

Re-collection, or *Drenpa*

Extract taken from 'The Happy Twins: Dzogchen and Mahamudra'¹

Autumn Retreat in the Eifel, 2019

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Dren-pa [Tib. Dran Pa] is the Tibetan word translated here as 'recollection'. It is the same as *sati* in Pali and *smriti* in Sanskrit which mean mindfulness, but not the dualistic mindfulness of being mindful of something. *Dren-pa* means to be in the presence of the open ground itself; it means not being distracted, not being led into concepts. In dzogchen text this is precisely what is meant by *dren-pa* or recollection.

It is as if you are going out for a walk. You are walking along the path and you are engrossed in something, and then suddenly a little bird shoots out in front you. That bird pops you out of whatever you were in, inside yourself, and now you see the trees and the park all around. '*Here I am, and it's a good day.*' That is a re-collection because the bird brought you back to where you were already. It is not an intentional recollection; you are not having to bring yourself to somewhere else. It is not effortful because from the very beginning we have always been in the awareness which is like the mirror. So you just wake up to where you already are. You did not go anywhere else. You are not adding any value. You are not removing any impediment. You are just here.

That is what recollection means. It doesn't mean you are sitting in your meditation and when you get distracted you think, '*Oh shit, I should be meditating.*' That would not be recollection because

¹ Two texts were studied on this retreat. The Mirror of Luminous Revelation (from Nuden Dorje Drophan Lingpa) and The Mahamudra Middle Way of the Ganges (from Tilopa).

that would be recollecting you back into your ego identity. This recollection means to relax into the openness of the ground.

Another example: you go to a party and you are dancing. Suddenly you notice that someone is a really good dancer, and the thought arises that you are not a very good dancer. You become self-conscious and it becomes more and more difficult to dance. In that moment, the music changes to a tune you really like and now your attention is with the music, and you find yourself dancing. Does that make sense?

When you got caught by the thought you started to become alienated from where you were. You were just dancing and moving your body around with a bunch of people, but because of the split of the attention you went into a kind of overview. You were thinking about dancing which meant that you had an alienation from your full embodiment, but the music you love returns you to where you are. You hadn't gone anywhere else. You hadn't vanished. You were here; it is *as if* you had vanished.

You could also construe that as, *'I got really lost. Thank goodness they changed the music. I turned around and saw a girl but thought I am not going to look at that girl because she upsets me. I feel better dancing with the wall.'* That would be the application of antidotes which is what we don't want to do. Recollection is simply to come back into the simplicity of this.

You can see that there are many little ways in which you could get a bit off balance here. You could be too tight or too loose. It is just about staying on the point that is there.

Question: I am struggling with this word 'recollection'. Does it mean 'effortful recollection' versus the freshness of recollection?

James: It is trying to remember something. Effortful doesn't necessarily mean that you are breaking out in sweat; it means the subject/object movement of the recollection.

Comment: Would the freshness of recollection be more of a technical term that you translated from *dren-pa* or *sati*? I am really stuck with the word.

James: You are in this room just now and you are looking over at me. In the moment that you are looking at me you are probably not very aware of the space of the room, nevertheless here you are, in the room. Recollection would be if we stopped looking at each other and talking together, and so you are here. You have always been here. You don't have to try to remember that you are here, because you *are* here.

Comment: So this moment when I realise I am here is *dren-pa*?

James: *Dren-pa* is where you simply come back to where you already are; you are not recollecting something from somewhere else. You are not thinking about what you did yesterday, or wondering where you left your keys. If you like, it is coming back to the self, so it is in the same family as resting or dwelling or being at home. When we get caught up in the subject/object movement of

thinking and planning, it takes us away from the here-ness of here and the givenness of things. Effortful recollection would be having lost the simple fact of being here because you are thinking about something and now you have to think about something else.

For example, I am doing the basic *samatha* practice of looking at my breath and then realise I am distracted. I might think that I have to try harder or that I need to get more sleep at night so that I can be fresh to practise in the early morning. Your whole game plan is one of recollecting – but you are losing because you haven't gone back to the simple. An awful lot of our mental life is occupied in that busy construction.

Recollection in its ordinary sense of bringing things together is like the fourth skandha of construction, compounding, and building.