



The Myth of Freedom and the Way of Meditation

Chögyam Trungpa , Marvin Casper (Editor) , John Baker (Editor)

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Freedom is generally thought of as the ability to achieve goals and satisfy desires. But what are the sources of these goals and desires? If they arise from ignorance, habitual patterns, and negative emotions, is the freedom to pursue these goals true freedom—or is it just a myth?

In this book, Chögyam Trungpa explores the meaning of freedom in the profound context of Tibetan Buddhism. He shows how our attitudes, preconceptions, and even our spiritual practices can become chains that bind us to repetitive patterns of frustration and despair. He also explains how meditation can bring into focus the causes of frustration, and how these negative forces can aid us in advancing toward true freedom.

Trungpa's unique ability to express the essence of Buddhist teachings in the language and imagery of contemporary American culture makes this book one of the best sources of the Buddhist doctrine ever written.

This edition also contains a foreword by Pema Chödrön, a close student of Chögyam Trungpa and the best-selling author of *When Things Fall Apart*.

The Myth of Freedom and the Way of Meditation Details

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Scott Ford says

A companion piece to Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, The Myth of Freedom and The Way of Meditation widens, deepens and expands on information regarding Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. As always, Trungpa Rinpoche's style is patient, clear and concise. Never a bad read, no matter which book you pick up. Great stuff!

Jason says

For starters, this is not a book for reading only; instead, it is a companion to regular contemplative practice (albeit not necessarily one that is "Buddhist").

I was "forced" to read this book as a graduate student at The Naropa Institute (in the same way that all students are "forced" to read textbooks) and found that I got very little out of the book. While at times his presentation was incredibly lucid, at other times Trungpa's turns of phrase made little sense, leading our circle of student heretics to coin the descriptive phrase "Trungpa-babble." (Full-disclosure: One of the reasons that this book appeared so jargon-laden at the time I first read it probably had to do with the fact that my sitting practice was very new and so I had little experience with which to compare Trungpa's ideas.)

On re-reading this book as one of the titles on my guru's reading lists, I was impressed by how much of the same material that had once left me cold now applied directly to my life and practice. Trungpa definitely takes the "romance" out of spiritual practice and reveals it to be as mundane as going to work, eating dinner, or taking a bath. Like those other activities, though, meditation (in this context the basic practice of sitting with oneself and familiarizing oneself with the neurosis and clarity that make up the mind) is essential to a life fully lived.

Charlie says

I suppose this book was planted one of the first seeds in my heart that I had run out of religions I could trust. The prospect was once a bit discouraging but it's okay now. It was from Trungpa that I learned to wrestle with such notions as "Enlightenment" being the ultimate disappointment. The title says it all, a "Myth of Freedom". I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to read it because you already know who you are. Once again it's a great day to lose your mind but you don't need a myth or a method to (not) do it. Perhaps the view that nihilism=god and emptiness=love is the myth of meditation. I just did not get much out of this one except the courage to leave the temple.

Cynthia Egbert says

I have written before of my intense appreciation for Chögyam Trungpa and this is another winner for me. This really fleshed out some of my remaining questions about how to approach meditation and gave me a better overview of Buddhism. It was a nice compilation of his teachings. I have to record some quotations from this one for future reference!

"Mediation is not a matter of trying to achieve ecstasy, spiritual bliss, or tranquility, nor is it attempting to become a better person. It is simply the creation of a space in which we are able to expose and undo our neurotic games, our self-deceptions, our hidden fears and hopes. We provide space through the simple discipline of doing nothing. Actually, doing nothing is very difficult. At first, we must begin by approximating doing nothing, and gradually our practice will develop. So meditation is a way of churning out the neuroses of mind and using them as part of our practice. Like manure, we do not throw our neuroses away, but we spread them on our garden; they become part of our richness."

"So meditation in the beginning is not an attempt to achieve happiness, nor is it the attempt to achieve mental calm or peace, though they could be byproducts of meditation. Meditation should not be regarded as a vacation from irritation."

"Meditation practice is not a matter of trying to produce a hypnotic state of mind or create a sense of restfulness. Trying to achieve a restful state of mind reflects a mentality of poverty. Seeking a restful state of mind, one is on guard against restlessness. There is a constant sense of paranoia and limitation. We feel a need to be on guard against the sudden fits of passion or aggression which might take us over, make us lose control. This guarding process limits the scope of the mind by not accepting whatever comes. Instead, meditation should reflect a mentality of richness in the sense of using everything that occurs in the state of mind."

"Having experienced the precision of mindfulness, we might ask the question of ourselves, 'What should I do with that? What can I do next?' And awareness reassures us that we do not really have to do anything with it but can leave it in its own natural place. It is like discovering a beautiful flower in the jungle; shall we pick the flower and bring it home or shall we let the flower stay in the jungle? Awareness says leave the flower in the jungle, since it is the natural place for that plant to grow."

"The lion's roar is fearlessness in the sense the ever situation in life is workable. Nothing is rejected as bad or grasped as good. But everything we experience in our life-situations, any type of emotion, as workable."

Steve Malley says

"...one level of meditation is where we observe our thoughts... the next level is where we realize the observer does not exist!"

Really makes ya' think. Don't it?

Travis says

This book is freaking ridiculous. After reading this book I knew immediately where Pema Chodron got her wisdom and brilliance from. I loved this book because it is some of the same insights that Chodron shares,

but it is from a harsher tongue, whereas Chodron is more kind. I really loved this book. I lent it out immediately after finishing it because I think it is so worthwhile.

Amy kohut says

it's a doozie...read it yourself.

Georgeta says

LOVE - is a vast store of energy which is not centered, which is not ego's energy at all. It is this energy which is the centerless dance of phenomena, the universe interpenetrating and making love to itself. It has two characteristics: a fire quality of warmth and a tendency to flow in a particular pattern, in the same way in which fire contains a spark as well as the air which directs the spark. And this energy is always on-going, whether or not it is seen through the confused filter of ego. It cannot be destroyed or interrupted at all. It is like the ever-burning sun. It consumes everything to the point where it allows no room for doubt or manipulation.

But when this heat is filtered through ego, it becomes stagnant, because we ignore the basic ground, refuse to see the vast space in which this energy occurs. Then the energy cannot flow freely in the open space shared with the object of passion. Instead it is solidified, narrowed and directed by the central headquarters of ego to move outward in order to draw the object of passion into its territory. This captive energy extends out to its object and then returns to be programmed again. We extend our tentacles and try to fix our relationship. This attempt to cling to the situation makes the communication process superficial. We just touch another person's surface and get stuck there, never experiencing their whole being. We are blinded by our clinging. The object of passion, instead of being bathed in the intense warmth of free passion feels oppressed by the stifling heat of neurotic passion.

Free passion is radiation without a radiator, a fluid, pervasive warmth that flows effortlessly. It is not destructive because it is a balanced state of being and highly intelligent. Self-consciousness inhibits this intelligent, balanced state of being. By opening, by dropping our self-conscious grasping, we see not only the surface of an object, but we see the whole way through. We appreciate not in terms of sensational qualities alone, but we see in terms of whole qualities, which are pure gold. We are not overwhelmed by the exterior, but seeing the exterior simultaneously puts us through to the interior. So we reach the heart of the situation and, if this is a meeting of two people, the relationship is very inspiring because we do not see the other person purely in terms of physical attraction or habitual patterns, we see the inside as well as the outside.

This whole-way-through communication might produce a problem. Suppose you see right through someone and that person does not want you to see right through and becomes horrified with you and runs away. Then what to do? You have made your communication completely and thoroughly. If that person runs away from you, that is his way of communicating with you. You would not investigate further. If you did pursue and chase him, then sooner or later you would become a demon from that person's point of view. You see right through his body and he has juicy fat and meat that you would like to eat up, so you seem like a vampire to him. And the more you try to pursue the other person, the more you fail. Perhaps you looked through too sharply with your desire, perhaps you were too penetrating. Possessing beautiful keen eyes, penetrating passion and intelligence, you abused your talent, played with it. It is quite natural with people, if they possess

some particular power or gifted energy, to abuse that quality, to misuse it by trying to penetrate every corner. Something quite obviously is lacking in such an approach- a sense of humor. If you try to push things too far, it means you do not feel the area properly; you only feel your relationship to the area. What is wrong is that you do not see all sides of the situation and therefore miss the humorous and ironical aspect.

Sometimes people run away from you because they want to play a game with you. They do not want a straight, honest and serious involvement with you, they want to play. But if they have a sense of humor and you do not, you become demonic. This is where *lalita*, the dance, comes in. You dance with reality, dance with apparent phenomena. When you want something very badly you do not extend your eye and hand automatically; you just admire. Instead of impulsively making a move from your side, you allow a move from the other side, which is learning to dance with the situation. You do not have to create the whole situation; you just watch it, work with it and learn to dance with it. So then it does not become your creation, but rather a mutual dance. No one is self-conscious, because it is a mutual experience.

When there is a fundamental openness in a relationship, being faithful, in the sense of real trust, happens automatically; it is a natural situation. Because the communication is so real and so beautiful and flowing, you cannot communicate in the same way with someone else, so automatically you are drawn together. But if any doubt presents itself, if you begin to feel threatened by some abstract possibility, although your communication is going beautifully at the time, then you are sowing the seed of paranoia and regarding the communication purely as ego entertainment.

If you sow a seed of doubt, it may make you rigid and terrified, afraid of losing the communication which is so good and real. And at some stage you will begin to be bewildered as to whether the communication is loving or aggressive. This bewilderment brings a certain loss of distance, and in this way neurosis begins. Once you lose the right perspective, the right distance in the communication process, then love becomes hate. The natural thing with hatred, just as with love, is that you want to make physical communication with the person; that is, you want to kill or injure them. In any relationship in which the ego is involved, a love relationship or any other, there is always the danger of turning against your partner. As long as there is the notion of threat or insecurity of any kind, then a love relationship could turn into its opposite.

Vanessa says

wowzers. some of this i really relate to and some is beyond where i am at and read and re-read as i get more meditation under my belt, would love to read this with a group or teacher. his razor sharp wisdom and truthfulness is inspiring and scary sometimes. i love all Chogyam Trungpa's writing because it has that quality of transmission into direct experience through the awareness and presence with which it was written.

Kristin says

Read for class - not my thing?

Hadrian says

Basis of Buddhist 'crazy thought' meditation. Interesting, although the author has some very dubious flaws of his own. I'm not going to totally dismiss it, though.

Ellie says

Very challenging book on the mindset needed for the "journey". Meditation is part of the practice needed, but this book went much deeper. Good but he referenced many other paths and practices that I could not understand/needed more background on.

"First we must learn how not to make a nuisance of ourselves. If we can make friends with ourselves, if we are willing to be what we are, without hating parts of ourselves and trying to hide them, then we can begin to open to others. And if we can begin to open without always having to protect ourselves, then perhaps we can begin to really help others." (116)

"Samyak means seeing life as it is without crutches, straightforwardly. In a bar one says, "I would like a straight drink." Not diluted with club soda or water; you just have it straight. That is samyak. No dilutions, no concoctions - just a straight drink. Buddha realized that life could be potent and delicious, positive and creative, and he realized that you do not need any concoctions with which to mix it. Life is a straight drink - hot pleasure, hot pain, straightforward, one hundred percent." (120)

"People who reject the materialism of American society and set themselves apart from it are unwilling to face themselves. They would like to comfort themselves with the notion that they are leading philosophically virtuous lives, rather than realizing that they are unwilling to work with the world as it is." (123)

Jennifer says

This is a great book for newbie American meditators and those interested in non-dualism. Among other things, it clearly describes many of the common reactions people can have when they begin and continue a meditation practice and learn about Buddhism/Eastern Spirituality. For example, the boredom one can experience when beginning to meditate. And why to keep pushing "forward" with the practice anyway. The book also spoke a bit to a question I've had recently about the suffering of others in that it suggests we must first "walk...the narrow path of simplicity" before embarking on compassionate action.

The section on love is wonderful. Also a good section on "working with people" that speaks to compassionate action.

There is also a full section on dualism and how to work with emotions that is very helpful. Basically, emotions become a "threat" because we can feel overpowered by them and may feel that we are "losing our basic identity, our center of command." This conflict creates the pain of emotions. But by "fully and directly"

relating with the emotions, then they cease to become an external problem. "One is able to make very close contact with the emotions and the war between your emotions and yourself; you and your projections, you and the world outside, becomes transparent. This involves removing the dualistic barriers set up by concepts, which is the...absence of relative concepts, emptiness." Essentially, the instruction is to "become one with the emotions." Turning towards them and becoming your emotions, you drop the resistance that creates a "problem". "The most powerful energies become absolutely workable rather than taking you over, because there is nothing to take over if you are not putting up any resistance."

Other helpful ideas which are very clearly articulated in this book

- "Resisting pain only increased its intensity".

- "Meditation practice is not a matter of trying to produce a....sense of restfulness....seeking a restful state of mind, one is on guard against restlessness..Instead meditation should reflect a mentality of richness in the sense of using everything that occurs..Thus if we provide enough room for restlessness so that it might function within the space, then the energy ceases to be restless because it can trust itself fundamentally. Meditation is giving a huge, luscious meadow to a restless cow."

- "Whenever there is a frivolous emotional situation and concept growing out of it, then this ground should be completely extinguished with a direct blow--that is, by seeing directly what is not right.. This is what is called the Sword of Manjushri, which cuts the root of dualistic conceptualization with one blow....The real objective is just to squash the frivolousness, the unwillingness to see things as they actually are, which appears rational."

And an interesting observation about Zen practice among Americans by this Tibetan Buddhist:

- "To the Japanese, Zen practice is an ordinary Japanese life-situation in which you just do your daily work and sit a lot of zazen. Bu Americans appreciate the little details--how you use your bowl and how you eat consciously in zazen posture. This is only supposed to create a feeling of boredom but to American students it is a work of art... The tradition is trying to bring out boredom, which is a necessary aspect of the narrow path of discipline, but instead the practice turns out to be an archeological, sociological survey of interesting things to do, something you could tell your friends about... The attempt to destroy credentials creates another credential."

Ben says

Changed my life.

Ellery says

This collection of talks is a staple for any Shambhalian and is one of Chogyam Trungpa's most famous books. For those familiar with Pema Chodron, you can tell where she gets her wisdom. She herself has said she has read this book over 25 times or so. Upon finishing it for the first of what will probably be many, many times, I can see why. It is incredibly rich with wisdom. I took about 5 months to get through this very

short set of teachings. After finishing reading a few pages you have to contemplate. You have to go back and re-read. This is a "collection of teachings" - not just a book. However, it is not as accessible as Pema Chodron's writing. Chogyam Trungpa does not spell things out in simple terms or give examples very often. He leaves you with more questions than answers, which in my opinion is better.

Some of the the chapters on guru devotion and tantra (the last two chapters) spoke to me less, as at least at this point, I am not as interested in these practices and devotion. Still, highly recommended, in particular to those on the Buddhist path.
