi, we need to adjust our attitude. We need to be brave, gutsy, even heroic, so we can say to ourselves with confidence: "I will face whatever comes. If a painful state comes, never mind. If a pleasant state comes, never mind."

All thoughts, emotions, and experiences have the right to appear freely. We also have the right not to cling and grasp, not to continuously create samsara. In the end, all of this seeming display is our own phenomena anyway, a personal mandala, so we can be friendly and open toward it, allowing it to be.

After we have spent some time training in this way, we will begin to feel more confident, self-contained, and self-assured. We may not know where this feeling is coming from, but we begin to sense that something deep within us is changing. This is the beginning of real confidence, because we know we can cope with any situation. For the first time, we are not afraid of ourselves at a deep level. This is very precious, a wonderful, freeing feeling.

This also means that for the first time in our lives we expe-

rience real choice. Usually we think we have choices when we really don't. We think we are the actual controller of experience, not seeing how in reality situations and experiences control us. Secretly we try to fix conditions to shape our experience. We have a hidden agenda but no real choice. Recognizing this is very hard for the ego to accept. It is why we need to bring this gutsy, heroic attitude to our training.

When liberation takes place within us, there is a freedom of choice. We know how to let things be, know how to hold on at times, and how to be free even when things get messy. How many people are afraid of their own shadow, their own thoughts and feelings? How many have inner conflicts that destroy them—making war, making strife, living in the bubble of their own self-generated worlds? We have these experiences because we don't have liberation in our heart and in our being. When we have this liberation, then we have true confidence rooted in freedom. We have the Dzogchen point of view.

With continued training in this view, we learn to live in harmony with the natural state. We feel the radiance of reality in our being. At the same time, what is not in harmony with the natural state diminishes. Misunderstandings, distortions, and confusions are less solid and compelling, and seem more dreamlike. This is a different approach than deciding up front what needs to be kept or kicked out in our practice and our

lives. Honestly, in the beginning we really don't know what is in tune with reality or not anyway.

With this practice, fear can still arise, but since we have some certainty on how to be free, we know how to work with it. The fear we deal with first is what I call distorted, unreasonable fear, rooted in past habits and emotional baggage. Dealing with this is the realm of what I call "Buddhist therapy."

Then a deeper, existential fear can arise. We experience how strong our fear of existence is, of just being. It is really scary to be in samsara, because everything is impermanent. We could die suddenly in a car accident, get a fatal disease, or lose a loved one forever.

Yet even this basic fear vanishes as the practice develops. We experience deep relaxation in our very bones. There is nothing, ultimately, to fear, and we can sigh with relief.

High realization is when the subtle fear of existence has been transcended, including the fear of death. Rebirth is experienced like moving from one house to another, not such a big deal. Milarepa said, "I fled to the mountains out of the fear of death and now I have captured the stronghold of deathlessness." He had gone beyond this root fear of existence.

If we want to capture this stronghold of innate deathlessness, we need to work with the phenomena right in front of us—the five aggregates, or *skandhas*. All of these are emptiness. Perceptions are emptiness, conceptions are emptiness, sensations are emptiness, and all the forms we experience are emptiness. Once we understand this fully through experience, then clinging is gone completely. We are fearless, confident, and naturally happy. ♦

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