

Sky Gazing: The Path of Joy and Ease

A Teaching by Kyabje Togden Amtrin

Recorded by Jamyang Tenphel

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The initial instruction that I received from Kyabje Togden Amtrin on sky gazing was extremely simple. To just gaze up at the sky for a decent period of time each day. Kyabje Togden Amtrin said that no more instruction is required. After a period of time, I was then taught the view and benefits of doing the practice, namely, that it will increase ones experience of Bodhicitta and spacious awareness in the heart. Kyabje Togden Amtrin clearly stated that this is the entire point of the practice. To open the heart and awaken.

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Sky Gazing Teaching by Kyabje Togden Amtrin who is Guru Rinpoche Himself

The luminosity of the blue sky is Bodhicitta itself. We do not need to remind ourselves of this fact. The heart knows this immediately as it gazes into the limitless blue luminous expanse. As the heart opens itself wide with joy and effortless love the self will loosen and dissolve in the face of your True Nature, which is represented by the sky. The radiance and spaciousness of the sky naturally places our minds in a state of connection with the Great Perfection – Bodhicitta and vast spaciousness combined, mingling as one, abiding as one. AH!

Sky gazing is a shortcut and a fast track for students who have already been developing their experiential understanding of Bodhicitta and spacious emptiness through practice; not the purely intellectual form of learning and contemplating emptiness, but the resting in spacious awareness form of meditation. For beginners, it can provide a taste or glimpse of spacious awareness and Bodhicitta itself. So it is suitable for beginners and advanced practitioners for different reasons. But the goal is the same. Resting in the nature of mind continuously and with stability.

Sky-gazing is the Dzogchen equivalent of Shamatha. So, if your joy practice is sky-gazing, you do not need to sit in a separate or additional Shamataha session, unless you want to.

Kyabje Togden Amtrin on Bodhicitta

True wisdom and compassion are one, not two. They both arise in the heart and both arise in unison. Always. Together they are known as Bodhicitta. The awakened heart. They are not

separate. Where compassion arises, the scent of wisdom is there. When true wisdom arises in the heart, compassion is there also. Always inseparable. Always one. Bodhicitta – awakened awareness.¹ There is no need to do separate practices to cultivate each separately. Every true practice in the Dharma will give rise to both simultaneously. Do not worry about this. It is the dualistic mind that has separated wisdom and compassion. The Enlightened Beings know only one – Bodhicitta.

A brief commentary on Sky Gazing by Jamyang Tenphel

*The greatest paradox in all of the Dharma
is that by doing absolutely nothing
the most extraordinary something
happens all by itself.*

Sky gazing is an ancient meditation practice that is based on the understanding that we do not need to produce, fabricate or create the awakened state, but rather that we simply need to get out of our own way and allow our True Nature, our natural perfection, to shine through on its own. It is a practice associated with the Dakinis, which means that it leads one to abide in spacious awareness.

Sky gazing falls into the “no-method” practice tradition. A practice that is purely experiential and free of form or structure. This practice brings us to the heartfelt understanding that everything that we need to awaken is already within us. Once we truly realise this, then we develop a deep understanding and confidence in the truth that there is nothing more to do, nothing more to know, and nowhere else to go. There is nothing left to do but rest limitlessly in our True Nature.

In my experience, there is no greater meditation practice than sky gazing to enable one to see the true nature of mind and all of its aspects and appearances. When practicing Shamatha meditation with our eyes closed, for example, we can get swept away and lost in imaginings, fantasies and fabrications. When meditating on an object, our minds can become too tight, rigid and concentrated and we can lose our ability to relax and just let things be. Sky gazing, however, allows us to see all of the activities of the mind nakedly and clearly. When we gaze into the wide

¹ Here Togden Amtrin is using the word Bodhicitta to mean Buddha Nature, the natural state, or awakened awareness.

open sky in a relaxed manner we can see the mind grasping and clinging to thoughts and feelings. We can see it pulling away from thoughts and feelings that make us uncomfortable or uneasy. We can see how distractions are constantly pulling the mind this way and that. By simply relaxing and watching it all pass by, we learn through our own experience that all of these appearances are much like a dream. Coming and going and leaving not a trace of anything substantial, real or true behind. This is the great gift that sky gazing gives us. The ability to see the mind and samsara clearly, and with time and patience, let it all dissolve and fall apart, leaving us to rest in the natural state. Our true home.

When Kyabje Togden Amtrin says ‘The luminosity of the blue sky *is* Bodhicitta itself’, he means that the luminous sky is nothing less than awakened awareness (Our True Nature, Buddha Nature). In this teaching the term Bodhicitta is referring not to relative compassion but to the awakened mind, which is spacious emptiness itself. This pith instruction tells us that, in the depth of our being, on the absolute or ultimate level, our true nature or heart recognizes this. Sky-gazing relies on this deep inner recognition. The practice is simply to make space for that recognition to rise naturally and bloom.

Sky gazing is not an analytical or contemplative practice. It does not require any visualizations, recitations or supplications. The beauty and power of this practice is its simplicity. It should be practiced, not learnt about or studied. Instructions are left to a minimum, otherwise concepts begin to form and take over, undermining genuine experience.

By completely relaxing our body and mind and gazing into the vast expanse of the sky, without objective or goal and remaining still, our hearts will naturally begin to open and expand, culminating in an experience of spacious awareness that is alive with Bodhicitta. With time, patience, and a joyful attitude, a sense of openness to all and oneness with all will become our experience. To over explain this practice would be to undermine its efficacy. Thus, less is more here.

Whether sky-gazing or night-gazing we don’t focus our attention on any single point. Clouds will pass by, stars will twinkle, but we just relax our gaze, let go and be open. Sky-gazing and night-gazing are about relaxing the gaze, relaxing the body and relaxing the mind. Relaxation comes

from the sky-gazing itself. You do not need to be relaxed before you start. Remember – ultimately there is nothing to do and nothing to get.

We must never forget that all formless practices such as sky gazing will only bring us to awakening when built on a solid foundation of ethical conduct and a heartfelt experience of the fundamental contemplations of the Dharma such as “The Four Thoughts that turn the Mind to the Dharma”, relative Bodhicitta (Love and compassion), Emptiness and Buddha-Nature. As Mahaguru Padmasambhava said, “Though the view should be as vast as the sky, your conduct should be as fine as sifted barley flour”.

To conclude I would like to leave you with one final pith instruction from Kyabje Togden Amtrin:

In complete relaxation, everything becomes equal naturally.

May all beings be free!