The first training is discipline. Discipline is controlling one's mind, or being, and bringing it into a state of tranquility through shamatha practice. Its basic message is that you should be wholesome, free from fetters, free from wandering mind, and constantly on the dot. With shila, the basic faculties of mind can be fully used. The mind contains good and bad, wandering thoughts and precise thoughts; and ideally all these qualities should be used. Mindfulness, or being fully minded, plays a very important part in shila because before you can conduct yourself with decency, you have to be able to maintain a peaceful state of being. In other words, you have to calm yourself down, or train yourself, to be able to conduct your basic state of being in a proper manner and in accordance with common sense.

The attitude of shila is an upright one, a good one. Once you take that attitude, it is like deciding to take a shower: you are going to get rid of all
your dirt, including your smell, and you are going to wash and press your
clothes as well. When you have taken a good shower and you are wear­
ing fresh clothes, you feel dignity and wholesomeness. Morality, in the
Buddhist sense, is strength. You are not subjugated by the flu, by fever, by
attacks of malaria. You are free from all sorts of attacks, free from sleepi­
ness, tiredness, and excitement.

There are many different levels of shila. The first level is somewhat
manufactured and deliberate. From that artificial level of trying to emulate
the possibility of shila, we then begin to experience real shila, or real dis­
cipline. It is like feeding meat to a young lion: because it has had the smell
and taste of meat, when that young lion becomes an adult it automatically
knows how to hunt. Similarly, we have the instinct to awaken. We are
all would-be buddhas. We are all would-be bodhisattvas, or enlightened
beings—we have that instinct. So whenever we try to mimic or to emulate
the Buddha, we are actually practicing real shila.

The notion of discipline, or shila, is not quite the same as the Victorian
ideal of good manners. In this case, you are organically tapping the source;
and having organically tapped the source, true shila happens to you. This
kind of discipline might hurt. If you sit for ten days in an upright posture,
you might have a hell of a pain. But there is something beyond that. After
that pain, you actually have learned how to sit fully and properly, and you
find yourself learning to think like the Buddha, at least in small doses. So
there is a lot of hope in this way of practicing.

Discipline may seem complicated, but it is actually very simple—it
is what binds your life together. Without discipline, life is made up of
successive indulgences and confusions based on aggression, passion, and
ignorance. If you lack discipline, life becomes a joke and is not worth
living. The accomplishment of discipline is based on renunciation, and
renunciation is inspired by experience that is beyond samsara, beyond
both the theistic and nontheistic worlds. In Tibetan this is called ngelek.
Nge means “real,” “complete,” or “true,” and lek means “good”; so ngelek
means the “final good.”

Discipline is not a dead end. It is not like trying to teach a tree to talk.
It is like teaching human beings to talk. Even very young children can
already say “Mommy” or “Daddy,” and they soon begin to speak our
language. Similarly, the shila principle is based on waking up a natural
instinct. Basically, discipline always follows the same logic: whether it is
at the hinayana, mahayana, or vajrayana level, it is never imposed. Some-
times it may seem to be imposed, but we are always dealing with what we intrinsically already have. Through shila, we are aspiring to wake up that intrinsic quality.

Meditation / Samadhi

The second training is samadhi, or absorption. In Tibetan it is tingdzin. Ting means “still,” dzin means “holding”; so tingdzin means “holding yourself still.” With tingdzin, you do not hang on to your particular preconceptions, but develop a state of mind that is clear, precise, and relaxed. Meditation is based on both mindfulness and awareness. Through shamatha (Tib.: shi-ne), or mindfulness practice, you develop concentration and one-pointedness, and with vipashyana (Tib.: lhakthon), or awareness practice, you develop expansiveness, relaxation, and a wider view.* Meditation, or samadhi, is connected with the idea of overcoming the constant search for entertainment. By overcoming that, you begin to cut through the subconscious mind, the mind that provides obstacles to meditation practice. Having done so, you begin to develop a state of absorption in the sense of complete presence. You develop a one-hundred-percent experience of being there.

In meditation, you are mixing your mind with the dharma. Once you attain that state of mind, you have no gaps in your mindfulness. You develop the potential of vipashyana as well, because, due to your training, you are so relaxed. You have already been thoroughly broken in, so to speak; therefore, you can hold yourself still, whether you are awake or asleep. You are seeing reality fully through the process of discipline. By means of training in the disciplines of shamatha and vipashyana, you have learned to control your mind. You learn how to evolve further, and not get stuck. You learn how you could be fully there, all the time.

Due to wandering mind, however, we would like to take a break. We would like to lie back, run into our room, and take a few puffs, whatever those puffs may be. A long time ago, I saw in Time magazine a photograph of the Dalai Lama holding a bottle of Coca-Cola, with the caption, “The

* Vipashyana means “clear seeing.” Its usage varies considerably, from intellectual analysis, to direct perception, to an open and expansive meditative state. Trungpa Rinpoche also links vipashyana to postmeditation practice and to the cultivation of awareness in everyday life.
Dalai Lama is taking a break with Coca-Cola.” I thought to myself, “Taking a break from what?” The notion of taking a break is very popular, actually. We think, “Give me a break!” But the idea of samadhi is meditation from which there is no break. A break is not needed because, in its essence, meditation is already a break from samsara.

Getting into the dharma is the greatest break you could ever think of. With samadhi, you have your break already. You don’t need a break from a break; that would be going backward. It would be a pseudo-break, which is hard work. Samadhi does not need any break because it is already a release from pain. It is deliverance, freedom, liberation. It is the sense of fully being there constantly. You are utterly, thoroughly, accurately on the spot all the time, and at the same time you are rejoicing and appreciating the whole thing.

Of course, there is a battle at the beginning and a battle at the end. At the beginning there is resistance to sitting down to meditate; and at the end there is the excitement of getting up and going back to your wicked break. But the sitting practice itself is fine. It is as smooth as the ocean, vast and open. There are lots of waves; nevertheless, it is still. Although big things may be churning around, that is no problem, because there is a sense of being there utterly and fully and acknowledging what is happening.

With samadhi, the practice of absorption, you are entering into a particular world—a full world, a big world, a complete world of meditation. Many students have a problem with that, feeling they are only on the fringe of that world. But you have no reason to believe that you are on the fringe, as long as you carry your body, speech, and mind along with you, which everybody does. There is a feeling of poverty in hanging out on the fringe. Finding yourself on the edge of that big world is self-destructive. The destruction doesn’t come from anybody else; it comes from putting yourself on the edge.

If you decide to sit on the wing of an airplane instead of getting inside the cabin, you know what will happen when you take off. You have a ticket that allows you to sit inside—you may even have a first-class seat waiting for you!—but once you are out on the wing, nobody can open the cabin door, because it would be too dangerous for the rest of the passengers. In the state of samadhi, you don’t sit on the wing, and you don’t have one foot on the inside and one foot on the outside—you have both feet inside, as well as your arms and your head!
When your whole being is inside, you experience totality. There is a feeling of being fully included, and an acknowledgment of your sense of being. The idea of absorption is that you are entering into a fully developed world of samadhi. When you are sitting, you begin to feel there is no other world than that of sitting on your cushion. You are fully there. That is conviction, that is absorption—being fully and utterly there.

If you seek confirmation, saying, “I’m not coming in unless you invite me in, otherwise I’ll jump out,” that approach is very poor. It is wicked and self-destructive. True confirmation only happens when you are inspired to become a real person, when you follow the teachings and do the work of the Buddha, the fully enlightened one. It can only happen when you see that you can transcend samsaric pain and work for the benefit of others.