

Robert Lee Stanley
Dr. Frederick P. Lenz Foundation Merit Scholarship

**American Buddhism: An Examination of Ground, Path, and Fruition
in the Teachings of Rama—Dr. Frederick P. Lenz**

It is sometimes said that there is no such thing as “Buddhism,” that it is more appropriate to refer to the philosophy/religion/practice (each term being insufficient and debatable) in the plural—that is, that there is a unique Buddhism for every practitioner of said. It is certainly the case that Buddhist teachers come in all manner of names, styles, and guises. Although Zen, Vajrayana, Pure Land, Theravada, Mahayana, and other forms share many basic elements, each form is inimitable and special, and the great masters of the various lineages have always been entirely unique, offering their own brand of the “way” for the hordes of confused beings they encounter. Without arguing the merits of the two terms and methods, it is sometimes useful to label Buddhist teachers as either “traditional” (meaning that they closely follow the forms and methods taught in their particular lineage) or “neoteric” (meaning that they creatively diverge from their lineage in one or more significant ways). Although Rama, Dr. Frederick P. Lenz, could hardly be considered a traditional Buddhist teacher (nor is it likely that he would wish to be known as such), it is this writer’s aspiration to illuminate this contemporary Buddhist neoteric and his dharma via a very traditional Buddhist approach: namely, an examination of ground, path, and fruition in his written and transcribed teachings. To briefly preview, that named *ground* here is a summary of the type of Buddhism that Rama has offered his students and others—more precisely, its name(s) and characteristics. That called *path* is the means by which Rama’s dharma is activated and fulfilled: in his words, meditation.

Finally, *fruition* is none other than the results of following the Buddhist path as Rama has taught it.

To begin with, what does the term “American Buddhism” mean, precisely? This writer equates the expression with other terms used by Rama to describe his presentation of the dharma—Short Path Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism, Tantric Zen, Original Zen, and so on.¹ Arguably, Rama stressed certain means and ends at different occasions (as Buddhist teachers are renowned for doing), and the names employed above are appropriately indicative of his particular emphasis at the time. It is not within the scope of this paper, however, to cross-reference the different strands of Rama’s teachings in a developmental analysis (i.e., the progression of Rama’s teachings over time); rather, it is this writer’s intention to synthesize the teachings into a hopefully coherent whole with elements recognizable throughout Rama’s words and works. To this end, it is convenient and appropriate to call the composite form “American Buddhism,” a brand of contemporary Buddhism presented by Rama with five particular emphases: *lay spirituality*, *practicality*, *teacher prominence*, *ethics*, and *practice*. Students of Rama and other interested parties will rightfully note the incompleteness of this list; it is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, the purpose of these five characteristics is first to operate as an introduction for persons interested in Rama’s teachings and, second, to serve as a lens through which Dr. Lenz and his works may be systematically viewed.

As a characteristic of Rama’s dharma, *lay spirituality* includes positive and negative descriptions of American Buddhism—that is, what American Buddhism is and is not. To this end, Rama refers to a popular distinction between spirituality and religion:

¹ Although “American Buddhism” seems the term most commonly used to describe Rama’s dharma presently, the terms listed above are used by Rama himself in the lectures of *The Enlightenment Cycle*, *Tantric Buddhism*, *Zen Tapes*, etc.

Tantra is spiritual, not religious. It deals with the spirit. Religion is just an applied body of doctrines that's believed or not believed by one or more individuals.

Spirituality is the science of metaphysics.²

In brief, and as he presents it, Rama's dharma has little to do with organized religion and everything to do with spirituality. It would be inaccurate, however, to assert that Dr. Lenz is anti-religious in his teachings, for he often recognizes the importance of traditional forms:

Buddhism isn't about temples and incense and shaved heads and robes, and it's not about church. There are aspects of Buddhism that involve that, and I guess people enjoy that—it helps them. It strengthens their practice.³

It is more precise to state that Rama presents himself mostly as a spiritual teacher for a group of contemporary lay practitioners, rather than as a religious figure for followers of more traditional forms:

There are monasteries in Japan where they teach Zen with rules, more rules than you can imagine, and you might feel comfortable with that. I don't teach that type of Zen.⁴

Rama refers to these traditional, primarily religious Buddhist forms as “long path” practices. It is not that he devaluates the “long path” teachings on conduct as presented in the Vinaya, nor does Rama depreciate the study of sutras and their commentaries; it is simply that he presents himself as a teacher of “short path” Buddhism, the emphasis of

² Rama -- Frederick P. Lenz. *Tantric Buddhism* (Beverly Hills: The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, 2003), 9.

³ Rama – Frederick P. Lenz. *The Enlightenment Cycle* (Beverly Hills: The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, 2002), 20.

⁴ Rama – Frederick P. Lenz. *Zen Tapes* (Beverly Hills: The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, 2002), 7.

which is primarily meditation.⁵ Rama repeatedly insists that his students live and work in contemporary society, as opposed to their becoming monastics closed off from commerce and the daily lives of others. Additionally, Rama does not require that his students avoid the sensual experiences shunned by some lay practitioners of other forms of Buddhism.⁶ He teaches that the experiences of lay life—sex, romance, financial success and failure, death of loved ones, etc.—are not problematic at all, provided one meets them without too much attraction or aversion.⁷ For Rama, Buddhism is simply about the quest for enlightenment, and his students pursue this quest in the realm of contemporary society. In his words, “All people who seek enlightenment are Buddhists, whether they realize it or not.”⁸

Because Rama’s students work in and with contemporary society, it seems appropriate that *practicality* is one of the five emphases of his teachings. That is, Rama teaches that his brand of Buddhism leads to real-world results:

Buddhism is about living a very grounded, happy, fun life, being energized and being good at everything you do, and getting better constantly. It’s about utilizing the full power of your mind, body and spirit—your emotions, everything—to enjoy life, to experience its multifaceted sides.⁹

Rama regularly insists that Buddhist practice brings one noticeable gains not just in future rebirths, but in this present lifetime:

In other words, when you practice mindfulness [a form of Buddhist practice

⁵ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 15.

⁶ *Tantric Buddhism*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ Rama – Frederick P. Lenz. *Insights: Tantric Buddhist Reflections on Life* (New York: InterGlobal Seminars, Inc., 1994), 35.

⁹ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 16.

taught by Rama], you're able to accomplish basically everything you might like to within the parameters of your capabilities.¹⁰

Specifically, Dr. Lenz asserts that practicing meditation both energizes and clarifies the practitioner. Although he teaches that the mind is originally clear, Rama explains that the process of becoming enlightened requires an intense detoxification of the contaminants layered upon the mind by none other than ourselves.¹¹ Meditation is the essential remedy for this noxious habit. Furthermore, meditation is one of the acts required to effectively energize the practitioner:

Energy conservation is a very, very important part of the practice of yoga, of Buddhism. We only have only so much energy, and in order to exist in higher spheres of mind, you need more energy. Energy comes from releasing the kundalini through the practice of meditation. You gain energy that way. You gain energy through empowerments from enlightened teachers. You gain energy by going to power places, by making pilgrimages to sacred places where the earth vibrates faster. You gain energy by doing happy things, by being successful, overcoming obstacles and obstructions. That will get your power up.¹²

Note that all of these given results of the Buddhist path are practical benefits in this life. Rama's repeated claims for such are quite insistent, and are understandably appealing to American students living and working in a goal- and result-oriented culture. Rama's dharma asserts that one witnesses practical results in one's life almost immediately.

Third, although Dr. Lenz eschews following most traditional aspects of Buddhism, he concurs with Buddhist convention in the value of *teacher prominence*. To

¹⁰ *Zen Tapes*, 21.

¹¹ *Tantric Buddhism*, 261.

¹² *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 18.

Rama, it appears almost unthinkable that one would follow the Buddhist path without a qualified instructor:

The best way to learn Buddhism is, of course, if you have an enlightened teacher, or if you don't have an enlightened teacher, a teacher who is much more advanced than yourself.¹³

On this point, Rama explains that there are two basic types of Buddhist teachers: exoteric and esoteric. Although the former are indispensable for teaching energy conservation, energy gain, and other essential techniques, esoteric teachers are more valuable, as they are able to “transfer power from themselves to you so you can much more rapidly escalate your spiritual development.”¹⁴ Despite this insistence on *teacher prominence*, Rama also stresses that it is ultimately up to the student to find the appropriate teacher and to follow his or her instructions:

So in yoga and Buddhism, you look for the right teacher. There's no best teacher... There's the one that works for you... In Buddhism, there is a sense that the teacher is not responsible for your education. You are.¹⁵

Receiving power from an esoteric teacher does not essentially matter, therefore, unless one takes responsibility for his or her own transformation. Rama repeatedly maintains that a student has no hope of becoming enlightened unless he or she is utterly committed to the teacher and his or her own unique path towards liberation. However, as noted above, the student is always the ultimate authority and responsible party in his or her own journey towards enlightenment.

¹³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 24.

Although Rama does not emphasize traditional Buddhist teachings on *shīla*, it is evident that he places a high value on *ethics*, particularly on how his students relate to other people. Dr. Lenz states that there is one foolproof way to tell if someone is enlightened: they treat other people with respect.¹⁶ He nearly defines Buddhism as the avoidance of injury to others and oneself.¹⁷ He repeatedly stresses tolerance, particularly for people who misinterpret Buddhism.¹⁸ Additionally, Rama emphasizes self-examination, integrity, and humility, particularly when sharing the dharma with non-Buddhists:

There are really only three important things to remember in life: to care, to share, and to be fair... Share the way, tell others about enlightenment. Care, but don't be pushy! Don't preach about enlightenment to people who don't really want to hear about it! Share the way by being a good example; care by only showing those few who express interest. And, of course, be fair: don't present your version of the truth to others. Lose your ulterior motives! Be accurate and pure in your presentation of the way, and you will become the way.¹⁹

Although Rama here primarily applies these “three important things” in regard to interactions with non-Buddhists, it seems a mistake to limit such pithy instructions to the realm of conversing with strangers. Indeed, it seems a worthy application of *ethics* to apply the three (“to care, to share, and to be fair”) to all aspects of the practitioner’s life.

The most important of the five emphases in Rama’s Buddhism is *practice*, i.e., meditation. In no uncertain terms, Rama asserts that “what matters is that you meditate,”

¹⁶ *Tantric Buddhism*, 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ *Insights: Tantric Buddhist Reflections on Life*, 68.

calling meditation the “essential practice.”²⁰ Rama places such importance on meditation in Buddhism that he calls anyone who meditates a Buddhist.²¹ In virtually every lecture or printed work this writer has examined, Rama stresses meditation above and beyond all else. It is appropriate, therefore, that the bulk of the remainder of this paper examine Rama’s teachings on meditation and the techniques to accomplish said.

Meditation, therefore, is the path of American Buddhism—the means by which the ground is expressed and the process by which the fruition finds manifestation. Because meditation means a variety of things to the practitioners of varying types of Buddhism, it will be helpful to review precisely what meditation means to Rama. To this end, the following list has been culled from his various works. Among other things, meditation is:

- a perfect state of light, energy, and humor²²
- a process of expanding awareness²³
- a process of silencing thoughts²⁴
- a process of not-doing²⁵
- being in touch with the universal light²⁶
- making the mind still²⁷
- letting go of the ego²⁸
- the bridge between levels of consciousness²⁹

²⁰ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 18 and 16, respectively.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

- mind perceiving itself³⁰
- not an action at all³¹
- the science of stopping thought³²
- the freedom from all mental states and concepts of self³³
- a celebration of unity with the cosmos³⁴

Note that these descriptions of meditation are alternatingly active and passive, processes and states. That is, sometimes Rama describes meditation as something that one endeavors to perform; at other times, meditation is simply an experience the practitioner undergoes. It is this writer's contention that the variety above is not a mark of inconsistency; rather, just as Rama calls his dharma different names on different occasions, he teaches meditation to different students according to their level of maturation and their variety of interests and backgrounds. On the whole, however, it will be illustrated below that Rama's instructions for meditation itself are quite consistent over time.

To begin with, Rama introduces meditation as a progressive effort: that is, one does not jump into advanced practice right away. In fact, following Rama's instructions, the practitioner eases into meditation in the following fashion: he or she begins by meditating for 15 minutes in the morning once a day for several weeks or months, then adds an evening meditation of 15 minutes for several more weeks or months, and slowly

²⁹ *Insights*, 4.

³⁰ *Tantric Buddhism*, 174.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 178.

³³ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁴ Rama -- Frederick P. Lenz. *On the Road with Rama* (Beverly Hills: The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, 2002), 27.

lengthens the duration of meditation to 30 minutes and then to 45 minutes and, finally, to an hour twice a day. When one is meditating for a total of two hours a day, it is no longer necessary to increase the duration of practice; rather, one's meditative proficiency should be honed from thereon.³⁵ It should also be noted here that Rama considers the morning practice the primary meditation.³⁶

You will find that it's good to meditate in the morning. When you meditate in the morning after you first get up, you energize your body, you wash out all the energies you picked up when you were very sensitive and your defenses were down...³⁷

Rama teaches that the purpose of one's evening meditation is twofold: first, it renews one's primary (morning) meditation and, second, it reconnects one with the energy of divine light.³⁸

To begin one's meditation session, Rama regularly emphasizes four factors: alertness, freshness, non-distraction, and posture. The meditator should not be overly sleepy when he or she meditates; Rama suggests having a cup of tea or coffee to help maintain alertness. Similarly, one's psyche should be fresh, and Rama stresses the importance of taking a shower before meditating, or at least washing one's face and hands, in order to remove unwanted energies. The meditator should also be non-distracted by hunger or physical restriction, and to this end Rama advises that one eat a small meal and wear comfortable clothing. Finally, and most importantly, Dr. Lenz

³⁵ The presentation above is a summary of instructions found in *The Enlightenment Cycle* (7-8), *Tantric Buddhism* (185-186), and *Zen Tapes* (28-29).

³⁶ *Tantric Buddhism*, 186.

³⁷ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 8.

³⁸ *Tantric Buddhism*, 186.

highlights the necessity of correct posture: the meditator should always sit erect with a straight back either in the cross-legged position or in a chair.³⁹

For the meditation session itself, Rama presents varying instructions, but for the purpose of simplicity they are divided here into two main aspects: dealing with mental activity and focusing one's awareness on an object. As for the first aspect, Dr. Lenz consistently suggests quieting the mind until thought has been quelled.⁴⁰ One does this not by making an enemy of mind's habitual thinking, but by merely ignoring thoughts and other mental phenomena as they arise:

When thoughts come in and out of your mind, ignore them. If you have experiences, see light, colors, sensations of lightness, that sort of thing, if cabbage grows out of your ears, don't worry about it. Just ignore it. Experiences come and go in meditation, and, you know, let 'em go; let 'em come.⁴¹

Rama often teaches to witness these forms of mental activity with an attitude of friendly equanimity. In essence, one interacts with the entire mental show as if it were not a problem at all:

You'll be the play of existence, and you'll see your thoughts parading before you sometimes—your frustrations, your desires. Be neither attracted nor repulsed. Wave at them as they go by—go ahead, wave. Wish them well on their journey. But know that you are not of them, and you are not in them.⁴²

In the end, however, it matters most that the meditator go beyond the mind's habitual chatter and enter the realm of pure light:

³⁹ These instructions are also summarized from *The Enlightenment Cycle* (4), *Tantric Buddhism* (185-187), and *Zen Tapes* (29-30).

⁴⁰ *Insights*, 61.

⁴¹ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 10-11.

⁴² *On the Road with Rama*, 13.

So then, in order to meditate, all we have to do is stop. If we stop, it's perfect meditation because it's perfect mind. That's it. We just have to stop. Now what do we stop? Thought. Impressions, desires, aversions, states of consciousness, ideas of being, essence, substance, predicate adjectives—everything has to go. Final clearance, everything must go. Exhalation—we're going to exhale everything, all qualities, all perceptions from mind until there's only the perfect, pristine, clear light, which does not perceive itself as other.⁴³

Rama notes that the process of stopping thought in this manner is certainly a gradual one, and the practitioner should not be discouraged if it takes a lot of time and effort—even years—to see marginal results.⁴⁴ To this end, in order to better tame the mind's activity, Rama suggests that the practitioner work with a specific object of meditation so that “all other thoughts will be forced out of the mind.”⁴⁵

There are several different objects suggested by Rama that may be beneficial in honing the student's ability to focus. For example, Rama and fellow musicians of the band Zazen created two tapes of music—“Enlightenment” and “Canyons of Light”—to serve as objects of meditation, the former for morning meditation and the latter for evening meditation. Dr. Lenz states that each of the tapes is infused with “a tremendous amount of kundalini” and listening to the music during meditation is like having an enlightened teacher in one's presence.⁴⁶ Additionally, Rama suggests using a variety of external visual objects:

You might use a candle flame; a brightly colored rock; a yantra, which is a

⁴³ *Tantric Buddhism*, 176.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

⁴⁵ *Zen Tapes*, 30.

⁴⁶ Rama encourages listening to the specifically designed music in *The Enlightenment Cycle*, particularly on pages 5, 9, and 10.

geometrical design specifically for the practice of concentration and meditation; or something else. Place the object within your view, hopefully at about eye level... you are going to simply look at the object, blink whenever your eyes become uncomfortable and focus on it. As thoughts come in and out of your mind, ignore them. Simple continue to concentrate.⁴⁷

Dr. Lenz also proposes that the meditator can choose to use a mantra in order to better foster one's concentration:

A mantra is a powerful sound which, when focused upon, clears the mind and helps bring you into a higher level of awareness. The most powerful of all mantras is "Aum" spelled A U M... It has a vibratory energy that helps eliminate thought.⁴⁸

It should be noted, however, that Rama most consistently offers focusing on chakras as a peerless method of meditation. In fact, many of the methods touched on above are intended to be employed in tandem with chakra concentration: for example, the songs on the tapes mentioned prior are designed to stimulate certain chakras.⁴⁹ Dr. Lenz asserts that there are three specific chakras to concentrate on in order to attain the best results from meditation:

Around the navel area, there's a chakra. In the middle of the chest, there's a chakra. And between the eyebrows and a little bit above, there is a chakra. There are more, but these are the most useful for the practice of zazen [meditation]. Choose one of these three points and hold your attention there... The first time you do it, or the first few times, you might even want to touch that spot for a

⁴⁷ *Zen Tapes*, 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 5-9.

minute or two. Hold your fingers very lightly against your navel, or in the center of your chest around the area of the heart, or between the eyebrows and a little bit above. As you press very gently there, it will be easier for you to focus. These are not random spots... The chakra around the navel area is the power chakra, and as you focus on this center you will develop tremendous will power. The heart center—which is in the center of the chest—develops the psychic centers, the psychic abilities, sensitivities, and also brings about a tremendous stillness within the mind... The third eye, which is between the eyebrows and slightly above—focusing in this area develops your intuitive wisdom, your knowledge, your higher mind, and gives you visions into other planes of reality.⁵⁰

Essentially, the method of this form of meditation is to focus on the given chakra undistractedly;⁵¹ the primary fruition of chakra meditation is the elevation of kundalini energy.⁵²

When one has practiced the above meditation techniques for the appropriate duration, Rama suggests concluding the meditation session with a bow in order to let go of the results of meditation while offering said to the universe.⁵³ In this way, the meditator begins his or her session with fresh wakefulness and concludes the same session with gratitude and relinquishment.

Before concluding with an examination of the fruition of these forms of Buddhist practice, it is important to note that although Rama primarily stresses sitting meditation,

⁵⁰ Rama presents similar instructions of chakra meditation elsewhere (see *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 6-7), but this excerpt (*Zen Tapes*, 32) seems the most thorough to this writer.

⁵¹ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 10.

⁵² *Tantric Buddhism*, 189.

⁵³ Rama specifically asserts the importance of bowing at closure in *The Enlightenment Cycle* (10), *Tantric Buddhism* (194), and *Zen Tapes* (33).

this form is hardly the only means of practice he teaches. Dr. Lenz also emphasizes the importance of practicing between meditation sessions in whatever daily situations one finds oneself, namely via *mindfulness*, *working with strong feelings*, *quiet observation*, and *advanced meditation*. Rama explains what he means by *mindfulness* practice in the following way:

It's a fun game that you can practice all day long. All day, after you've meditated in the morning, as thoughts come in your mind—emotions, feelings—realize that most of them aren't your own. And just bounce out anything negative, anything unhappy, angry, jealous, suspicious, anything that would make you unhappy and destroy your inner calm, your inner equilibrium that you gained from your morning meditation. Just blow it out. Push it away.⁵⁴

The above excerpt is also a method for *working with strong feelings*. On this topic, Rama also suggests to simply disregard painful feelings while enjoying whatever sensations and emotions one finds pleasant. However, Dr. Lenz mostly stresses that enlightenment is only possible when the practitioner rises above anything deemed negative or positive.⁵⁵

To this end, Rama also instructs practitioners to seek a sense of *quiet observation*:

We don't get so involved in a state of mind that we forget that it's just another transient state of mind, no matter how much ecstasy or agony or mixture of both is involved.⁵⁶

Finally, and almost exclusively in *Zen Tapes*, Dr. Lenz teaches what he calls *advanced meditation*. Essentially, this is a method for living in the world in constant practice while fulfilling the functions of one's employment, studying with teachers, propagating the

⁵⁴ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 8.

⁵⁵ *Insights*, 27.

⁵⁶ *Tantric Buddhism*, 89.

dharma, and supporting the sangha. At this level of meditation, the practitioner joins everything that arises in life with awareness:

In advanced meditation, you're going to step beyond your role as perceiver of the view, perceiver of your life, perceiver of your death. That's just a way of looking at things in duality. Instead, you are going to merge everything into the flux. You're going to go to stillness. When that happens, the world collapses.

There's no time, no space, no viewer, no viewing, no object in view.⁵⁷

Advanced meditation means going beyond the distinction between meditation and non-meditation, a distinction which Dr. Lenz asserts is characteristic of the mindset of beginning and intermediate meditators:

Advanced meditation means all day long, all night long, keeping our mind in a specific state or series of states of awareness that engender or lead to enlightenment; not being angry when we could be angry; not being hateful when we could be hateful; not being depressed or remorseful; lifting ourselves out of these states with our willpower, willing something else... Not just let go to your thoughts and sit there and think or move into sleepy states of awareness, but to move into high-powered states of attention that bring you to that still point.⁵⁸

Advanced meditation, then, is specifically about doing, about being active and lively in the world. Specifically, *advanced meditation* is about service. Meditation is no longer merely about personal profit:

If you decide to progress to advanced meditation, then you need to take an active part in the spreading of the dharma... You need to consider now, actively, the

⁵⁷ *Zen Tapes*, 298.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

welfare of others.⁵⁹

One practices *advanced meditation*, then, by serving his or her teacher in any number of ways, providing economic support to the sangha, volunteering more hours than are asked of one, performing office chores, etc. Life in all of its manifestations becomes an opportunity for service and practice. In other words, as the practitioner advances along the path and becomes ready to endeavor *advanced meditation*, the false separation between life and practice, between self and other, dissolves. This is the pinnacle of Buddhist practice and signifies the fruition of following the path.

As mentioned above, one of the five emphases of Rama's dharma is *practicality*. It is therefore appropriate that the marks of fruition considered here are tangible and applicable to the practitioner's daily life. However, before considering the results of meditation practice per se, it is useful to consider Dr. Lenz's basic guidelines for determining if one's practice has been successful:

But if you are really practicing correctly, the litmus test to true practice is that you like yourself better. You like your life better. You feel better. You can see every month, every week, every year, and improvement in the states of mind you exist in, an improvement with how you handle both difficult situations and easy situations.⁶⁰

Rama urges his students to thoroughly examine their own lives to determine whether or not they are engaging in fruitful practice:

If you are not becoming happier, more centered and better at what you do in the physical world, if you can't relate better to people than you could before, if your

⁵⁹ Ibid., 305.

⁶⁰ *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 17.

conversation isn't sharper, if you're not funnier, if you're not more street-wise, you're not meditating. You're spacing out.⁶¹

To summarize, meditation practice is successful if one noticeably enjoys life more and can measure improvement tangibly in one's interactions with environments beyond the personal meditation hall.

In addition to the measurable benefits given above, Rama teaches that proper meditation leads to:

- greater relaxation⁶²
- deep authenticity—i.e., “being who you really are”⁶³
- becoming more psychic⁶⁴
- developing a consistently clear mind⁶⁵
- centering one's life⁶⁶
- the ability to take difficulties and challenges in stride⁶⁷
- becoming kind⁶⁸
- humility⁶⁹
- overcoming sorrow and pain⁷⁰
- non-attachment and the ability of drop everything in life at any moment⁷¹
- greater awareness⁷²

⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

⁶² Ibid., 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁷¹ *Tantric Buddhism*, 347.

- greater ease in studying and working⁷³
- the development of knowledge and power⁷⁴

A strong case can be made that each of these benefits is highly useful in one's current, daily life. It is not that Rama discourages the practitioner from considering the fruition of practice in consequent lifetimes; it is more that he consistently focuses on what meditation can do in the right here and now, or at least in the very near future.

As is the case with most forms of Buddhism, making clear distinctions among ground, path, and fruition in Rama's American Buddhism is not entirely successful. For example, one cannot discuss the ground of Rama's dharma (the characteristics of this form of Buddhism) without including his emphasis on meditation (path). Similarly, the results (fruition) of meditation (path) are so strongly highlighted in Rama's view (ground) that it is almost absurd to attempt any separation of the three elements. They are as interwoven as cause and effect, as indivisible as arising, abiding, and ceasing. However, attempting such a deconstruction—albeit incompletely—provides the opportunity to learn more about the particular elements of Rama's teachings and, therefore, more about the dharmic whole. Viewing dharma through ground, path, and fruition has been a traditional means of Buddhist examination for over two thousand years. Although Rama teaches in a stimulatingly non-traditional way, it is this writer's hope that the tradition-based analysis enacted above provides some benefit to all interested beings.

⁷² *Zen Tapes*, 33.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

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