One keynote of the esoteric and tantric traditions of meditation is that they give rise to a grounded and all-inclusive field of awareness; rather than moving away from our fully embodied, experiential human existence, they are moving toward it. The emphasis is on the human experience as the ultimate and final reference point for everything that we know and think. This goes back to the time of the Buddha. He was engaged by one of his students, who wanted him to give him intellectual and tradition-based answers to questions. The Buddha’s response was, “You can live that way if you want to. But at that point, there’s no journey, and there’s no
awakening. In fact, there’s no anything.” That approach, and ultimately, trusting anybody or anything outside of your own direct experience, he said, leads to suffering, confusion, pain, and harming others.

The Buddha spoke for the primacy of experience – that which we know in the depth of our own being, unfiltered through the thinking mind. His response to this student was, “The only way that you should ever trust anything and know anything is to see for yourself if it’s the case.” That is the role of direct intuition, known only in and through our body. He said, “Everything else is a hypothesis and not to be believed blindly.” This theme of the sacredness of direct experience as our only resource, our only guide, our only protector, has been central to the early meditation traditions – Ch’án and Zen, and Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism in Tibet – the esoteric traditions.

Through meditation practice that is fully grounded in our body, what we call “somatic meditation,” we arrive at the knowledge that is not mediated by the thinking mind. It is not abstract; it is not conceptual, it is not hypothetical. At this point, through our body’s direct intuition, what we know is not what the mind thinks or assumes. What we know in our bodies is direct naked experience. And that experience is, as William Blake said, limitless. We’re touching eternity when we step out of the thinking mind. When we talk about the human experience as being the touchstone of the whole tradition, this is what we’re talking about. We’re not talking about what we “think” we experience. We’re talking about what we, in fact, truly experience, and it happens without thought. It’s self-evident. It’s the knowledge of our deeper being, what we’re calling our Soma.

In the conventional culture, we always look to the experts for everything. Even in the field of meditation, people look to the experts. In these days of profound spiritual consumerism, spiritual shopping, and spiritual materialism, people go to
the internet to see which teacher gets the most “hits.” And then that teacher becomes the expert for them. They may even say, “that’s my spiritual teacher,” although never having met that person.

When we are operating in modern culture, there are many powerful and seductive forces that lead us in different directions. The internet is amongst the most powerful of addictions and also the most pernicious, and least understood. It has captured and changed all of us in various ways. From my scholarly studies and direct contact with indigenous traditions and traditional religions throughout the world, I know that it hasn’t always been like this. And because our disembodiment in this culture is so extreme, we have to find a way back to our basic being; our somatic being; our intuitive way of knowing; our physical body, and the arena where we experience things nakedly.

This capacity to know in a different way has been not only part of us since the beginning but is actually a key to our survival. In the book *Black Elk Speaks*, he shows us how much he relied on what his body knew, how much his bodily intuition showed him while hunting buffalo in winter, blinded by blizzards. He said, “I sensed that over the third hill, there were buffalo.” And there were.

We talk about the five senses; sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. And then we talk about the sixth sense as if it were a weird sort of outlying thing that maybe it exists, maybe it doesn’t. When we are in our body, the knowledge of the sixth sense becomes our way of knowing. It’s immediate direct knowledge. It is our direct intuition. It doesn’t have to be filtered by anything. And the clarity of that knowledge is much higher than any other way of knowing. This veracity, the self-existing truthfulness of that somatic knowledge, is infinitely beyond what we know in any other way.

We have to develop that capacity. To be more specific, we are
developing the capacity to be identified with our largest and most profound being, and to view and see the world from that standpoint and live from there.

We’re developing, we could say, a different kind of human being than the one we have been trained to be within this culture. We could also say that we are recovering a way of being human that’s much more ancient and closer to our human genetic system. In fact, it is our human genetic inheritance from the very beginning. So we have a challenge in our culture to come back to ourselves. I think that the tendencies that separate us and deny us our own humanity and reinforce our disconnection, are very strong and real, but they don’t hold a candle to the noon day sun of the awareness of our own body.

About Dharma Ocean

Dharma Ocean is a non-profit global educational foundation that focuses on somatic meditation as the way to help students – of any secular or religious discipline, by teaching them the importance of embodiment in both meditation and their daily lives as taught in the “practicing lineage” of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. The foundation was established in 2005 by scholar, author, and teacher Dr. Reggie Ray, and is located in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Southern Colorado.

Their Blazing Mountain Retreat Center in Crestone is a sacred and protected space that hosts a wide range of retreats and meditation groups. Students can immerse themselves in the richness and depth of their most fundamental being through connection with spiritual tradition, community, and nature. Dharma Ocean also offers online programs and specialized training for students who wish to become Vajrayana practitioners.