

The Trinity of Revelation

Dang, Rolpa and Tsal

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The sole basis of everything is inconceivable and ungraspable. From it arise two paths or ways: the way of awareness and the way of unawareness. Unfortunately, we are more familiar with the way of unawareness which leads to separation, isolation, reification and identification. Due to this, we imagine that we are individual entities living in a world of individual entities. We develop a sense of our character, what we are like, and this identity makes us recognisable to ourselves and to others. However, this identity is unstable and is influenced by internal events such as thoughts, moods and memories and by external events such as attack or welcome.

Due to unawareness of our inconceivable basis we feel ourselves to have agency, to be separate individuals able to think, speak and act. This delusion that we are the doer of our lives binds us to the framework of duality within which I am the subject acting on others or I am the object being acted upon by others. We try to influence these interactions in our own favour by formulating differentiating intentions towards those we deem friends and those we deem enemies. Such biased intentions give rise to both contingent effects and delayed karmic consequences.

Even when we become aware of impermanence and start to see the truth of dependent origination we are still within the frame of duality. To see that this entity or situation or event is occurring on the basis of that entity or situation or event allows us, through analysis, to gain a concept-based clarity. Unfortunately, this only arrives after we have already been drawn into the three wheels that maintain reification. These three wheels are subject, object and the verb or

action that connects them—for example, *“I can understand what is happening.”* Although this analysis opens the door to emptiness, it is likely that the most we gain is modest insight within the domain of conceptualisation.

Once unawareness conditions all your experience no amount of thinking will free you from this. If in any situation your starting point is that ‘I am the doer’, then each moment confirms your isolated ego as the basis of your identity. Your character, including your embodied posture, style of gestures, tone of voice and way of expressing yourself, establishes for yourself and others the seeming fact that you are knowable and identifiable. You seem to exist with enduring qualities. You are a causal force and, operating as an entity in a world of entities, you will be drawn towards making effort to improve and diversify how you think, speak, and act.

If, however, due to the ripening of your good karma you are able to meet a teacher with the necessary qualities and receive dzogchen introduction through them, you can start to open to your own intrinsic basis. This basis, ground or source is your own original face—to see this sets you on the way of awareness. As Garab Dorje indicated, you have to be pointed towards the truth of yourself, your ungraspable unborn presence. Once you open to this, as Garab Dorje said, you have to use direct opening to the open to dispel all doubts. Doubt and uncertainty are based on concepts and the relativisation of comparing and contrasting. The open is untouched by concepts and does not rely on them. Garab Dorje’s third point is to continue in this way and avoid going under the power of duality and reification. All occurrence is intrinsically integral with the ever-open ground. It has never truly been apart from it and so there is nothing to improve, remove or integrate.

Having opened to the ever-open we want to abide with this and so we need to become familiar with how experience arises while awareness remains not other than the basis. The basis, the source of all, is inconceivable and unlike anything we think we know. The display of its potential is without limit and each and every moment of display is inherently unreifiable as it is. Like a dream or a mirage or a rainbow this nondual display neither exists nor does not exist and cannot be apprehended by concepts. The potential of the basis encompasses all forms and patterns of experience, including all those which are wrongly taken to exist. It is vital to see the unchanging integrity of the basis as it offers hospitality to the diversity of its own display. This is the first

aspect of revelation and is known as **dang**. The other two aspects of revelation, **rolpa** and **tsal**, follow on from this. The primordial purity of the basis is inseparable from the instant presence of experience as manifest through these Three Modes of revelation. If you take them to be existents you will create many problems for yourself.

Dang is the capacity of the basis to neither merge with occurrence nor to block it. The traditional example for this is a crystal ball. A crystal ball will take on the colouration of whatever colour of material it is placed on. The crystal ball is transparent and translucent with no inner content of its own and thus is open and welcoming, receiving whatever arises. This is the quality of the dharmakaya, our empty essence that is ever-open. Dharmakaya, having no content of its own, is completely open and able to integrate every situation without gain or loss. It has no boundaries, no inside or outside, no bias or favouritism, and has nothing to protect and nothing to gain. The crystal ball will allow any colour to suffuse it, and similarly our dharmakaya nature is open to any arising without fear or risk of being damaged. This is primordial purity, the unchanging quality of our empty *essence*.

The various colours arising in the crystal ball neither harm nor improve it and likewise bad thoughts arising in your mind do not harm the empty essence of your mind. They may harm your sense of yourself but your sense of yourself is just another thought pattern arising inseparable from your awareness which is inseparable from its basis. That is to say, experiences impact experiences but they don't impact the space of open awareness. The dharmakaya has no substance that could be hurt or affected; it is infinite unborn emptiness. This is the vajra quality, the indestructible nature of enlightenment. Nothing can destroy it and so it doesn't have to defend itself. This is a wonderful quality to open to. Being infinitely open, we find we are infinitely available. Nothing will harm our essence, nor can it ever be depleted.

When you sit in meditation, if you start to judge what is happening you may get worried because your mind is not clear, or you might feel you are having too many of one kind of thought and not enough of another. If this occurs simply recall this image of the crystal ball and relax into naked empty awareness. Nothing that occurs can harm your essence. You don't have to improve your meditation. You don't have to work at making it clearer or sharper or better. Such effort may 'improve' the content of your mind but it cannot influence the ever-empty mind itself. So

simply allow the mind to be as it is and rest in open presence with all that occurs. In this way you will find yourself as the dharmakaya.

The second mode of revelation is called **rolpa**. This indicates play and display and is linked to the sambhogakaya, the enlightened aspect of enjoying the clarity of ungraspable radiance. The image used to illustrate this is a mirror and its reflections. The mirror has the potential or capacity to show a reflection of whatever is placed in front of it. It is not that the mirror contains within it, hidden like seeds in a pod, all the images that it will show. The mirror is empty through and through yet it has the potential, the capacity, to show exactly what is placed in front of it. Just as a reflection arises from and appears within the empty mirror, so our awareness illuminates the ungraspable clarity of our experience inseparable from the space of its occurrence.

The word **rolpa** indicates play and dance and points to the lack of substantial reality in our experience. Experience is clarity, the luminosity which is the very fact of experience itself. The nature of the empty essence is clarity, the luminosity of experience free of the duality of 'I experience this'. Experience itself as it is in itself is precise and clear. It is luminous and self-illuminating. It is clearly bright and clearly empty. Concepts cannot clarify what is already clear. When the mind is under the power of duality it mistakenly employs concepts to create clarity yet this dualistic clarity is very different from the intrinsic clarity of the self-showing of the open empty mind. The mirror is both stable and moving. The surface of the mirror, where reflections come and go, appears to be very dynamic and yet the space within which they move, the mirror itself, is completely still. **Rolpa** indicates the flow of new patterns of experience arising, changing, and passing away within the empty space of the mind, a natural dynamism that is not generated by our individual will and intention.

For example, if you practise an anuyoga sadhana of Padmasambhava, the ungraspable unreified light body of Padmasambhava appears. It arises instantly and fully formed. It is uncreated, undeveloped. It is the radiant clarity of the ground. You are light in a world of light, free of substance and the shadow of the belief in existence. In the practice you are Padmasambhava and after the practice you are Padmasambhava manifesting as your usual form. Both appearances are the expression of the empty essence. To integrate your usual form fully into Padmasambhava is to open to the sambhogakaya, the effortless display of our empty

essence. All that arises in the mind is like a reflection—apparent yet ungraspable. This is the clarity, the unobstructedness, of the non-dual display free of knower and known.

The third quality or mode of revelation is called ***tsal***, the arising of all that we seem to encounter through our senses. The image used to illustrate this is a piece of natural crystal. When the sun shines into a crystal you see rays of rainbow-coloured light refracted by the crystal. Similarly, on the level of the nirmanakaya, the creativity and potential which exists in latent form as clear light comes into diverse precise patterning according to the circumstances. The differentiated refracted light shining from the crystal cannot be seen within it. The ***tsal*** potential arises ‘out there’ as all the appearances we can encounter. This is the actuality of the rich diversity of our world, so it is vital to see that this is the truth of all that we habitually reify. If we see the true nature of these appearances which are the circumstances of our participation, then their unique specificity is not a limitation to be removed for these colourations are an integral part of the creativity of ***tsal*** energy.

However revelation arises, in whichever of these Three Modes it arises, it is not personal. We are not revealing this. We, as individuals, do not generate these experiences. Rather, what we take to be ourselves is part of the revelation. To see this directly frees us from the delusion of being an isolate, an entity, an existent. The essence reveals instant presence, the uncreated display of the potentiality of ungraspable emptiness. So instead of relying on a conceptual interpretation such as, *“How I am now is the result of how I was in my past lives”*, we see that all the particularities of our lives are in each moment directly radiating from and within the basis. *Tsal* is the self-liberating revelation of our patterning in the world of patternings.

All Three Modes of intrinsic revelation are inseparable from the basis, as are all the forms of dualistic revelation manifesting as the experiences of samsara. If due to unawareness of the unborn, we focus on and get involved in the movement of appearances, then with this dualistic entanglement appearances will be taken to be the appearances of things. Under this delusion we will be unaware of the nondual integrity of what is occurring and so we will be swept along by the flow of events.

To be aware of these Three Modes of revelation is very important for practice for they help us see what is actually happening. The Three Modes are a trinity of potentiality rather than three separate things or functions. They are the means by which experience is revealed so we will benefit from observing them in our practice.

We begin by relaxing into the ever-present spaciousness from which and within which we present. It is as if our awareness is a huge crystal ball within which appear this room and all that is in it including our body, our thoughts and so on. Without effort everything is here and yet without substance, without internal defining existence. Our awareness is the arena of emptiness and emptiness is the arena of our awareness. Everything can be simply accepted as being here, without either adopting or rejecting, because these appearances are inseparable from the basis. These illusory transient forms cannot make any mark on fundamental openness. Openness remains open while appearances come and go.

Unawareness of this brings fear and anxiety, in particular our fear of the destruction of ourselves. By opening to openness we can see directly that no separate self exists. There is infinite emptiness, awareness and clarity. Our mind is open, empty, clear and radiant. In each and every moment myriad diverse revelations are occurring. This is the trinity of the translucent hospitality of **dang**, the bright generosity of **rolpa**, and the omnipresent connectivity of **tsal**. Abiding in openness our presence is relaxed as endless varied patterns arise and pass.

The as is of open essence reveals the as if of appearance. The untainted purity of essence has no need for protection from occurrences. They arise and pass without leaving a trace just as the crystal ball is unmarked by any occurrences. The bright nature of the essence is unreifiable and ungraspable. This display is **rolpa**, the whole field of 'private' appearance arising all at once as reflections in the mirror of awareness and vanishing without trace. The contactful diversity of **tsal** arises as the precise details of each moment of sensory experience. This is co-emergent connectivity offering freedom from isolation and limited identity. **Tsal** is fresh and empty and leaves no trace. It is the immediacy of each moment free of pre-figured agenda.

Participant: Are we in charge of our actions or do they just come? With awareness do I have the possibility to make decisions, or is there is no 'I' that makes a decision?

James: I remember when I was about twelve, going out in the countryside with my parents. I went up to the top of a big hill and started to run down it. After a while I was running so fast that I couldn't stop. At first the ground was very smooth and then it started to get very steep and very rough, and that was the first time in my life I truly realised, "*Ah! I am not at all in charge of this!*" Yet somehow my feet were in the right place without me being in control or deciding what to do. Have you ever had that experience? It is quite amazing. The only way to survive in such situations is simply to trust the direct immediacy of the revelation of non-duality.

This example may give you a sense of the **tsal** aspect: precise activity without a controlling reflective agent. When the lamp shines on the crystal, light comes out. Thus the body running down the hill is co-emergent with the hill, a seamless arising of boulder and step. The movement is not being processed, just as there is no machine inside the crystal making the colours. The sunlight hits the facet at the right angle and light radiates. This is immediate, a movement arising as part of the situation rather than being applied to the situation. If we open to our ground, the basis, we see that each moment of our life is the dynamic spontaneity of awareness.

The more we trust the precision of immediacy the less we have to think. Most of us spend quite a lot of time in anxious thinking and worrying. But what we call thinking is not fresh thinking, it is a turning about within old patterns of thought. The more we trust our relaxed openness the more we are present with the self-liberation of appearances. Thoughts are not the enemy yet we dull ourselves with badly applied thoughts, with inefficient thinking, defensive thinking. Instant presence does not rest on thought. Thoughts are constructive whereas the clarity of instant presence requires no effort from awareness. No thing is created in the ceaseless play of self-arising and self-liberating.

Looking closely at daily activities can also give us a flavour of **dang**. For example, when you read a novel and are entranced within it, it is as if you are in the book, and the book is in you. You have become empty of yourself and are filled by the movement of the story. Then you close the book and you go off and do something else. Even if it's a very interesting book, you can put it down and let yourself be filled with a new activity. Then later you come back to the book and find yourself right back in it. The same phenomenon occurs when watching a film or at the

theatre. We enter each situation and it enters us—for a moment—and then something new occurs. This freshness is always available yet when we are not open it is a different story. If we are trapped in duality we will carry the traces of experiences and identify with them. We will enter into judgement and believe in our individual agency in order to get more of what we like and less of what we don't like. When that happens we are closed to our own open availability and are unable to open fully to the situation. Rather than having the generous translucency of the crystal ball we have become full of our own stuff and are opaque like a ball made of granite.

Participant: How does this relate to distraction?

James: As long as our experience is mediated by duality we can easily be distracted and taken away from the immediate presence of our hospitable translucency, our bright display and our diverse participation. Preoccupation with memories and plans obscures the easy relaxed openness of awareness and then, when thought chases thought, the Three Modes of revelation, although present, are hidden from us. The trinity of revelation is inseparable from the ever-fresh, naked ground and when we open our experience to its own ground, then these Three Modes are present as our presence. The empty ball shows nondefining appearance. The empty mirror shows nondefining appearance. The empty crystal shows nondefining appearance.

The openness of **dang** does not judge or discriminate; it does not block, limit or edit anything that occurs. The richness of the potential of the essence is not habitual or intentional or partial since **rolpa** displays freshly according to circumstances. The precision and impact of **tsal** is fresh and direct as the non-dual co-emergence of actor, context and action.

If these Three Modes of revelation are not known, then they appear as modes of obscuration. Thus **dang** shows as pre-formed existence, like a pre-coloured ball of glass which seems to be an enduring entity of self. **Rolpa** becomes like a distorting mirror generating incongruence between object and reflection. **Tsal** becomes like a projector rather than a crystal, manifesting pre-formed images.

In brief, revelation manifests in three different ways: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya. The dharmakaya aspect or **dang** indicates the state of openness which is our actuality inseparable from the basis. This openness is indestructible and so is fearlessly hospitable

in the manner of a crystal ball. If a crystal ball is placed on a red surface it appears red, while if on a green surface it appears green, and so on. However its basic condition never changes. That is how **dang** does not obstruct revelation. When we are in the state of openness this openness remains unaltered no matter what circumstances occur. Awareness does not remain apart from whatever occurs. It is not thinking that it is open and it does not care about circumstances. Rather, circumstances are instantly integral, like the colours in the example of the crystal ball.

Dang revelation is without fixed colour or form and yet has infinite capacity to manifest any form just as a mirror has infinite potentiality to reflect any form or colour. The mirror itself has no inherent content and so does not change form or colour when it reflects something. This is **dang** revelation. The reflection in the mirror, the **rolpa** mode of revelation, changes form or colour according to the object placed in front of it, just as our visions or inner life arise according to either the presence of clarity or to our karmic habits. **Dang** is instant, seamless and not pre-programmed, while with **rolpa** the forms that arise depend on the object, not on the mirror, for the mirror does not change.

The open essence displays as its bright nature—this is revelation occurring in the **rolpa** manner of reflection. With **rolpa** the experience takes place instantly and uninterruptedly showing all manner of forms, colours, sizes or shapes. The infinite potentiality of **dang** does not itself manifest but allows revelation to occur concretely when there is a specific secondary cause. This revelation is possible due to the availability of openness which is never an active participant in the revelation

When there are secondary causes our potential can manifest in two ways depending on our condition and our capacity. We can manifest while remaining present in our nature or by falling into dualistic vision. If we are present in our nature we experience the sambhogakaya aspect known as **rolpa**. Whatever is in front of a mirror, whether good or bad, is immediately reflected in it. Abiding within awareness, a practitioner is not conditioned by what appears in the mirror because he or she understands that whatever appears is only a reflection devoid of independent existence. Whether the reflections seem to be good or bad is not important because at the level of profound openness there is no difference between good and bad.

The reflections only manifest because the basis has a natural capacity to reflect. Everything manifests just as it is, with colour, form, shape, size. Anything can appear. This revelation is not manifesting as subject and object but as if in an internal dimension as the impressions of experience. As with reflections in a mirror, the person's revelation manifests internally. For example, the appearance of a deity such as Vajrasattva manifesting in us is a result of this **rolpa** revelation. We experience the reflection of the actual Vajrasattva, just as when an object is placed in front of a mirror the reflection of that object arises in the mirror.

The third manifestation of revelation, **tsal**, is related to the nirmanakaya. The example used is a piece of rock crystal struck by the sun's rays. Infinite rainbow colours emanate from the crystal onto the walls of the room. If you look into the crystal you cannot see these rainbows within it; they are only visible outside. This **tsal** revelation appears at the level of subject and object: something apparently manifesting outside ourselves at the objective level in a seemingly external world.

Tsal revelation shows as our manifestation of pure vision and of impure vision and in particular of our karmic vision. If we are trapped in our identity as human beings we will only experience human vision. We will perceive our environment dualistically, splitting the apparent 'reality' into a perceiving subject separated from a world of external objects.

Yet in fact everything we perceive is like the rainbow lights which have their source in the rock crystal when it is hit by the sun's rays. If we see a five-coloured rainbow this means we are perceiving the pure dimension, pure vision. But when the essence of the elements combines together with our karma, then the elements manifest on the material level, creating the impure vision of separate existent entities. The source of karmic vision is our belief in duality which generates the opaque aspect of **tsal** revelation. Yet the same **tsal** revelation gives us the possibility of reintegrating our material existence within its own essence and of finally achieving the Rainbow Body.

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