

ABC anchor **DAN HARRIS** talks meditation with **SHARON SALZBERG, JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN & MARK EPSTEIN**

# SHAMBHALA SUN

BUDDHISM CULTURE MEDITATION LIFE

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## Get off the wheel of **Habit**

How to free yourself from habitual patterns of thinking, relating, and acting.

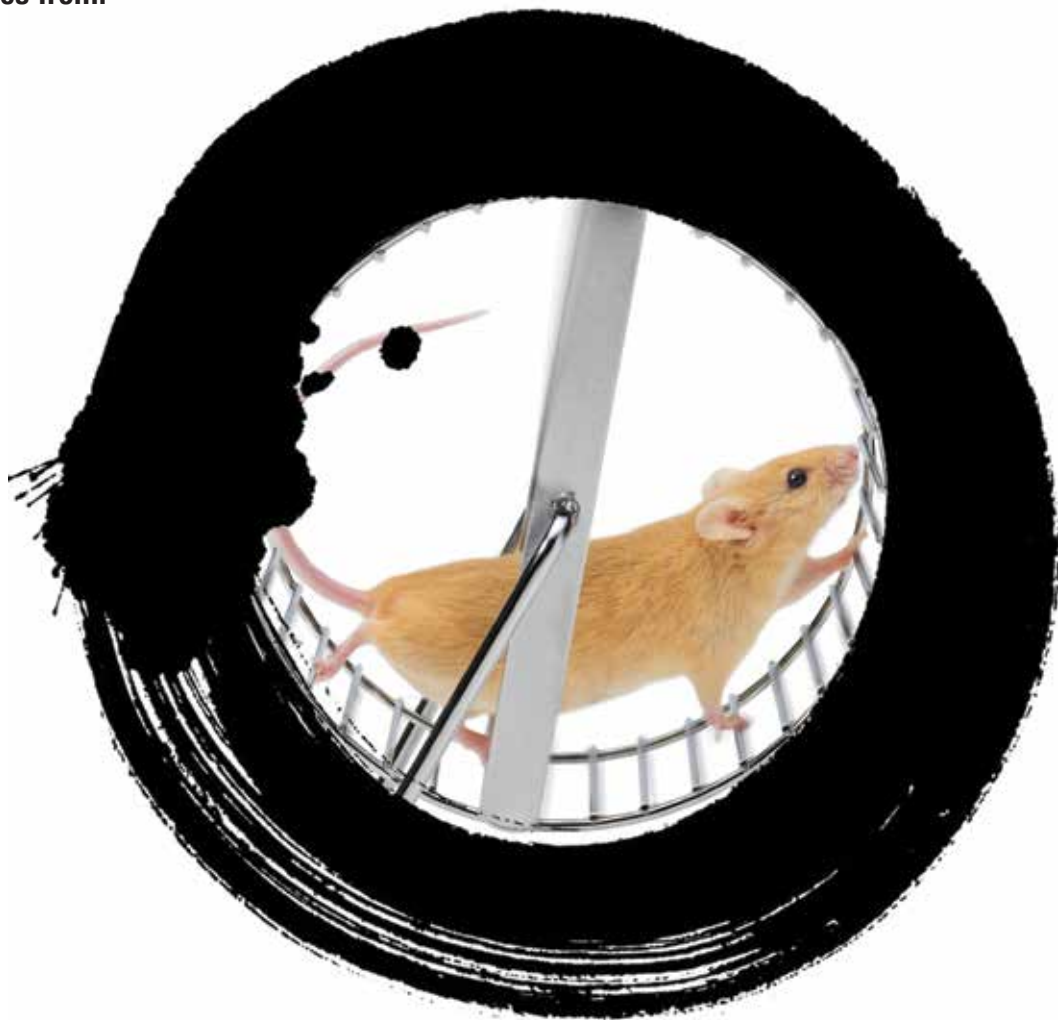
It's the whole point of Buddhist meditation. (They don't call it the Wheel of Life for nothing.)

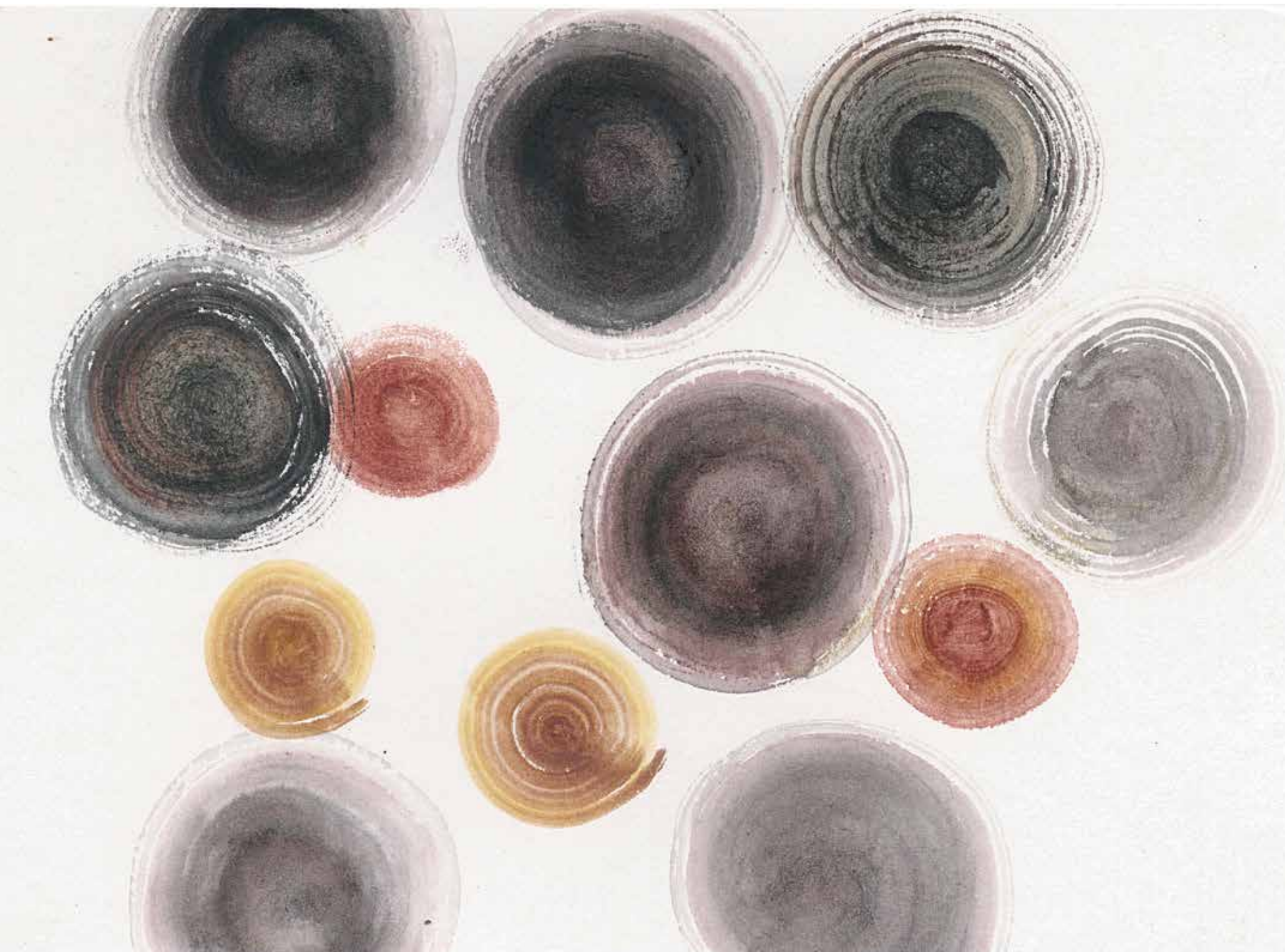
Helpful teachings & techniques from:

**THICH NHAT HANH**

**SYLVIA BOORSTEIN**

**TSOKNYI RINPOCHE**





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## The Natural Liberation of Habits

When you recognize the true nature of mind, says Dzogchen master **TSOKNYI RINPOCHE**, all habitual patterns are naturally liberated in the space of wisdom. That includes the ultimate habit known as samsara.

**T**HE ULTIMATE HABITUAL PATTERN is samsara itself—the wheel of habitual cyclic existence that causes all your suffering. The karma that drives the wheel—the three poisons of attachment, aggression, and ignorance—are actually deep-seated habits of mind.

When you finally get tired of unconsciously participating in the daily show of habitual samsaric programming, what can you do to change it? Buddhism teaches three basic ways to cut your ties to samsara, once you have decided this is something you really need and want to do.

One approach is to shut off the world of phenomena and your attachment to it. This is the path of renunciation. It is illustrated by the paintings of skeletons on the walls of temples in Burma or Thailand. They are reminders to Theravada monks and nuns to stay free of desire and attachment arising in their mind. The problem is that this method of cutting individual episodes of attachment one after another could be endless.

Another possibility is to transform how you perceive samsara altogether. Instead of renouncing it, you train to develop strong compassion and insight into the empty nature of samsara. By changing your habitually deluded way of perceiving phenomena, you will change how your mind is affected by and responds to negative emotions and confusion. This is the basic approach of Mahayana Buddhism. It is a subtle practice that requires a good deal of patient self-examination and clear awareness of your motivation.

*TSOKNYI RINPOCHE is the author of three books of Dzogchen teachings: Open Heart, Open Mind; Carefree Dignity, and Fearless Simplicity. Join him for the Shambhala Sun's meditation retreat at the Omega Institute, August 26 to 30, 2015.*

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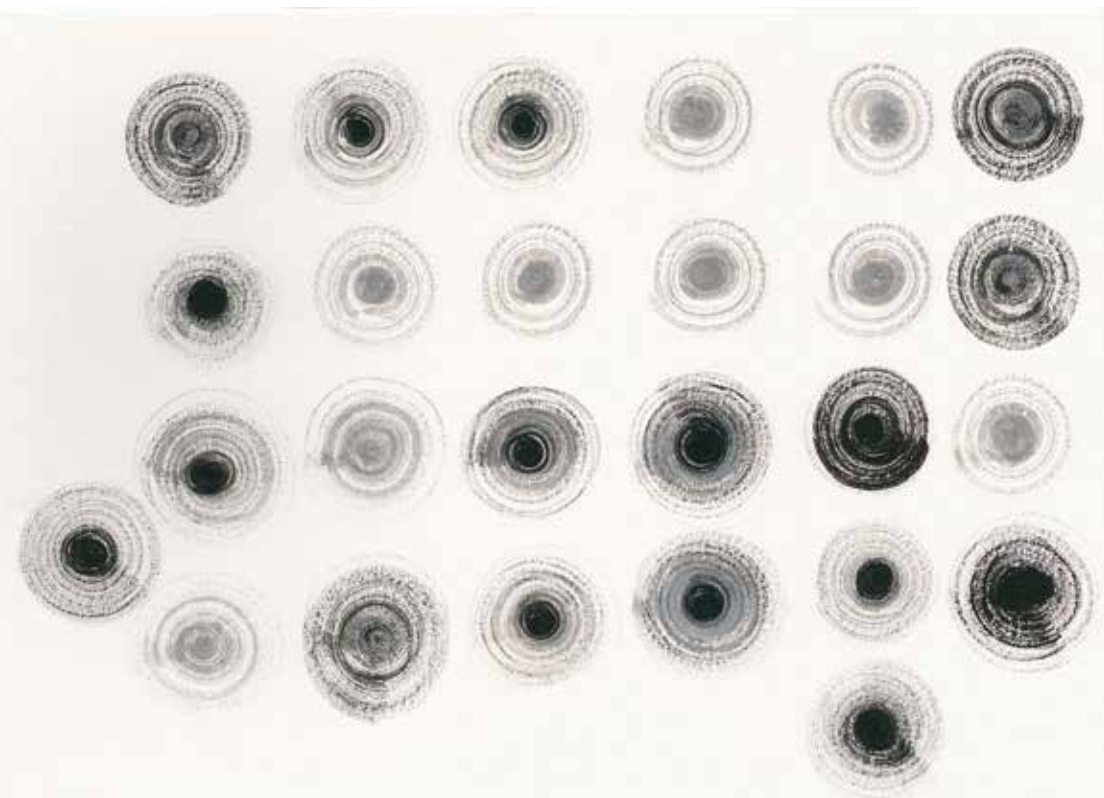


The third method is to allow samsara to manifest and immediately recognize that it is the expression or display of primordial wisdom. This is the approach in the Dzogchen and Mahamudra meditation traditions of Vajrayana Buddhism.

In Dzogchen practice, the most important thing is the recognition of inner space, or emptiness. If you can practice this, then whatever phenomena of samsara arise are dissolved into wisdom mind.

For this to happen, your recognition of mind nature has to be unwavering. If you can achieve this, then anything that arises your mindstream—any emotions, thoughts, likes, dislikes, perceptions of good and bad, and so on—is naturally released without effort.

The problem is that when phenomena arise from confusion and ignorance, they dominate your perception and the result is suffering. However, habitual negative emotions like fear can be naturally liberated by allowing them to dissolve into the inner space of mind. You can do this because the essence of these habitual emotions is actually wisdom.



The key point is to let go of the grasping within the emotion and see its true nature. When habitual emotions arise, you neither suppress nor get caught up in them. You do not get carried away by clinging to self and other. If you just allow the emotion to dissolve, the energy trapped within it is released and blossoms as wisdom.

With continued practice in the true nature of mind, you

can develop strong self-knowing awareness so that it naturally alchemizes negative emotions into their essence. When phenomena arise, they are self-liberated because your ego identity and conceptual mind have finally retired. Then the true nature of mind, which is wisdom, lets them resolve into inner space naturally.

In Dzogchen, this is called the “great ease,” in which even the concept of death is a joke, just another phenomenon that is ultimately empty. You have gone through a secret door of sorts: everything that was hidden from you by conceptual mind and ego fixation is revealed. You realize it has been completely accessible and present all the time as your basic nature.

True mind nature does not act, do anything, modify, or function as some subtle antidote to phenomena. It is simply open space and luminosity in union. If you throw colored chalk powder into the air, it has nothing to hold onto or cling to. It naturally falls to the ground. It is not like space does anything. It is simply how space is. The true nature of mind is like that.

There are progressive unfoldings in Dzogchen, as you deepen your experience of wisdom mind and learn to liberate habits without effort. The stage of *self-liberation* is compared to throwing chalk into space. *Liberation upon arising* is like making a drawing on water, and *liberation beyond benefit and harm* is like a thief entering an empty house.

When you reach this last level, everything that arises is seen as friendly and you are completely carefree. You do not need to accept, reject, or change anything. All appearances are realized as pure wisdom phenomena, arising spontaneously as compassionate energy from the unity of absolute and relative truth.

This natural liberation of thoughts and emotions is based on a non-conceptual recognition of inner space. You know that the essence of any afflictive emotion is pure wisdom and that thoughts in themselves are

empty. This gives you a deep sense of spacious ease, a carefree feeling. You have confidence that all phenomena can be naturally released by themselves without the necessity of an antidote or remedy. You experience the infinite purity that pervades everything. You do not need to eliminate or abandon anything, since it is already pure in essence. ♦



## Recognizing Clarity: A Dzogchen Meditation

CLARITY IS THE CAPACITY to recognize and distinguish the unlimited variety of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and appearances that continually emerge in the mind. It is also called luminosity. Without clarity, we wouldn’t be able to recognize or identify any aspect of our experience. To recognize clarity, do this meditation practice using a physical object as the focus of your attention.

1. Rest for a few minutes in open presence.
2. Turn your attention to an object on which you’ve chosen to focus. I advise using a physical object that is clear and transparent, like a glass.

Thoughts, feelings, and judgments about the object will almost inevitably arise: “This is pretty.” “This is ugly.” “This is—I don’t know—it’s just a glass.” You may even wonder, as I did many years ago when I was first taught this practice, “Why am I doing this?” The point of the practice lies in the next step.

3. After focusing for a few moments on an object, turn your attention inward. Focus on awareness that perceives not only the object, but also the thoughts, feelings, judgments surrounding it.

As you do so, a very gentle experience of what many of my teachers called “awareness of being aware” emerges. You’ll begin to recognize that whatever you see, however you see it, is accompanied by emotional and cognitive residue—the stuff that remains from being a neglected child, a failure in the eyes of parents or teachers, the victim of a schoolyard bully.

When we turn our awareness inward, we begin to decompress the images we hold about ourselves and the world around us. In so doing, we begin to see how past experiences turn into present patterns. We glimpse the possibility of a connection between what we see and our capacity to see. ♦

*Adapted from Open Heart, Open Mind: A Guide to Inner Transformation by Tsoknyi Rinpoche with Eric Swanson. Published by Harmony, a division of Random House, Inc.*



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